**Complaints Policy and Procedure for Heddon on the Wall Parish Council**

1. **Overview**

Heddon on the Wall Parish Council is committed to providing a quality service for the benefit of the people who live or work in its area or are visitors to our parish. 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 by this council, this Complaints Procedure sets out how you may complain to the council and how we shall try to resolve your complaint.

This Complaints Procedure applies to complaints about council administration and procedures, for which the council takes corporate responsibility. We aim to deal with complaints impartially, objectively and swiftly, and to find a solution locally, whenever possible, to the satisfaction of all parties.

1. **Informal complaints**

You may make your complaint about the Council’s procedures or administration to the Parish Clerk, preferably in writing or by email. (The Parish Clerk, Heddon Library and Business Centre, Towne Gate, Heddon on the Wall, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 0EJ. Email: heddonpc@gmail.com) Please include your name, address, relevant dates and as much information as possible. Anonymous complaints will be disregarded.

The Parish Clerk will reply without delay, and will attempt to resolve the complaint informally. If the Clerk considers it necessary, the Chairman will be consulted. Whether resolved or not, this complaint will be recorded, will be brought to the Parish Council to be noted, and the details will be kept for 6 years.

1. **Formal complaints**
2. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the informal procedure, you may put your complaint in writing to the Parish Clerk, as above. If you do not wish to put it to the Clerk you may address it to the Chairman, at Heddon Library and Business Centre.
3. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and tell you when the Council will meet to consider it. It is best to send it two full weeks before the next council meeting to allow time for it to be put onto the agenda.
4. The council may defer dealing with the complaint only if they consider it necessary to seek professional advice, such as from a lawyer.
5. You will be invited to attend a Council meeting, and you may bring a representative if you wish.
6. You should send all relevant documents to the Clerk at least two weeks before the meeting, and the Clerk will send you such documents as he/she considers relevant.
7. The Council shall consider whether the circumstances warrant exclusion of press and public. Any decision about a complaint will be announced in public at a Council meeting.
8. The Chairman will introduce everyone and explain the procedure.
9. You will be given 5 minutes to outline the grounds for complaint. Then the Clerk and Councillors may ask questions.
10. The Clerk will explain the Council’s position and both you and the councillors may ask questions.
11. You will be allowed the opportunity to summarise your position.
12. You and the Clerk will be asked to leave the room while councillors debate whether or not the grounds for complaint have been made. The Chairman may ask two councillors to leave also, so that they may, if necessary, consider an appeal.
13. If a decision can be reached that day, you will be told immediately. If a delay is necessary you will be told how long it may be, and when it will be announced.
14. The decision will be confirmed in writing within seven days, whether or not any action is to be taken.
15. A record of the complaint and investigation will be held for 6 years.
16. **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 be or has been taken.

Guidelines for identifying vexatious complaints.

1. If they are too frequent, over several months.
2. If they take up so much of the Clerk’s time that she/he has not enough time for other council work.
3. If, in writing or orally, they contain improper language, adverse comments about people, or threats, open or implied.

These matters will be referred to the Council by the Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts. Council may then decide, in these circumstances, that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant, and inform the complainant so, making it clear that only new and substantial issues will merit a response.

1. **Anonymous complaints will be disregarded.**
2. **Complaints which cannot be dealt with under this procedure**
3. Complaints of financial irregularity which should go to the Council’s auditor.
4. Complaints about suspected criminal activity which should go to the police.
5. Complaints about an individual councillor, if he or she fails to follow the Code of Conduct laid down for Councillors. These should go to the Monitoring Officer of Northumberland County Council.
6. Complaints about an employee of Heddon Parish Council should go to the Clerk or Chairman, and will be dealt with by the Council’s internal disciplinary procedure.

**Adopted by Heddon Parish Council on 14 November 2018**

**Signed:**