ALVANLEY PARISH COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

1. The Importance of Complaints

1.1. Alvanley Parish Council is committed to providing a quality service for the benefit of the people who live or work in our area or are visiting here. Complaints are valuable because they provide a chance to put things right if there has been an error, and to make sure that the same mistakes are not repeated. We are anxious to hear people's comments and we are committed to making full use of complaints information to contribute to continuous service improvement.

1.2. If you are dissatisfied with the standard of service you have received from this council or are unhappy about an action or lack of action, this procedure sets out how you may complain to the council and how we shall try to resolve your complaint.

2. Definition of A Complaint

2.1. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the parish council or its staff which affects an individual customer or group of customers.

2.2. This procedure applies to complaints about council administration and procedures and may include complaints about how council employees have dealt with your concerns.

Some examples include:

- neglect or unjustified delay;
- malice, bias, or unfair discrimination;
- failure to tell people their rights;
- failure to provide advice or information when reasonably requested;
- providing misleading or inaccurate advice; and/or
- inefficiency, ineffectiveness, bad and unprofessional practice or conduct.

2.3. This complaints procedure does not apply to:

- complaints by one council employee against another council employee, or between a council employee and the council as employer. These matters are dealt with under the council's disciplinary and grievance procedures;
- complaints against councillors. Complaints against councillors are covered by the Code of Conduct for Members adopted by the council on 18th May 2022 and, if a

complaint against a councillor is received by the council, it will be referred to the Standards Committee of Cheshire West and Chester Council. Further information on the process of dealing with complaints against councillors may be obtained from the Monitoring Officer of Cheshire West and Chester Council; and

- complaints for which there is a legal remedy or where legal proceedings already exist.

3. Equal Opportunities

3.1. The parish council is committed to equal opportunities. Complaints feedback will be used to highlight discriminatory practices, and to promote equality of opportunity.

3.2. Complaints by members of the public of discrimination and/or harassment against the parish council will be dealt with through the complaints procedure unless it is a complaint that should be dealt with through a statutory procedure.

4. Complaints Officer

4.1. The Complaints Officer for the parish council is the clerk. Their main duties are:

i. The day-to-day operation and management of the procedure;
ii. To oversee, and undertake where necessary, the investigation of formal complaints within the relevant timescales;
iii. To maintain a record of all complaints received including details of the nature of the complaint, action taken, outcome, and time taken to resolve;
iv. To identify improvement points arising from any complaints; and
v. To identify staff and councillor training issues.

5. Handling Complaints

5.1. **Everyday problems, queries and comments** - the council receives queries, problems and comments as part of its day to day running, and they should not all be regarded as complaints. These are routine and expected and are generally resolved quickly to the customer's satisfaction. If someone is dissatisfied with the original service or response they received and wishes to take the matter further then the issue should be recognised as a complaint.

5.2. **Informal complaints** - during the course of daily business, minor complaints are made to officers about the services we provide. These will usually be dealt with by the clerk. It is not appropriate for every comment to be treated as a formal complaint. Every effort should be made to deal with these problems immediately, either by providing information, instigating the appropriate action or explaining a decision.

5.3. **Formal complaints** - for the benefit of good local administration, the council has adopted the Code of Practice in Appendix 1 for considering complaints either made by complainants directly or that have been referred back to the council from other bodies. This Code of Practice is aimed at those situations where a complaint has been made about the council's administration or procedures to ensure that complainants can feel satisfied that their grievance has been properly and fully considered. It is designed for

complaints that cannot be satisfied by less formal measures or explanations provided to the complainant by the clerk or Chair of the Council. All parties will be treated fairly and the process will be reasonable, accessible and transparent. However, there may be occasions when a complainant makes an approach in a different manner and it is important that the procedure does not in itself become a barrier to effective communication.

5.4. 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. In such cases, reference should be made to the council's Vexatious Complaints Policy.

5.5. **Anonymous Complaints** - anonymous complaints should be referred to the clerk, and may be acted on at his discretion, according to the type and seriousness of the allegation.

6. Resolution and Remedies

6.1. The aim in dealing with all complaints is to reach a resolution or remedy that satisfies the complainant, whether it is the remedy they were originally seeking or not. Where a complaint is found to be at all justified, consideration may need to be given to the question of an appropriate remedy. An explanation or an apology will always be needed.

Complaints should be directed to:

The Clerk

Alvanley Parish Council

PO Box No 4,042

Chester CH1 9XX

Tel: 07784 486 767

E-mail: clerk@alvanleyparishcouncil.gov.uk

The clerk can provide direct contact details for the Chair of the Council on request.

Adoption Date: 4th March 2026
Last Reviewed Date: 4th March 2026
Next Review Date: May 2027

APPENDIX 1

FORMAL COMPLAINTS CODE OF PRACTICE

Formal complaints can be considered at a council meeting. However, the council may also wish to establish a committee to deal with a complaint, which avoids the need for full council having to assemble and makes the process less daunting for a complainant if they choose to attend in person. If such a committee is formed, it should report its conclusions to the next council meeting.

At the meeting considering the complaint, the position of the council may be represented by the clerk or chair. If the clerk is putting forward the justification for the action or procedure complained of, they should not advise the council or committee.

Upon receiving a complaint:

1. The complainant should be asked to put the complaint about the council's procedures or administration in writing to the clerk.
2. If the complainant does not wish to put the complaint to the clerk, they may be advised to put it to the Chair of the Council.
3. The clerk shall acknowledge the receipt of the complaint within 5 working days and advise the complainant when the matter will be considered by the full council or by a committee established for the purposes of hearing complaints.
4. The complainant shall be invited to attend the relevant meeting and bring with them such representative as they wish.
5. 7 clear workings 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 on at the meeting.

At the meeting considering the complaint:

6. Members 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.
7. Chair to introduce everyone.
8. Chair to explain procedure.
9. Complainant (or representative) to outline grounds for complaint.
10. Members to ask any questions of the complainant.
11. If relevant, clerk to explain the council's position.
12. Members to ask any questions of the clerk.
13. Clerk and complainant to be offered the opportunity of last word (in this order).
14. Complainant (and clerk, if relevant) to be asked to leave the room while council members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties to be invited back.
15. Complainant (and clerk, if relevant) return to hear decision, or to be advised when decision will be made. After the meeting:
16. The decision should be confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.