

COMPLAINTS POLICY

- 1.1. Wicken Parish Council is committed to dealing effectively with any complaints you may have about our service.
- 1.2. We define a complaint as: *"A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about an organisation's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the organisation"*.
- 1.3. Initially, the identity of a complainant will only be made known to those who need to consider a complaint. Care will be taken to maintain confidentiality where circumstances demand, e.g. where matters concern financial or sensitive information or where third parties are concerned.
- 1.4. If we got something wrong, we will apologise and where possible we will try to put things right. We also aim to learn from our mistakes and use the information we gain to improve our services

1. WHEN TO USE THIS POLICY

- 1.1. When you complain to us, we will usually respond in the way we explain below. Sometimes, you might be concerned about matters that are not decided by us and we will then advise you about how to make your concerns known.
- 1.2. Examples of areas not covered by this complaints policy are:
 - 1.2.1. Activities which do not fall within the powers or remit of the Parish Council
 - 1.2.2. Issues and activities which are the responsibility of a district council or its equivalent
 - 1.2.3. Issues and activities which are the responsibility of a national body such as the Environment Agency
 - 1.2.4. Complaints about financial irregularities which must be addressed to the auditor of the Parish Council whose details may be obtained from the Parish Clerk.
 - 1.2.5. Complaints about breaches of the Councillor Code of Conduct which should be referred to the Standards Committee of West Northamptonshire Council (effective May 2021)
 - 1.2.6. Complaints about the Parish Clerk should be referred to the Chair of the Parish Council

3 INFORMAL RESOLUTION

- 3.1 If possible, we believe it is best to deal with things as soon as possible and in the easiest and most direct way. If you have a complaint, raise it with the person you are dealing with. He or she will try to resolve it for you there and then. However, they may need time to look into it which should not be longer than 14 working days from the date of your complaint.
- 3.2 If there are any lessons to learn from addressing your complaint, the person to whom you complained will raise it with the whole Parish Council. If that individual cannot help, he or she will explain why and you can then ask for your complaint to be formally investigated.
- 3.3 All complaints whether informal or formal must be referred to the Parish Clerk within 24 hours by the most convenient means available.

4 HOW TO COMPLAIN FORMALLY

- 4.1 You can make a complaint, which must be in writing, in any of the ways below:
- 4.2 You can get in touch with a Parish Councillor whose details are on the Wicken website www.wickennorthants.co.uk
- 4.3 You can email us at wickenclerk@outlook.com
- 4.4 You can write a letter to us at the following address: The Parish Clerk, Tall Cedars, 2 Leckhampstead Road, Wicken MK196BY

5 WHAT SHOULD YOU INCLUDE IN YOUR COMPLAINT

- 5.1 Remember to state your name, address and telephone number (and email, if applicable) and whether you are acting on behalf of someone else
- 5.2 Briefly describe what your complaint is about stating relevant dates and times, if applicable
- 5.3 List your specific concerns starting with the most important concern
- 5.4 Be clear about what you are hoping to achieve (for example an apology, explanation, etc.)
- 5.5 State your preferred method of communication

- 5.6 It will assist the Complaints Officer if extra information and/or copies of relevant documents are attached to your complaint.

6 DEALING WITH YOUR COMPLAINT

- 6.1 We will formally acknowledge your complaint within (the maximum time to be inserted here is 5 working days) and let you know how we intend to deal with it.
- 6.2 We will ask you to tell us how you would like us to communicate with you and establish whether you have any particular requirements for example, if you have language difficulties.
- 6.3 We will deal with your complaint in an open and honest way.
- 6.4 We will make sure that your interactions with us in the future do not suffer just because you have made a complaint.
- 6.5 If you are making a complaint on behalf of somebody else, we will need their agreement to you acting on their behalf.

7 INVESTIGATION

- 7.1 We will tell you who we have asked to investigate your complaint. If your complaint is straightforward, we will usually ask somebody from the service to look into it and get back to you. In some cases, if the complaint is serious, we may ask someone from outside the Parish Council to investigate.
- 7.2 We will set out to you our understanding of your complaint and ask you to confirm that we have got it right. We will also ask you to tell us what outcome you are hoping for.
- 7.3 The person looking at your complaint will usually need to see the records we hold relevant to your complaint.
- 7.4 If there is a simple solution to your problem, we may ask you if you are happy to accept this.
- 7.5 We will aim to resolve concerns as quickly as possible and expect to deal with the vast majority within 14 working days. If your complaint is more complex we will:
- 7.5.1 let you know within this time why we think it may take longer to investigate
 - 7.5.2 tell you how long we expect it to take.
 - 7.5.3 give you regular updates (the maximum time to be inserted here is every 20 working days) on any progress made
- 7.6 The person who is investigating your concerns will aim first to establish the facts. The extent of this investigation will depend on how complex and how serious the issues you have raised are.
- 7.7 In some instances, we may ask to meet you to discuss your complaint. Occasionally, we might suggest mediation or another method to try to resolve disputes.
- 7.8 When investigating your complaint, we will look at relevant evidence. This could include files, notes of conversations, letters, emails or whatever may be relevant to your complaint. If necessary, we will talk to others involved and look at our policies and any guidance.

8 OUTCOME

- 8.1 If we formally investigate your complaint, we will let you know what we have found in keeping with your preferred form of communication. This could be by letter or email, for example.
- 8.2 If necessary, we will produce a longer report.
- 8.3 We will explain how and why we came to our conclusions.
- 8.4 If we find that we got it wrong, we will tell you what and why it happened. If we find there is a fault in our systems or the way we do things, we will tell you what it is and how we plan to change things to stop it happening again.
- 8.5 If we got it wrong, we will always apologise.

9 PUTTING THINGS RIGHT

If we didn't do something well, we will aim to put it right. If you have lost out as a result of a mistake on our part we will try to put you back in the position you would have been in if we had got it right.

10 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN

- 10.1 If you are unable to resolve your complaint with the Parish Council then you should be aware that Parish Councils as corporate bodies do not come under the jurisdiction of the Local Government Ombudsman so there are no provisions for you to have the matter referred to another body

11 LEARNING LESSONS

- 11.1 We take your complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes we have made. The outcome of complaints will be discussed at Parish Council meetings but subject to any confidentiality which is required to be maintained. This may involve holding this session of the relevant meeting with the public being excluded.
- 11.2 We will let you know when changes we have promised have been made.

12 WHAT WE EXPECT FROM YOU

- 12.1 In times of trouble or distress, some people may act out of character. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined.
- 12.2 We believe that all complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, we also consider that Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk have the same rights. We, therefore, expect you to be polite and courteous in your dealings with us. We will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence.

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