



Coxhoe Parish Council

Complaints Policy & Procedure

Approved May 2023

Review Date: May 2024

Complaints Policy & Procedure

This procedure covers complaints about the administration, procedures or services of the Council. Complaints about individuals are a separate matter; complaints about an employee would be dealt with as an employment issue and complaints about a Councillor should be made to the Standards Board for England. Complaints against policy decisions made by the Council shall be referred back to Council (taking note of Standing Order 14).

Coxhoe Parish Council takes the views of local people seriously and need to be aware when there is dissatisfaction with the services which the Council delivers, or a person or body acting on its behalf. The outcome of a complaint will assist the Council in reviewing and where necessary changing the way services are delivered, and putting things right where necessary. The Complaints Policy and Procedure is fully supported by the Parish Council.

Complaints shall be dealt with initially by the Clerk (or the Chair), and then by the Complaints Committee (known as the Grievance, Disciplinary and Complaints Committee), which shall be made up of Members of the Council and convened as and when necessary. The complaints committee shall report its conclusions to the next Parish Council meeting following any hearing and any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the Council meeting in public.

Note that Parish Councils are not generally covered by the Local Government Ombudsman, unless they were undertaking an activity on behalf of a principal Council.

Making a Complaint

1. Complainants should make complaints about the Council's services, procedures or administration in writing to the Clerk, using the format at Appendix 2 (which can be copied into the body of an email). If the complainant prefers not to address the complaint to the Clerk (usually where the complaint relates to the Clerk), complaints should be sent to the Chair of the Council using the same format.
2. Complaints will be acknowledged as soon as possible. Within fifteen working days of receipt of a complaint, the Clerk (or Chair) shall acknowledge the receipt of the complaint in writing to the complainant and try to settle the complaint directly.
3. Where the Clerk or Chair receives a written complaint about the Clerk's actions, this will always be referred to the Chair. The Clerk will be formally advised and will be given the opportunity to comment.
4. The Clerk or other officer shall report to the next meeting of the Council any written complaint disposed of by direct action with the complainant.
5. Where a complaint cannot be settled directly, within fifteen working days of this being identified, a date shall be set for a complaints committee meeting and the complainant advised in writing of this date.
6. The complainant shall be invited to attend the relevant meeting and bring with them a representative if they wish.
7. Not less than seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the Clerk/Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence, which they wish to refer to at the meeting. The Clerk/Council shall similarly provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting.

At the Meeting

8. A complaint against a local council is personal to the complainant and should be treated as confidential unless the complainant confirms that they waive their right to confidentiality. The meeting of a relevant committee considering the complaint or inviting the complainant to make representations will need to exclude the public. This would not preclude the committee from inviting the complainant to speak at a meeting or requesting the attendance of the Clerk (or other nominated officer) to represent the position of the council.
9. The Chair of the meeting shall introduce everyone.
10. The Chair of the meeting shall explain the procedure.
11. The complainant (or their representative) shall outline the grounds for complaint.
12. The members of the committee may ask any question of the complainant.
13. If relevant, the Clerk or other officer shall explain the Council's position.
14. Members may ask any question of the Clerk or other officer.
15. The Clerk, or other officer and the complainant shall be offered the opportunity of last word (in this order).
16. The Clerk, or other officer and complainant shall 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).
17. The Clerk, or other officer and the complainant shall return to hear the decision, or to be advised when a decision shall be made.
18. A flowchart illustrating the process is supplied at Appendix 1.

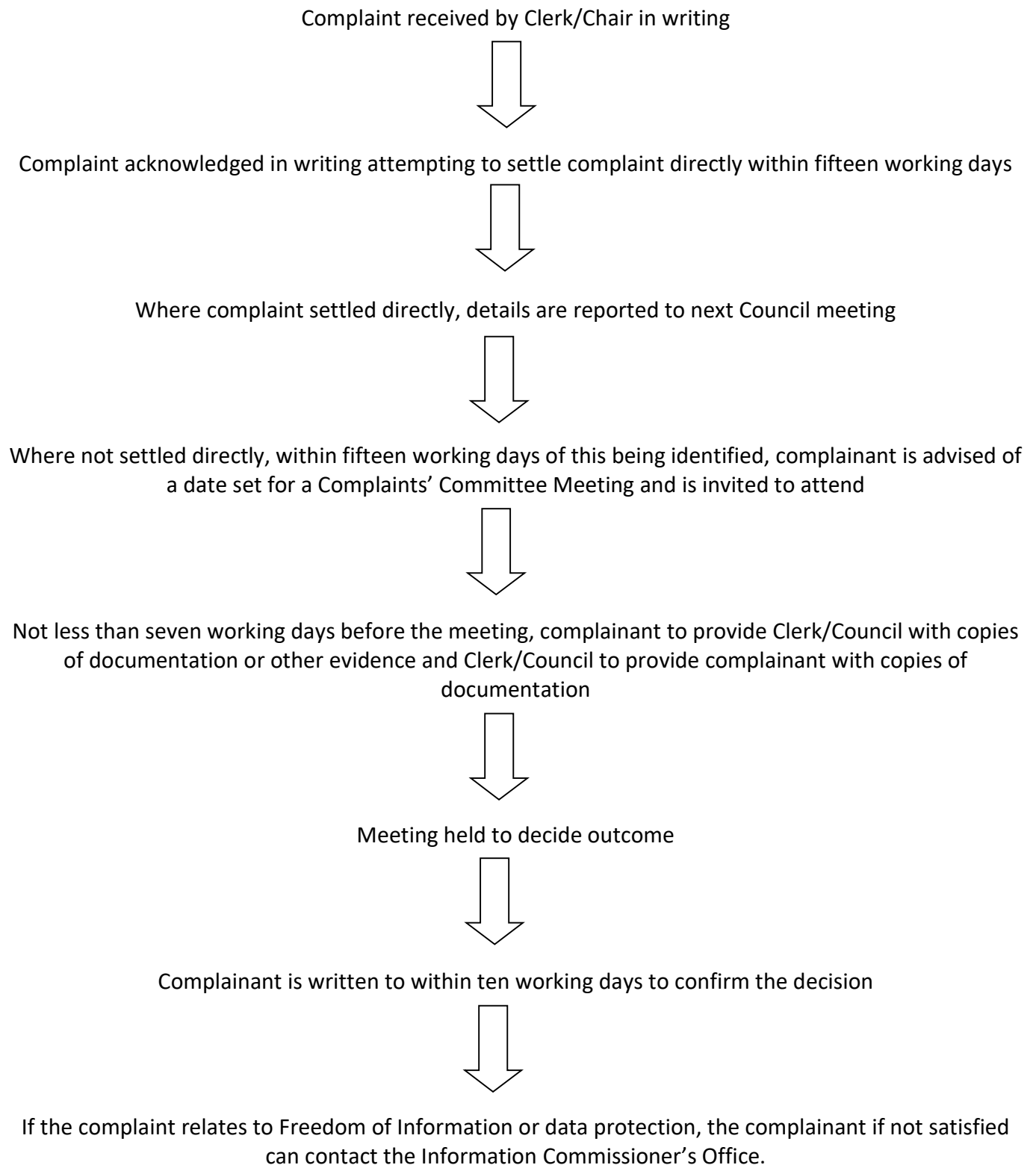
After the Meeting

19. The decision shall be confirmed in writing within ten working days together with details of any action to be taken.
20. All records of complaints are to be kept by the Clerk, in accordance with the Council's Retention of Documents Policy.

Freedom of Information Complaints

21. If a complainant believes that information has not been released in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, this should first be considered by the Council using its usual procedure and can then be referred to the Information Commissioner (see Appendix 3 for details) if the complainant is not satisfied. Complaints regarding Data Protection.
22. Complaints regarding data protection concerns should be made to the Clerk either by email or in a letter.
23. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the complainant may be asked to provide proof of identity.
24. A complaint will be handled within the legal timescales following a validated complaint.
25. If the complainant is not satisfied with the conclusion or solution offered by Coxhoe Parish Council, the complainant can take the complaint directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (see Appendix 3 for details).

Appendix 1
Flowchart process for complaints



Appendix 2

Coxhoe Parish Council Complaints Format

Complaints must be submitted in writing, by letter or email, in the below format.

Name:

Address:

Email Address:

Telephone Number:

Complaints will be handled under data protection legislation. Do you require this complaint to be dealt with confidentially by the Parish Council, that is, to not disclose its contents to a third party?

Yes/No

Please provide details of who this complaint is about:

Give details of your complaint:

Appendix 3

Contact details

Coxhoe Parish Council Clerk

Email address: clerk@coxhoeparishcouncil.gov.uk

Postal address:

Parish Council Clerk

Coxhoe Village Hall

Front Street East

Coxhoe

Durham

DH6 4DB

Chair of Coxhoe Parish Council

Email address: chair@coxhoeparishcouncil.gov.uk

Postal address:

Chair, Coxhoe Parish Council

Coxhoe Village Hall

Front Street East

Coxhoe

Durham

DH6 4DB

Information Commissioner's Office

Website address: <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>

Postal address:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire

SK9 5AF

Tel: 0303 123 1113 (local rate) or 01625 545 745 if you prefer to use a national rate number.