

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

AIM OF THE POLICY

The aim of this Policy is to explain the procedure by which complaints will be dealt with by St Albans Parish Council. It should be noted that this does not affect an elector's statutory right to object to the Parish Council's audit of accounts pursuant to section 16 of the Audit Commission Act 1998. Nor will it apply to criminal activity (which should be reported to the police), conduct of councillors (which should be submitted in accordance with procedures within the Code of Conduct) or employee conduct which will be dealt with under the Parish Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

1. The complainant should raise the complaint informally with the Clerk or Chairman.
2. If the complaint is not resolved satisfactorily then the complainant should put the complaint in writing to the Clerk or Chairman.
3. The Clerk or Chairman will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the Parish Council. The complainant will be advised whether the complaint will be treated as confidential or not. Complaints naming councillors, staff, or other residents will be treated as confidential.
4. The complaint will be discussed by the Chairman, Clerk and any named Councillor and, if possible, resolution offered. This will be communicated in writing.
5. If not resolved, the complainant shall be invited to attend a meeting and to bring with them a representative if they wish.
6. Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the council with copies of any documentation or other evidence relied on. The Parish Council shall provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting and shall do so promptly, allowing the claimant the opportunity to read the material in good time for the meeting.

At the Meeting

- The meeting will be in private.
- The Chairman will introduce everyone and explain the procedure.
- The complainant (or representative) should outline the grounds for complaint and, thereafter, questions may be asked by members at the meeting
- The Clerk or Chairman will have an opportunity to explain the Parish Council's position and questions may be asked by (i) the complainant and (ii) members.

- The Clerk or Chairman and then the complainant should be offered the opportunity to summarise their position.
- The complainant should be asked to leave the room while members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, *both* parties shall be invited back.
- The complainant should be given the opportunity to wait for the decision but if the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day they should be advised when the decision is likely to be made and when it is likely to be communicated to them

After the Meeting

- The decision should be confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.
- The resulting decision will be made public by notices and on the website.

Unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints.

On occasions certain complaints can be difficult to resolve and can cause anxiety and distress to both complainants and employees of the Parish Council. Whilst the aim of the Parish Council is always to try to find a way to resolve matters, on occasions complainants are encountered who become unreasonably persistent or vexatious in their actions to obtain the outcome that they want.

The Parish Council wants to ensure that in using the complaints procedure complainants who are unreasonable or vexatious are dealt with fairly but also that the Parish Council's resources are used as effectively as possible and that other service users or Parish Council employees do not suffer any detriment as a result of their behaviour.

Unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints will be viewed under a separate policy.