

Weston-in-Gordano Parish Council

Complaints Procedure for External Complaints

1. Introduction

Weston-in-Gordano Parish Council is committed to providing a high standard of service to the community. We recognise, however, that from time-to-time individuals may feel that the Council has fallen short of this standard. This procedure sets out how complaints may be made and how they will be handled.

2. Scope of this Procedure

This procedure applies to complaints about the administrative actions, procedures, services, or decisions of Weston-in-Gordano Parish Council. This procedure does not apply to:

- **Complaints about the conduct of individual Parish Councillors**, which are dealt with under the Members' Code of Conduct by North Somerset Council.
- **Complaints relating to Parish Council staff**, which are managed internally as employment matters in accordance with the Council's Grievance and Disciplinary Policies.

Complaints that fall outside the scope of this procedure will be redirected to the appropriate body.

3. Initial Procedure

The complainant will be asked to submit their complaint, relating to the Council's procedures or administration, in writing to the Parish Clerk. A record of the complaint will be maintained by the Clerk. If the complainant does not wish to submit their complaint to the Parish Clerk, it may instead be addressed to the Chairman of the Parish Council.

The Parish Clerk or Chairman shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days. In the first instance, the complaint will be investigated by the Chairman of the Parish Council or, where established and appropriate, the Chairman of the Employment Committee. This investigation will normally be completed and the complainant notified of the outcome within twenty-one working days. Where appropriate, Weston-in-Gordano Parish Council shall issue a written apology to the complainant, signed by the Chairman of the Council.

4. Escalation to a Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the initial investigation, they have the right to request that their complaint be considered by a Complaints Hearing Panel, appointed by the Parish Council for this purpose. Any councillor with a conflict of interest shall not take part and will be substituted as necessary. If a hearing is requested:

- The complainant will be invited to attend the meeting and may be accompanied or represented if they wish.
- The complainant must provide the Council with copies of any documentation or evidence they wish to rely upon at least seven working days prior to the meeting.
- The Parish Council shall similarly provide the complainant with copies of any documentation it intends to rely upon.

5. Procedure at the Hearing

The Council shall first consider whether the circumstances require the exclusion of the public and press. The hearing shall follow this procedure:

- The Chairman introduces those present.
- The Chairman outlines the procedure to be followed.
- The complainant (or their representative) presents their complaint.
- Members may ask questions of the complainant.
- If relevant, the Parish Clerk presents the Council's position.
- Members may ask questions of the Parish Clerk.
- Both the Parish Clerk and the complainant are offered the opportunity to make a final statement (in that order).
- Both parties withdraw while Members deliberate. If clarification is required, both parties may be invited back.
- Both parties return to hear the decision, or will be advised when and how the decision will be communicated.

6. After the Hearing

The decision of the Parish Council shall be confirmed in writing within seven working days, together with details of any action to be taken. Any decision on a complaint shall be reported at a Parish Council meeting, in public, without breaching confidentiality.

7. Complaints Outside This Procedure

Complaints about Parish Councillors

Complaints regarding the conduct of Parish Councillors are subject to the jurisdiction of North Somerset Council's Standards arrangements. Such complaints should be made to the Monitoring Officer at North Somerset Council.

Complaints about Parish Council Staff

Complaints relating to Parish Council staff will be treated as employment matters and handled internally in accordance with the Council's Grievance and Disciplinary Policies. While details of such matters remain confidential, complainants can be assured that appropriate action will be taken where required.

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0.3			