

## **Leigh on Mendip Parish Council: Complaints Procedure**

### **Councillors**

This procedure does not cover any complaints made regarding the conduct of a Parish Councillor.

### **Complaints**

Complaints to Councillors concerning Parish Council business are taken seriously and, if given verbally to the Councillor, should be requested to be put in writing by the complainant and addressed to the Clerk.

Any complaint received by Leigh on Mendip Parish Council must be clearly marked as a complaint otherwise it will be dealt with as a standard communication and will not come under the scope of a complaint. However, the unreasonable complainant behaviour section will still apply.

Any written complaint received from a Parishioner by a Parish Councillor or the Clerk should be promptly copied to all councillors and the Clerk for consideration and receipt of the complaint acknowledged by the Clerk within 7 day of receipt.

The complaint will be investigated by the Clerk within 21 days, taking into account considered input from councillors, and a response prepared for the next full council meeting.

Any complaint regarding a third party will be passed to the third party and they will be given the opportunity to make any comments.

The Clerk, or the Chairman where the complaint is in respect to the Clerk, will report the outcome of any complaints resolved by direct action with the complainant at the next available meeting of the Council explaining the reason for the need to take direct action.

As with any monthly Council meeting the public, including any complainant, will have the right to talk to the complaint during the public session to the time limit enforced at such meetings.

The Parish Councillors will consider the content of the complaint and agree appropriate action and response. Should the Parish Council consider that the circumstances of a complaint warrants the matter being discussed without the presence of the press and the public present the result will be communicated to the complainant directly and to the general public through the minutes of the meeting.

The complainant will be informed of any actions and response within 14 days of the meeting.

The Parish Council may defer dealing with any complaint if it is of the opinion that any of the issues arising from the complaint require further advice being obtained. Any advice received will be referred to the next available meeting of the Parish Council.

### **Management of unreasonable complainant behaviour**

The Parish Council is committed to dealing with all complaints and other correspondence fairly and impartially, and to making its services as accessible as possible.

Because of the nature or frequency of their contact with the Parish Council a small number of complainants or other correspondents could hinder the normal workings of the Council. This may be because of unacceptable behaviour in their dealings with the Parish Council, or because of unreasonably persistent contacts that distract staff from carrying out the day-to-day work of the Council.

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### **Unacceptable Behaviour**

The Parish Council will not tolerate deceitful, abusive, offensive, threatening or other forms of unacceptable behaviour from complainants or correspondents. When it occurs, the Parish Council will take proportionate action to protect the wellbeing of staff and the integrity of the processes.

Unacceptable behaviour at a council meeting is covered by the Parish Council Standing Orders.

### **Unreasonably Persistent Behaviour**

Staff manages and undertakes work on behalf of the Parish Council and cannot do so if an individual or group attempts to dominate attention with frequent, lengthy contacts and repetitive information. The Parish Council will take action to restrict access to service or associated initiatives when unreasonable behaviour of this nature persists.

### **Warnings**

In most instances when the Parish Council considers behaviour is unreasonable the appropriate individual or group will be contacted to explain why and be asked to stop. This may take the form of a face-to-face meeting with the Chairman or other member of the Parish Council. They will also be warned that, if the behaviour continues, action will be taken to restrict contact with the Parish Council.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of Parish Council staff or Councillors the matter will be reported to the police and the taking of legal action will be considered. In such cases, Leigh on Mendip Parish Council may not give the complainant or correspondent prior warning.

### **Restricting access to the Parish Council**

The Parish Council will decide whether the circumstances justify any restriction of access. They will record the reason for their decision and explain it to the person or group concerned. They will state for how long any restriction will apply before it is reconsidered, and state how the decision can be challenged. Restrictions will be reviewed every six months or on the meeting following expiry of such a restriction order to determine whether they are still necessary and should remain in place or be extended.

The sort of restrictions imposed could include:

- a. restricting e-mails / telephone calls to specified days and limited times
- b. limiting contacts to one form only (for example, a maximum of one letter in advance of each Parish Council meeting)
- c. requiring contact to take place with one named Officer / Councillor

If a complainant or correspondent attending a Parish Council meeting is affecting the normal running of the meeting then the Chairman has the right to request the individual concerned to leave the meeting.

### **Terminating access to the Parish Council**

If a complainant or correspondent continues to behave unreasonably, and overrides the restrictions placed on access to the Parish Council, the Council may decide to terminate all contact.