

Complaints Policy

Brickhill Parish Council aims to operate in a way that is open, transparent and fair and to provide efficient and appropriate services to the community of Brickhill. The Council welcomes feedback from the public at all times. This Complaints Policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to reflect any changes needed to ensure best practice is followed.

When is this Complaints Policy Procedure not appropriate?

	Nature of the Complaint	Action
A	Alleged financial irregularity	Local electors have legal rights to inspect, ask questions about and challenge items in the Brickhill Parish Council accounts. Local electors have a statutory right to object to the council's audit of accounts (s.16 Audit Commission Act 1998). For more detailed guidance on electors' rights and the special power of auditors, copies of the publication <i>Council Accounts – a guide to your rights</i> are available by calling the National Audit Office on 020 7798 7000 or downloading from the website https://www.nao.org.uk/
B	Alleged criminal activity	The Police
C	*Members' conduct alleged to breach the code of conduct adopted by the council	Submit the complaint directly to the Monitoring Officer at Bedford Borough Council. (a copy of the current Code of Conduct is on the parish council's website).

* Members include parish councillors

Complaints which can be handled by this Complaints Policy:

This policy can deal with complaints which are “expressions of dissatisfaction about the council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action was taken or the service provided by the council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the council”.

Brickhill Parish Council has a two stage complaints procedure.

Receipt of the complaint:

- All complaints should be addressed to the Clerk. If the complaint is about the Clerk, then the complaint should be addressed to the Chairman of the Parish Council or to a parish councillor who is not the subject directly of the complaint. The addresses and contact numbers are on the parish council website www.brickhillparishcouncil.gov.uk and on the noticeboards around the parish and in the newsletter.
- In the event that the Council receives a complaint either in person, by telephone, letter or email an attempt will be made to try to resolve the complaint informally within ten days of receipt. The complainant will be asked at the outset to confirm if they want the complaint to be treated confidentially. Even if the complainant waives the right to confidentiality, the council will comply with its obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 to safeguard against the unlawful disclosure of personal data.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the informal attempt to deal with the matter, he, she or they will be asked to submit a formal written complaint. A written acknowledgement of the formal written complaint will be sent within ten days and the complainant will be informed of the next steps in the complaints procedure.

Investigating the complaint:

- Upon receipt of the formal written complaint, a Complaints Committee will be formed comprising of three parish councillors appointed on an ad hoc basis from the existing parish councillors. The three parish councillors shall appoint one of the three to be chairman. That Committee will be given the delegated authority to deal with complaints on behalf of the parish council. As far as is practicable, none of the parish councillors appointed should have taken part in the action which forms the basis of the complaint. A date for a meeting will be organised within a period of three weeks.
- The council will need to investigate the facts of the complaint and collate relevant evidence. The three-week period referred to above will allow time to do so.

Meeting with the complainant:

- The complainant will be informed of the membership of the Complaints Committee and shall be invited to attend a meeting of the committee and to bring with them a representative if they wish.
- Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the council with copies of any documentation or other evidence relied on. The council shall provide the complainant with copies of any documentation upon which they wish to rely at the meeting and shall do so promptly, allowing the complainant the opportunity to read the material in good time for the meeting.
- The chairman of the committee should introduce everyone and explain the procedure
- The complainant (or representative) should outline the grounds for complaint and, thereafter, questions may be asked by (i) the clerk or other nominated officer and then (ii) members of the committee.
- The Complaints Committee will then have an opportunity to explain the council's position and questions may be asked by the complainant.
- The Complaints Committee and then the complainant will have the opportunity to summarise their position.
- The complainant should be advised when a decision about the complaint is likely to be made and when it is likely to be communicated to them (see 13. below).

After the complaint has been decided:

- Within seven working days of the meeting, the council will write to the complainant to confirm whether or not it has upheld the complaint. The council will give reasons for its decision together with details of any action to be taken by the council if appropriate.

(Adopted by Brickhill Parish Council 7th April 2022)