

ASTLEY ABBOTTS PARISH COUNCIL

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy

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Associated Documents

- Standing Orders
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
- Privacy Notice

Version History

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1. Introduction

Astley Abbotts Parish Council is committed to providing courteous, efficient and accountable local government.

The Council welcomes complaints, compliments and comments because they help improve services, strengthen public confidence and support good governance.

If you are dissatisfied with a Council service or the way a matter has been handled, we encourage you to tell us. We will consider your concerns fairly, impartially and without unnecessary delay.

Where we have made a mistake, we will acknowledge it and, where appropriate, take action to put matters right. Where we believe we have acted correctly, we will explain our decision.

This policy explains how to make a complaint, compliment or comment and what you can expect from the Council.

2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints, compliments and comments relating to the services and administration of Astley Abbotts Parish Council.

It includes concerns about:

- Council services;
- communication with the Council;
- administrative procedures;
- actions taken by employees or contractors acting on behalf of the Council; and
- suggestions for improving Council services.

The Council also welcomes compliments recognising good service and comments that may help improve the way it works.

This policy does **not** apply to:

- complaints that a councillor has breached the Councillor Code of Conduct;
- planning or licensing decisions;
- requests made under the Freedom of Information Act or Environmental Information Regulations;
- employee grievances or disciplinary matters;
- matters that are the subject of legal proceedings; or
- issues where another statutory complaints or appeals procedure applies.

Complaints alleging a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct must be referred to the Monitoring Officer at Shropshire Council.

Where this policy does not apply, the Council will, where possible, direct you to the appropriate organisation or procedure.

3. Making a Complaint

Complaints should normally be made within **12 months** of the matter arising.

Complaints may be made:

- by email;
- by letter;
- by telephone;
- in person, where appropriate; or
- by completing the Complaint Form at Appendix A.

Where a complaint is made verbally, the Council may ask for it to be confirmed in writing. Where this is not possible because of disability, language needs or other personal circumstances, reasonable assistance will be provided.

Complaints should normally be sent to the **Parish Clerk**.

If the complaint concerns the **Parish Clerk**, it should be sent to the **Chair**.

If the complaint concerns the **Chair**, it should be sent to the **Vice-Chair** or, where there is no Vice-Chair, to the Council.

Complaints made solely through social media will not normally be investigated. Individuals will usually be invited to submit their complaint using one of the methods above.

The Council will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within **five working days**.

4. How Complaints are Handled

The Council will deal with complaints fairly, consistently and without unnecessary delay.

Where appropriate, concerns will first be considered informally. Many issues can be resolved quickly through discussion or clarification.

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, it will be investigated. The investigation may include reviewing relevant documents, speaking to those involved and considering any Council policies or legislation that apply.

Anyone who is the subject of a complaint will be given an opportunity to respond before a decision is reached.

The Council aims to complete investigations within **20 working days**. Where this is not possible, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and given an updated timescale.

5. Complaints about the Parish Clerk, Chair or Councillors

Most complaints will be dealt with by the Parish Clerk. Where this is not appropriate, the complaint will be handled as follows.

Complaints about the Parish Clerk

Complaints about the Parish Clerk should be submitted to the Chair. The Chair will consider how the complaint should be investigated and ensure the Parish Clerk has an opportunity to respond before any decision is made.

Complaints about the Chair

Complaints about the Chair should be submitted to the Vice-Chair or, where there is no Vice-Chair, to the Council. The Chair will be given the opportunity to respond before the complaint is determined.

Complaints about Councillors

This policy does not apply to complaints that a councillor has breached the Councillor Code of Conduct. Such complaints must be referred to the Monitoring Officer at Shropshire Council.

Where a complaint concerns a councillor but does not relate to the Councillor Code of Conduct, the Council will determine the most appropriate way to consider the matter under this policy.

6. Complaint Hearings

Most complaints will be resolved without the need for a formal hearing. Where a hearing is necessary, the complainant will be given reasonable notice of the date, time and procedure to be followed.

The complainant may attend the hearing and may be accompanied by a friend, relative or representative. Anyone who is the subject of the complaint will also be given the opportunity to attend and respond where appropriate.

The Council may ask questions to clarify the issues before considering all the information presented.

Where necessary, the Council may deliberate in private to protect confidential or personal information.

The complainant will normally receive a written decision within **10 working days** of the hearing. The response will explain the Council's decision, the reasons for it and any action the Council intends to take.

The Council's decision under this procedure concludes the Council's complaints process.

7. Outcomes

Following its investigation, the Council may decide to:

- uphold the complaint;
- uphold part of the complaint;
- not uphold the complaint; or
- take no further action.

Where appropriate, the Council may:

- apologise;
- provide an explanation;
- review or amend a procedure;
- improve a service; or
- take any other reasonable action arising from the complaint.

The Council will not normally award financial compensation under this procedure. Where a complaint raises issues of legal liability or insurance, it will be referred to the Council's insurers or legal advisers where appropriate.

8. Confidentiality and Equality

Complaints will be handled confidentially and information will only be shared where necessary to investigate or determine the complaint.

Personal information will be processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council's Privacy Notice.

The Council will make reasonable adjustments where required to ensure this procedure is accessible to everyone.

Everyone involved in the complaints process is expected to treat others with courtesy and respect.

9. Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

The Council recognises that most complaints are made in good faith and welcomes constructive feedback.

Occasionally, however, a complainant's behaviour may become unreasonable because of the frequency or nature of their contact with the Council rather than the complaint itself.

Examples may include:

- repeatedly raising the same issues after they have been fully considered;
- refusing to accept a properly explained decision without providing new information;
- making excessive or unreasonable demands on Council resources;
- using abusive, offensive or threatening language; or
- behaving in a way that unreasonably affects the Council's ability to carry out its normal business.

The Council will not regard someone as unreasonable simply because they are persistent or disagree with a decision.

Before placing any restrictions on future contact, the Council will normally explain its concerns and give the individual an opportunity to modify their behaviour.

Where this is unsuccessful, the Council may introduce proportionate measures, such as limiting correspondence or nominating a single point of contact.

Any restrictions will be recorded and reviewed periodically.

10. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if legislation, guidance or Council procedures change.

The Parish Clerk may make minor administrative amendments, such as updating contact details or legislative references, provided these do not alter the substance of the policy.

Any substantive amendments must be approved by the Council.

The Council will use complaints, compliments and comments to help improve its services where appropriate.

Appendix A – Complaint Form

ASTLEY ABBOTTS PARISH COUNCIL

Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Please complete this form if you wish to make a formal complaint.

Your Details

Name	
Address	
Telephone	
Email	

Preferred Method of Contact

Email	
Telephone	
Letter	

Details of Your Complaint

Please describe your complaint, including relevant dates and any people involved. Continue on additional page if necessary.

Have you already contacted the Council about this matter?

Yes		No	
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If Yes, please give details:

What would you like the Council to do to resolve your complaint?

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Supporting Documents (if any)

Declaration

I confirm that the information provided is true to the best of my knowledge.

Signature _____

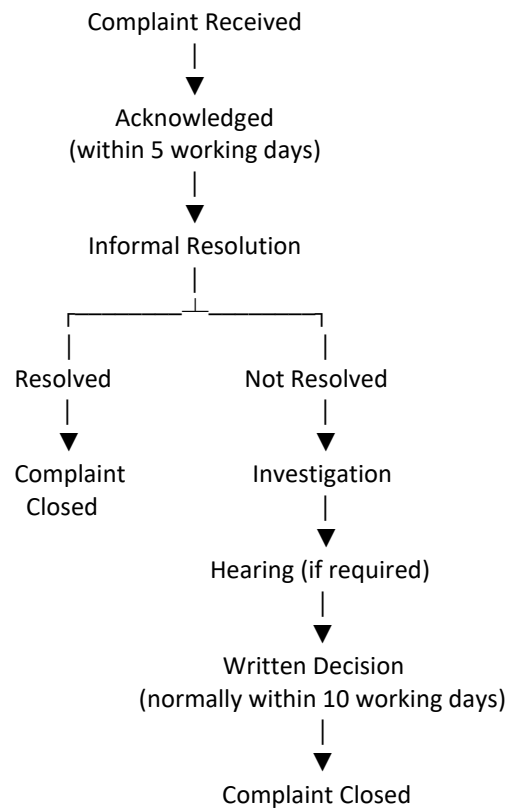
Date _____

Submit your complaint to:

- **General complaints:** Parish Clerk
- **Complaints about the Parish Clerk:** Chair
- **Complaints about the Chair:** Vice-Chair or the Council

Current contact details are available on the Council's website.

Appendix B – Complaints Process



Approval

Approved by Astley Abbotts Parish Council
Version 1.0
Date Adopted _____
Minute Reference _____
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End of Policy