

Sonning Common Parish Council

Code of Practice for Handling Complaints

Introduction

1. Complaints about the proper officer of the Council (i.e. the Clerk) will be dealt with as an employment matter. The complainant to be assured that the matter will be dealt with internally as such and appropriate action taken as required.
2. Complaints regarding the conduct of a member of the Council must be submitted to: The Monitoring Officer South Oxfordshire District Council, Benson Lane, Crowmarsh Gifford, Wallingford , OX10 8HQ email: monitoringofficer@southoxon.gov.uk. If the complaint is relating to the Code of Conduct the complainant must state why he/she thinks the member of the Council has not followed the Code of Conduct.
3. This code of practice is therefore aimed at those situations where a complaint has been made about the administration of the Council or about its procedures. It is not really an appropriate forum for a complaint against individuals, as the provisions available above should cover these situations.
4. The Council views the adoption of this complaints procedure as an efficient way of dealing with complaints received and a means of preserving the good reputation of the Council through a transparent process.
5. The procedure is designed for those complaints that cannot be satisfied by less formal measures or explanations provided to the complainant by the Clerk or Chairman.
6. The Clerk will represent the position of the Council at the meeting of the full Council when the complaint is heard. If the Clerk puts forward the justification for the action or procedure complained of, he or she will not advise the Council.
7. At all times, the rules of natural justice will apply. In other words, all parties should be treated fairly and the process should be reasonable, accessible and transparent.

The Code of Practice Process

Before the Meeting

1. The complainant to 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 Chairman of the Council.
3. The Clerk shall acknowledge the receipt of the complaint and advise the complainant when the Council will consider the matter.
4. The complainant shall be invited to attend the relevant meeting and bring with them such representative as they wish.
5. Seven clear working 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 at the meeting.

At the Meeting

1. The Council 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.
2. Chairman to introduce everyone.
3. Chairman to explain procedure.
4. Complainant (or representative) to outline grounds for complaint.
5. Members to ask any question of the complainant.
6. If relevant, Clerk to explain the Council's position.
7. Members to ask any question of the Clerk.
8. Clerk and complainant to be offered opportunity of last word (in this order).
9. Clerk and complainant to be asked to leave room while 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).
10. Clerk and complainant return to hear decision, or to be advised when decision will be made.

After the Meeting

1. Decision confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.

This Code of Practice for handling Complaints from members of the public and service users 2013-14 was approved by Sonning Common Parish Council on 20 May 2013.

Chairman: