

Llanharry Community Council

Resolution protocol and complaints policy

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Contents

Resolution Protocol for Llanharry Community Council	2
Background	2
Issues which should be considered under this process	2
Issues which should not be considered under this process.....	2
The Process	2
The complaint	2
Resolution Process.....	3
Possible results of the process.....	3
Time for the process	3
Important Points to Note in preparing a process for use by the Council	4
Complaints procedure	4
What is a complaint?	4
Dealing with complaints.....	5
Complaints about staff.....	5
Complaints about Members of Llanharry Community Council.....	5

Resolution Protocol for Llanharry Community Council

Background

The Public Service Ombudsman has agreed to the principle of referring some complaints against Members back to Community and Town Councils for a local resolution.

Issues which should be considered under this process

Low level complaints about Members, including:

- Minor complaints from Members about Members
- Minor complaints from Officers about Members
- Members alleged to have not shown respect and consideration for others – either verbally or in writing

Issues which should not be considered under this process

Complaints which must be directed to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, including:

- Complaints instigated by a member of the public
- Serious complaints – breaches of the Code of Conduct/failure to disclose interests/bullying/abuse of position or trust/repeated breaches
- Complaints made by the Clerk/Proper Officer
- Vexatious, malicious or frivolous complaints
- Members' complaints about officers which should be dealt with using the Council's internal complaints process
- Repetitive low level complaints

The Process

The complaint

The complaint would need to be sent to the Clerk/Proper Officer of the Council to undertake a first sift to ensure that the complaint is at a low level and should not be dealt with by way of a complaint to the Ombudsman. If appropriate, therefore, the Clerk/Proper Officer should firstly seek an early resolution of any such dispute by liaising informally with the individual members concerned prior to the resolution process described below. It is vitally important that the 'accused' member is given full details of the complaint against them so that in the interests of natural justice they are in a position to prepare their response to the accusation.

Resolution Process

The involvement of the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council in the following process is not to adjudicate on the complaint, but to attempt to get the members/officers involved to come to an agreement as to how the issue(s) could be resolved on an amicable basis.

The Clerk/Proper Officer will act as a facilitator for the resolution process below.

If the complaint is between Members other than the Chair of the Council, the Clerk/Proper Officer and the Chair will meet individually with the complainant and Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint is between Members, one of whom is the Chair of Council, but not the Vice Chair, the Clerk/Proper Officer and the Vice Chair will meet with the complainant and Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by an officer/employee, but not the Clerk/Proper Officer, against a Member other than the Chair of Council, the Clerk/Proper Officer and the Chair of Council will meet with the officer and the Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by an officer/employee, but not the Clerk/Proper Officer, against the Chair of Council, the Clerk/Proper Officer and the Vice Chair of Council will meet with the officer and the Chair to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by the Clerk/Proper Officer, then it is likely to be best practice that this complaint is forwarded by way of a complaint to the Ombudsman.

Possible results of the process

If an agreement is reached by Members and/or officers during this Stage then no further action is required.

If agreement cannot be reached the aggrieved Member/officer would always have the opportunity of referring the matter to the Ombudsman.

Examples of agreements might include issue of a letter of apology, a written undertaking or commitment not to breach the Code of Conduct in the future, a commitment to undertake training or an agreement that on the basis of the evidence that no further action should be taken and the matter be closed.

Time for the process

It is the intention that all of the processes can be completed as quickly as possible to resolve the issue. However exact timing will depend on the availability of individuals to attend the meetings.

Important Points to Note in preparing a process for use by the Council

Any meetings held with a view to discussing the issues of complaints and/or resolving matters are at the very least minuted, if not recorded. This is to ensure that agreements are captured. This will also be useful in the event that matters break down or escalate and need to be referred to the PSOW. It may also be useful as evidence in the event of further similar breaches of the conduct and future conduct.

Councils need to be clear on their powers in respect of code of conduct matters. Investigations of possible breaches of the Code are matters for the Ombudsman. The Local Government Act 2000 gives him the authority to carry out such investigations. The Council has no legal authority to undertake such investigations or to make findings of a breach of the Code of Conduct, which are decisions that can only be reached by a Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

Complaints procedure

What is a complaint?

1.0 Llanharry Community Council believes a complaints procedure demonstrates to its residents that the Council:

- wishes to provide a good service;
- values feedback;
- undertakes its business in an open and honest manner;
- wishes to deal with complaints fairly.

1.1 The Council believes that complaints and suggestions provide a valuable opportunity for improving its services and performance.

1.2 For the purposes of this procedure, a complaint is defined as:

An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council or its staff affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

1.3 This definition covers most complaints, for example:

- dissatisfaction with the administration of policy and decisions;
- delays in responding to service requests;
- failure to achieve standards of service;
- failure to fulfil statutory responsibilities;
- employees' behaviour or attitude.

Dealing with complaints

Complaints about staff

Stage 1

- 1.4 Many complaints can be dealt with quickly and satisfactorily by the 'front line' staff, the Clerk, the administrative assistant or the Caretaker who provide the service.
- 1.5 However, complainants will be told what they should do if they remain dissatisfied.

This will normally be to ask that their complaint be considered by their line manager or the Chair of the Community Council.

Stage 2

- 1.6 The Line manager or the Chair will reconsider the complaint and inform the complainant of the outcome.
- 1.7 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of this stage the complainant will be told that their complaint will move to stage 3. Complaints about the Community Clerk will pass automatically to stage 3.

Stage 3

- 1.8 The complaint will be considered by a Complaints Panel comprising three members of the Community Council and not the Chair. The Complaints Panel will, after obtaining any additional information necessary, recommend a response to the full Council.
- 1.9 If, after being informed of the outcome of this stage, the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complainant will be advised how they can pursue the complaint through the Public Service Ombudsman.

Complaints about Members of Llanharry Community Council

- 1.10 All Councillors have signed an undertaking that they will observe the Council's Code of Conduct. The Code specifies a Councillor's obligations. Alleged breaches of the Code must be reported to the Public Service Ombudsman