

**HURWORTH PARISH COUNCIL; Procedure No. 15– Handling  
Complaints April 2011, updated June 2015**

1. The following procedure will be adopted for dealing with complaints about the Council's administration, its procedures, any Councillors or employees. Complaints about a policy decision made by the Council will be referred back to the Council, or relevant Committee, as appropriate, for consideration.
2. If a complaint about procedures, administration, Councillors or the actions of any of the Council's employees is notified orally to a Councillor, or to the Clerk to the Council, a written record of the complaint will be made, noting the name and contact details of the complainant and the nature of the complaint.
3. The complainant will be asked to put the complaint in writing (letter/e-mail/standard form) to the Clerk to the Council. The complaint will be dealt with within 14 days of receipt. Refusal to put the complaint in writing will nullify the complaint.
4. If the complainant prefers not to put the complaint to the Clerk to the Council (because the matter relates to the Clerk, for example,) he or she should write to the Chair.
5. (a) On receipt of a written complaint, the Clerk to the Council (except where the complainant is the Clerk's actions) or Chair of Council (if the complaint relates to the Clerk), will seek to settle the complaint directly with the complainant. This will not be done without first notifying any person complained about and giving the person an opportunity to comment. Efforts should be made to resolve the complaint at this stage.  
  
(b) Where the Clerk to the Council or a Councillor receives a written complaint about the Clerk's actions, the complaint shall be referred to the Chair of Council. The Clerk to the Council will be formally advised of the matter and given an opportunity to comment.
6. The Clerk to the Council (or Chair) will report any complaint disposed of by direct action with the complainant to the next meeting of the Council.
7. The Clerk to the Council (or Chair) will report any complaint that has not been resolved to the next meeting of the Council. The Clerk will notify the complainant of the date on which the complaint will be considered and the complainant will be offered an opportunity to explain the complaint to the Council orally.
8. Matters relating to Grievance or Disciplinary proceedings that are taking, or are likely to take place, will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's grievance and disciplinary procedures.

9. The Council may consider whether the circumstances of any complaint warrant the matter being discussed in the absence of the press and public, but any decision on the complaint will be announced at the Council meeting in public.

10. The Council may consider in the circumstances of any particular complaint whether to make any without liability payment or provide other reasonable benefit to any person who has suffered loss as a result of the Council's maladministration. Any payment may only be authorised by the Council after obtaining legal advice and advice from the Council's auditor on the propriety of such a payment.

11. As soon as possible after the decision has been made (and in any event not later than 10 days after the meeting) the complainant will be notified in writing of the decision and any action to be taken.

12. The Council may defer dealing with any complaint if it is of the opinion that issues arise on which further advice is necessary. The advice will be considered and the complaint dealt with at the next meeting after the advice has been received.

13. In the event of a complaint not being resolved in an informal manner, then the complaint will be referred to the HPC Vetting Committee.

#### 13.1 The HPC Vetting Committee

The committee is be made up of the current and immediate past Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. Four councillors in total.

#### 13.2 The Process

- The Clerk will circulate a copy of the complaint to the four Vetting Committee members.
- The Clerk may be asked to insert suggested responses to the complaint(s), using the information held by the council.
- The Vetting Committee will review the questions and answers, and modify as appropriate, prior to confirming the content of the response.
- An official response will be sent within a 14 day period.
- In the event that the written response is not accepted, then a meeting between the complainant and the Vetting Committee should be arranged.
- When the meeting takes place, all the facts need to be reviewed, and a conclusion reached, which can be accepted by both the complainant and the council.