Complaints Policy

Approved by:	Full Council Meeting – ref 133/24.1
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Contents:

Policy Purpose	3
Main Body	3-5

Policy Purpose:

1. The Parish Council provides many services to community groups, companies, and individuals. We try to get our service delivery right every time, but there are occasions when users of our services may be dissatisfied with our performance, for any number of reasons. This policy sets out how to raise a complaint with Meriden Parish Council.
2. This procedure should be used to address complaints about Meriden Parish Council administration and procedures and may include complaints about the way Council employees have dealt with your concerns. It is not appropriate to deal with all complaints using this procedure. For example, complaints about financial irregularity, criminal activity, Councillor or Clerk conduct require special consideration or may be subject to other Council or third-party procedures. If your complaint does not fall within the scope of this procedure please contact either the Clerk to Meriden Parish Council or the Chair of the Council for further advice.

Main Body:

3. **The following is a definition of Complaint offered by the Local Government Ombudsman**.
   3.1. "A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of service, whether the action was taken or the service provided by the Council itself or a person or body action on behalf of the Council.".

4. Informal Complaint

4.1. It is hoped that most complaints can be resolved quickly and amicably through this route. Informal complaints can be made by telephone, email or a visit to the Council offices.

4.2. The complaint will be handled by the Clerk who will handle the complaint and seek its resolution. Complaints should always be directed through the Council offices, not through individual Councillors.

4.3. A complainant may advise a Councillor of the details of a complaint, but individual Councillors are not in a position to resolve complaints. It is expected that most complaints can be resolved through this informal route.

4.4. However, the Council appreciates that on occasions if an informal approach had not resolved the complaint, or that the initial complaint is so serious, then the formal complaints process should be followed.

5. Formal Complaint

5.1. The Clerk to the Council is responsible for managing the formal complaints process as the Clerk is the senior officer of the Council.

5.2. If a formal complaint is being raised against the Clerk, please contact the Chair of the Council to discuss the complaint further.

5.3. A formal complaint can only be submitted in writing/email to the Council, it should be addressed to the Clerk, marked “Confidential – Formal Complaint”, and this will ensure the matter is handled by the Clerk. The complaint should cover as much detail as possible and enclose any relevant supporting documentation.
5.4. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days.
5.5. The Clerk will carry out an initial investigation into the complaint and will within ten working days provide the complainant with an update on progress, or a suggested resolution.
5.6. If the complainant is satisfied with the resolution the complaint is closed.
5.7. The Clerk will report to the Council summary details of the complaint and a brief summary of its resolution.
5.8. This summary report will exclude the name(s) of the complainant.
5.9. If the Clerk is unable to resolve the complaint, or the complainant is not satisfied with the proposed resolution then the matter will be referred to a meeting of the Council’s Finance, Governance and Personnel Committee.

5.9.1. Procedure prior to any meeting.

5.9.1.1. The complainant shall be invited to a meeting and to bring with them representation if they wish.
5.9.1.2. Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant shall provide the Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence relied on.
5.9.1.3. The Council shall provide the complainant with copies of any unrestricted documentation upon which they wish to rely on at the meeting and shall do so promptly, allowing the claimant the opportunity to read the material in good time for the meeting.

5.9.2. Procedure at the meeting

5.9.2.1. The Council shall consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the public and the press.
5.9.2.2. Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at a Meriden Parish Council meeting in public.
5.9.2.3. The Chair shall introduce everyone and explain the procedure.
5.9.2.4. The complainant (or representative) should outline the grounds for complaint and, thereafter, questions may be asked by the Clerk and then members.
5.9.2.5. The Clerk will have an opportunity to explain the Council’s position and questions may be asked by the complainant and members.
5.9.2.6. The Clerk and then the complainant should be offered the opportunity to summarise their position.
5.9.2.7. The Clerk and the complainant should be asked to leave the room while members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made.

5.9.2.7.1. If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties shall be invited back.

5.9.2.8. The Clerk and the complainant should be given the opportunity to wait for the decision but if the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day they should be advised when the decision is likely to be made and when it is likely to be communicated to them.

5.9.3. Post meeting procedure

5.9.3.1. The decision should be confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.

6. Formal Complaint Regarding a Councillor's Conduct

6.1 Any complaints regarding the conduct of a Councillor must be directed to the Monitoring Officer at Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council; complainants are advised to discuss the conduct complaint procedure directly with the Monitoring Officer.

6.2 Complainants should submit the complaint in writing to the Monitoring Officer and enclose all documentation necessary in support of the complaint.

6.3 Meriden Parish Council will remain impartial to the investigation by the Monitoring Officer but will provide the Monitoring Officer with any documentation requested and attend requests for meetings to discuss the evidence presented, if required.

6.4 Members of Meriden Parish Council can contact the Monitoring Officer directly if there are concerns regarding a Councillor's conduct within the workplace and request an investigation.