

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE 2019

EATON BRAY PARISH COUNCIL

Email: clerk@ebpc.co.uk Website: www.ebpc.co.uk

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE 2019

1. Introduction

The following is the Parish Council's procedure for dealing with complaints about the Council's administration or its procedures, a complaint against the Clerk or a complaint against a Parish Councillor. Complaints about a policy decision made by the Council will be referred to the Council for consideration.

The procedure is based on the framework suggested by the National Association of Local Councils.

2. Definition of a complaint?

Generally, this will be about the Parish Council's procedures or administration. It will be an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service - whether the action was taken (or the service provided by the Council) by the Parish Council or a person or organisation acting on behalf of the Council.

Complaints should always be directed through the Clerk (except for complaints about the Clerk, in which case, the Chairman takes the place of the Clerk in managing the process). It may be that the matter you are concerned about could be dealt with in a less formal manner.

3. Making a complaint

It is not appropriate to deal with ALL complaints from members of the public under the formal complaints procedure. The Parish Council receives queries, problems and comments as part of its day-to-day business, and they should not all be regarded as complaints. It is hoped that less formal measures or explanations provided to the complainant by the Clerk will resolve most issues. Any informal complaint will be reported to the Parish Council by the Clerk.

If your complaint about procedures, administration or the actions of the Council employee is notified orally to a Councillor, or to the Clerk to the Council, a written record of the complaint will be made, noting your name and contact details and the nature of the complaint.

You will be asked to put the complaint in writing (letter or e-mail) to the Clerk to the Council.

When your complaint has been received, we will write to you within twenty working days to let you know:

- 3.1 Who is responsible for dealing with the complaint.
- 3.2 How it will be dealt with.
- 3.3 When the complaint is likely to be dealt with.

4. What to do

Complaints can be made in any of the following ways:

- 4.1 Write or telephone the Clerk to the Parish Council (see Website for details).
- 4.2 Write to the Chairman of the Parish Council (see Website for details).
- 4.3 If the complaint is about the Clerk, telephone or write to the Chairman.

5. What happens next?

On receipt of your written complaint, the Clerk to the Council will seek to settle the complaint directly with you by explaining the Parish Council's position, if this is appropriate. Attempts will be made to resolve the complaint at this stage.

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Complainants can expect to receive a response in full within twenty working days of acknowledgement of the complaint.

6. Complaint about the Clerk

If a complaint is made against the Clerk, they will be formally advised of the matter by the Chairman and given an opportunity to comment.

7. Complaint about the ethical behaviour of a Parish Councillor

Members of Parish Councils sign a declaration to abide by a Code of Conduct and if they breach that code, there are consequences. A complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct should be made in writing and addressed to Central Bedfordshire Council Monitoring Officer's Department, via the on-line complaint form:

[https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/officeforms/Complaint form for councillors conduct.ofml](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/officeforms/Complaint%20form%20for%20councillors%20conduct.ofml)

8. Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to pursue a complaint when it clearly has no reasonable basis, or when the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where some other process, whether through the courts or some other recognised procedure, should, or has been taken. These matters will be referred to the Parish Council by the Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. The Parish Council may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant and inform the complainant so, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.

9. Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will be disregarded.

10. Formal Complaints

In certain circumstances, procedures/bodies other than the Parish Council may be appropriate in respect of the following types of complaint:

- 10.1 Financial irregularity - statutory right to object to Council's audit of account under S.16 Audit Commission Act 1998. On other matters, the council may need to consult its auditor.
- 10.2 Criminal activity - the Police.

11. How will procedures operate?

11.1 Complaints about the Council's procedures, administration or policies will be dealt with by the Parish Council

- 11.1.1 The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within twenty working days when you will be advised accordingly.
- 11.1.2 You will be invited to attend a meeting and may bring a representative with you.
- 11.1.3 Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, you are requested to provide the Parish Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence which you wish to refer to at the meeting. Similarly, the Parish Council will provide you with copies of any documentation which it wishes to rely on at the meeting.

11.2 Procedure at the Meeting

- 11.2.1 The Complaints Committee will consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the press and public.
- 11.2.2 The Chairman will introduce everyone and will explain the procedure.
- 11.2.3 You, as the complainant, or your representative, will outline the grounds for complaint.

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- 11.2.4 Members of the Complaints Committee will ask questions of you or your representative.
- 11.2.5 If relevant, the Clerk will explain the Parish Council's position.
- 11.2.6 Members of the Committee will be able to ask questions of the Clerk to the Council.
- 11.2.7 The Chairman will summarise the Parish Council's position and then you will be offered the opportunity of summing up.
- 11.2.8 You will be asked to withdraw from the meeting (together with your representative or anyone accompanying you) whilst Members reach a decision on whether the grounds for the complaint have been made. It may be appropriate in some circumstances for the Clerk also to withdraw from the meeting whilst Members reach a decision.
- 11.2.9 If any points of clarification are required, you will be invited to re-join the meeting whilst clarification is sought and then asked to withdraw again.
- 11.2.10 You will then re-join the meeting to be advised of the decision of the Committee, together with reasons for the decision, or, if necessary, to be advised when a decision will be made. Dependent on the detail of the reasons for the decision, it might only be possible to give you the decision at the meeting, with the detailed reasons following in the decision letter.

11.3 After the meeting

The decision will be confirmed in writing within seven working days.

12 Complaints relating to the Clerk

These will be dealt with by the Parish Council as an employment matter. Such complaints could result in disciplinary action or, in cases of gross misconduct, dismissal from the Council's employment. The matter will be dealt with internally to protect the employment rights to which employees of the Parish Council are entitled. The complainant will be informed of action taken.

13 What to do if you are still not satisfied

- 13.1 Should the complainant not agree with the decision they are entitled to appeal the decision within fourteen days of receipt of the result of the proceedings.
- 13.2 The councillors nominated to handle the appeal should, within twenty working days of receiving the appeal, examine the way in which the council dealt with the complaint.
- 13.3 If procedures were correctly handled by the council, then the appellant should be notified that the appeal has not been successful. If the complaint was not handled correctly it must be referred back for consideration as at [11].
- 13.4 The appellant should be notified of the result of the appeals process within fourteen days.
- 13.5 The decision of the Parish Council is final.

14 Post Decision

- 14.1 If the complainant continues to behave in unreasonable and/or vexatious way, the Chairman or Vice Chairman should seek the approval of the council to agree what action(s) to take, e.g., restrict or refuse any further contact.
- 14.2 The complainant must be advised by letter from the Clerk of this action, including any further actions the complainant may take with other bodies including their right to obtain independent advice.
- 14.3 The council must record the decision and hold all relevant correspondence/personal details about the complaint and the complainant, stored appropriately in line with the Data Protection Act.
- 14.4 The Clerk must notify all councillors and members of staff as appropriate.
- 14.5 Any new complaint from any person who has come under the policy must be treated on its merit.

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This complaints procedure paper was presented to Eaton Bray Parish Council

Signed for an on behalf of Eaton Bray Parish Council:

Name/Signature	<i>Councillor Neil Cartwright</i>
Position	<i>Chairman / Parish Councillor</i>
Date	<i>13th May 2019</i>
Minute Record	<i>Page 1803 / item (12) (12.5)</i>