

# STANTON & STREATLAM PARISH COUNCIL

## Complaints Policy

### 1 Scope

This procedure covers complaints about the administration or procedures of the Council.

Complaints about individuals are a separate matter: complaints about an employee should be dealt with as an employment issue and complaints about (or involving the conduct of) a Councillor are considered against the agreed Code of Conduct, for which local resolution will be sought by the Council, in the first instance. Thereafter, unresolved complaints of this type should be made to the Standards Committee at Durham County Council.

Complaints against policy decisions made by the Council shall be referred back to the Council.

A complaint is defined as:

*Any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council or its employees affecting an individual customer or group of customers.*

### 2 Policy

Stanton and Streatlam Parish Council takes the views of local people seriously and needs to be aware when there is dissatisfaction in the delivery of its services.

The outcome of a complaint will assist the Council in reviewing and, where necessary, changing the way in which services are delivered.

A complaint can be discussed with a member of staff, and most complaints are successfully dealt with by doing this. However, if a complainant is not satisfied with the response he or she receives, the complainant can use the formal complaints procedure.

The Complaints Committee is established as a sub-committee of the council with delegated authority to determine, on behalf of the Parish Council, individual cases of appeal under the Council's complaints procedures and such other matters relating to complaints made by members of the public as require determination by the Parish Council. It shall meet as and when circumstances require, and comprise three members of the Council, as agreed by the Chairman.

The complaints committee shall report its conclusions to the next Council

meeting following any hearing.

### 3 Procedure - Making a Complaint

Complainants should make complaints about the Council's procedures or administration in writing to the Clerk.

Within five working days of receipt of a complaint, the Clerk shall acknowledge the receipt of the complaint in writing to the complainant and try to settle the complaint directly. Where no evidence to substantiate the complaint is available, the complainant shall be thusly informed by the Clerk.

The Clerk shall report to the next meeting of the Council any written complaint disposed of by direct action with the complainant, including those that are not substantiated by evidence.

Where a complaint cannot be settled directly, within twelve working days of receipt of a complaint, a date shall be set for a complaints committee meeting and the complainant advised in writing of this date.

The complainant shall be invited to attend the relevant meeting and bring with them such representative as they wish.

Not less than five clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence, which they wish to refer to at the meeting.

The Council shall similarly provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting.

### 4 Procedure - at the Meeting

The Council shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and the press. Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the Council meeting in public.

- The Chairman of the meeting shall introduce everyone.
- The Chairman of the meeting shall explain the procedure.
- The complainant (or representative) shall outline the grounds for complaint.
- The members of the committee may ask any question of the complainant.
- If relevant, the Clerk or other officer shall explain the Council's position.
- Members may ask any question of the Clerk or other officer.
- The Clerk, or other officer and the complainant shall be offered the opportunity of last word (in this order).

□ The Clerk, or other officer and complainant shall be asked to leave the room while the Members of the Complaints Committee 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).

□ The Clerk, or other officer and the complainant shall return to hear the decision, or to be advised when decision shall be made.

#### 5 Procedure - after the Meeting

The decision shall be confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.