



Vexatious Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

This policy identifies situations where a complainant, either individually or as part of a group, may be considered to be habitual, persistent or vexatious. The following clauses form the Parish Council's policy for responding to such situations.

1.1 Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

- **Habitual** means repeated or recurring behaviour.
- **Vexatious** refers to actions pursued without sufficient grounds and primarily intended to cause annoyance, disruption or distress.

1.2 Purpose of the Policy

This policy is intended to assist the Council in identifying and managing unreasonable behaviour by complainants whose actions hinder the proper consideration of complaints or place excessive demands on Council resources.

1.3 Scope

For the purposes of this policy, "complaints" include:

- complaints submitted under the Council's Complaints Procedure;
- requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- requests made under the Data Protection Act 2018; and
- persistent correspondence relating to Council business.

1.4 General Principles

Bringtons Parish Council recognises that complainants may sometimes feel frustrated or dissatisfied. The Council will always seek to respond fairly, politely and reasonably.

However, habitual or vexatious complaints can place unreasonable demands on the time and resources of Councillors and staff. In some cases, there may be nothing further that can reasonably be done to resolve a matter.

1.5 Legitimate Complaints

A complainant will not automatically be regarded as vexatious simply because they:

- make a complaint;
- challenge a decision;
- request further clarification; or
- express dissatisfaction with the outcome of a complaint.

1.6 Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all complaints are dealt with in a manner that is consistent, fair, proportionate and reasonable.

2. Habitual or Vexatious Complaints

For the purposes of this policy, habitual or vexatious complaints may involve:

- repeated and/or obsessive pursuit of unreasonable complaints or unrealistic outcomes; and/or
- reasonable complaints pursued in an unreasonable manner.

2.1 Prior Warning

Before implementing this policy, the Council will normally provide the complainant with:

- a written warning;
- an explanation of the concerns regarding their behaviour; and
- a copy of this policy.

2.2 Decision to Apply the Policy

Where behaviour continues and is considered habitual, unreasonable or vexatious, the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Council, may recommend that restrictions be imposed.

2.3 Notification

The complainant will be notified in writing:

- why the policy is being applied;
- what restrictions are being imposed; and
- the duration of those restrictions.

2.4 Review

The status of the complainant will be kept under review. If the complainant demonstrates a more reasonable approach, restrictions may be reduced or removed.

3. Defining Unreasonable or Vexatious Behaviour

3.1 General Definition

Bringtons Parish Council defines unreasonable persistent or vexatious complainants as individuals whose behaviour, due to the nature or frequency of contact with the Council, hinders the Council's ability to deal properly with complaints or conduct normal business.

3.2 Examples of Behaviour

Examples of unreasonable or vexatious behaviour may include, but are not limited to:

- pursuing complaints with little or no grounds;
- refusing to specify the basis of a complaint;
- refusing to cooperate with the complaints process;
- refusing to accept that certain matters are outside the Council's powers or jurisdiction;
- making excessive or repetitive contact with the Council;
- demanding immediate or unreasonable responses;
- using abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening language;
- harassing or intimidating Councillors or staff;
- introducing unrelated issues during an ongoing complaint;
- repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint;
- refusing to accept the outcome of a complaint investigation;
- repeatedly submitting the same complaint after the process has concluded;
- contacting multiple Councillors or external organisations simultaneously about the same issue;
- publishing unfounded allegations about the Council or its staff;
- secretly recording meetings or conversations without consent;
- pursuing unrealistic outcomes despite explanations being provided.

The above list is not exhaustive, and a single action alone may not justify application of this policy.

4. Imposing Restrictions

4.1 Initial Action

The Clerk shall first consult with the Chair of the Council before any formal action is taken.

The complainant will normally receive a written warning requesting that the behaviour cease.

4.2 Continued Behaviour

If the behaviour continues, the Council may impose proportionate restrictions on communications.

4.3 Possible Restrictions

Restrictions may include:

- limiting contact to one named officer or Councillor;
- requiring communication in writing only;
- refusing to respond to repetitive correspondence on the same matter;
- restricting telephone calls to specific times or durations;
- requiring meetings to take place in the presence of a witness;
- refusing contact except through a representative;
- blocking abusive or excessive email communications.

4.4 Duration

Restrictions will normally apply for between three and six months, although this may be extended in exceptional circumstances.

4.5 Serious Cases

Where behaviour threatens the safety or welfare of Councillors, staff or others, the Council may:

- report the matter to the police;
 - seek legal advice; or
 - take other appropriate action without prior warning.
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5. New Complaints

Any new complaint submitted by a complainant subject to this policy will still be considered on its merits.

The Council will determine whether any restrictions already in place remain necessary and proportionate.

The Council will not ignore legitimate complaints solely because a complainant has previously been subject to this policy.

6. Review of Restrictions

6.1 Regular Review

The Clerk and Chair of the Council shall review restrictions:

- after three months; and
- at appropriate intervals thereafter.

6.2 Notification

The complainant will be informed in writing if restrictions are extended, amended or removed.

7. Record Keeping

7.1 Records

The Clerk shall maintain appropriate records including:

- the name of the complainant;

- the nature of the behaviour;
- correspondence and evidence;
- restrictions imposed;
- dates of reviews; and
- outcomes of decisions.

7.2 Confidentiality

Records will be maintained in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council's data protection policies.

8. Review of Policy

This policy shall be reviewed every three years or sooner if required by changes in legislation or Council procedures.

Adopted by: Bringtons Parish Council

Signed: *Keith White*

Date: 20th May 2026