**WHEATHILL PARISH COUNCIL’S COMPLAINTS POLICY**

**Introduction**

1 This policy is based on guidance provided by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and takes account of good practice from Shropshire Council’s complaints procedure, adapted for the small size and structure of Wheathill Parish Council.

2 The policy sets out how formal complaints will be handled fairly, consistently and transparently. It is intended to provide a clear process for residents, service users and other stakeholders who wish to raise a formal complaint about the Council’s actions, services or administration.

3 For the purposes of this policy, a complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of a service, whether taken by the Council itself or by someone acting on behalf of the Council.

4 This policy confirms that:
• All complaints will be acknowledged and investigated in line with set timescales.
• Complaints will normally be dealt with in writing, though complainants may be invited to attend a meeting to make representations.
• Complaints will be considered by a Complaints Sub-Committee formed of Councillors and nominated parishioners, to ensure fairness and impartiality.
• Confidentiality will be respected, and data will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

**Scope**

5 This complaints procedure applies to residents living in or near Wheathill Parish, individuals, community groups or organisations affected by the Council’s decisions. It does not apply to complaints regarding councillor conduct (referred to Shropshire Council’s Monitoring Officer), staff grievances (internal grievance procedure), criminal matters (Police), financial irregularities (External Auditor), or Freedom of Information/Data Protection requests (statutory procedures).

**Submitting a Complaint**

6 All formal complaints must be submitted in writing (letter or email). They should be addressed to the Parish Clerk. If the complaint concerns the Clerk, it should instead be addressed to the Chair or, if appropriate, the Vice-Chair.

7 The Council will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 7 working days and confirm whether it will be treated as confidential.

**Handling Complaints**

8 Complaints will be investigated by a Complaints Sub-Committee formed of Councillors, each nominating one parishioner to sit alongside them.

9 The Sub-Committee will review the complaint, gather evidence and may invite the complainant to attend a meeting to present their case. The complainant may bring a representative or friend.

10 The Council will aim to provide a written decision within 12 weeks of receipt. Where more time is required due to complexity, the complainant will be informed.

**Outcomes**

11 Following investigation, the Council will write to the complainant confirming whether the complaint is upheld (in full, in part, or not upheld), the reasons for the decision, and any actions the Council intends to take.

12 The Council may issue an apology, provide an explanation, or take corrective steps, but will avoid formal admissions of legal liability unless advised to do so.

**Appeals**

13 As Wheathill Parish Council is a small council, complaints will be determined at a single stage. There is no internal appeal process. If dissatisfied, the complainant may refer their concerns to relevant external bodies, such as the Monitoring Officer, External Auditor, Police, or Information Commissioner’s Office.

**Confidentiality**

14 All complaints will be treated in confidence. Information will be shared only with those directly involved in handling the complaint. Meetings of the Complaints Sub-Committee considering complaints will exclude the public, though the complainant may attend if invited.

**Anonymous Complaints**

15 Anonymous complaints will not normally be pursued but may be logged for information if the Council considers it appropriate.

**Persistent or Vexatious Complaints**

16 The Council reserves the right to manage unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints in line with national guidance, while ensuring new valid issues are always considered.

Policy Administration

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