

Cold Ashby Complaints procedure

This document describes what to do if you are dissatisfied in any way with the level of service provided by the Parish Council or with the treatment you have received or with any action the council has taken or not taken. These procedures apply whether you are dissatisfied with the council as a whole, any part of it or any individual person acting on behalf of the parish council.

Who to contact

In the first instance you should get in touch with the clerk to the parish council. His details are on the website, www.parish-council.com/coldashby, on the village notice board by the village hall and at the end of this leaflet. If your complaint or dissatisfaction concerns the parish clerk, then you can contact the chairman of the council, whose details are also on the website.

In the first instance the clerk will see if your complaint can be resolved informally. Often things are a simple misunderstanding or a lack of information and matters can be resolved quickly.

If your complaint is more serious or you are not content to resolve it informally then the clerk, or the councillor dealing with you, will ask you to put it in writing, which you can do in a letter, or by e-mail.

The clerk will respond to your letter within three clear working days of the date of receipt, setting out what he believes to be the substance of your complaint and explaining the next steps. You need contact him again at this stage only if you do not understand or agree with his letter.

In handling your complaint the council will endeavour to meet the following standards:

- Confidentiality: so far as is possible the council will reveal your identity only to those dealing with the complaint and in sensitive matters, confidentiality will be a prime concern.
- Timescale: the clerk will respond to a written request within three clear working days of the date he receives it. The whole process, including consideration by committee if that is necessary, will take no more than 21 days; if there is an appeal to the full council it will take place at the first available full council meeting. If your complaint is complex the clerk may need to negotiate a different timescale with you.

- Remedy: the point of a procedure such as this is to put things right. If your complaint is found to be justified the council will seek to agree with you a remedy which is commensurate with the nature and severity of the disservice or dissatisfaction
- Natural justice: in all cases and at all times the council will try to ensure you are treated fairly, that you are able to use the procedures easily and that the process is reasonable and transparent.

You should be aware that the council will use a small committee of two councillors to hear complaints and if yours is not settled informally by the clerk, you may be asked to attend a meeting with these two councillors, where you will be asked to state your case and may be asked questions relating to it.

The procedure

The council has established a committee of two councillors (selected on a case-by-case basis) to hear complaints which progress beyond the informal stage. Appeals against the decision of this committee by the complainant will be heard at full council, when the committee members may be asked to withdraw.

First steps

- If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, the complainant will be asked to put the complaint or dissatisfaction in writing to the clerk, or if the clerk is concerned in the complaint directly, the chairman.
- The clerk (or chairman) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and summarise its nature within three clear working days of the date of receipt.
- The clerk (or chairman) will advise the complainant how the complaint is to be handled and, if it is to be heard by the complaints committee, the date of the committee meeting.
- The complainant will be invited to bring a representative with them to the meeting if they so wish but the representative must not be a legally qualified person without the prior knowledge and consent of the council. If a legally qualified person is involved, the Council will require 14 days notice.
- Seven clear working days (but see above for legal representation) prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the council with copies of any documentation or other evidence to be relied on. The council will do the same, allowing enough time for it to be read in good time for the meeting.

The Meeting

- The meeting will decide whether the circumstances of the complaint, or the complainant warrant the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting. Due

weight shall be given to the wishes of the complainant in this matter. A decision on a complaint must be announced in public.

- The chairman of the meeting will introduce everyone and explain the process to be followed.
- The complainant will be asked to outline the substance of the complaint and first the clerk and then the councillors may ask questions.
- The clerk will outline the response of the council to the complaint and may be asked questions by first the complainant and then the councillors
- First the clerk and then the complainant should summarise their positions.
- The clerk and the complainant should withdraw whilst the councillors consider their decision, but may be invited back for points of clarification. Both parties must be invited back in this case.
- Every effort should be made to make the decision within a timescale which would allow the complainant to wait to hear it. If this is not possible the complainant must be told when the decision will be made and how they will be informed of it.

After the Meeting

- The decision and details of any action to be taken must be confirmed in writing to the complainant within seven clear working days.

What if the complaint cannot be resolved through this process?

In cases where the Council's procedures are not deemed appropriate or are exhausted without resolution, the complainant will be directed to the West Northants Council Standards Officer, whose address can be found on the West Northants website.