

How to Complain to Shinfield Parish Council

Our Commitment

We are committed to providing the best possible services; however, sometimes things can go wrong. When they do, we need to know so that we can put them right and learn for the future.

We want to hear about **your** experiences, both good and bad, so that we can continuously improve what we do. We aim to:

- Make it easy for you to contact us about any issues;
- Listen and work with you on further action;
- Solve problems at an early stage;
- Prevent problems happening again;
- Recognise good service.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, perhaps about:

- The service you have received;
- Things you think we should have done, or have not done;
- The actions of our staff or contractors and agents who work on our behalf.

What is a Complaints Procedure?

Our complaints procedure is the way the council manages a report of a problem with our service.

We aim to handle most problems informally; but where this is not possible or practical, or you remain dissatisfied, we have a formal 3-stage procedure.

What can be expected?

Our complaints procedure aims to ensure the process is:

- Publicised and well documented;
- Easy to understand and use;
- Helpful and receptive, not adversarial;
- Objective and based on clear procedures;
- Capable of putting things right where necessary;
- Sensitive to the needs and circumstances of the complainant;

- Adequately resourced and fully supported by the elected parish councillors and officers;
- Regularly analysed to spot patterns of complaint and lessons for service improvement.

How to Initiate a Complaint

Verbal complaint- initial complaints should be made verbally, in person, or by telephone, to the Clerk of the council on 0118 9888220.

This type of complaint is most appropriate for some minor matter such as the need for repair to property owned or operated by the council, a faulty street light, or play equipment etc.

A verbal complaint will normally be dealt with directly by the Clerk, or their nominated representative, without any need for a response.

You may make a complaint to a councillor if you wish, although a councillor has no authority to act as an individual and must refer the matter to the Clerk.

Written complaint-should you need to register a written complaint where a verbal complaint has failed, or the matter is more complex, please complete a copy of the council's **complaints form** and complete this with any information you wish to provide to support your complaint.

A complaints form can be obtained from, and should be returned to:

Parish Council Office,
School Green,
Shinfield,
Berkshire
RG2 9EH

This should be addressed to the Clerk, unless the complaint concerns the Clerk. In this instance, the complaint should be sealed and addressed to the Chairman of the council and clearly marked "Council Chairman- Private and Confidential".

Ordinarily, written complaints of matters of a serious nature will be recorded in the council's minutes, once they are resolved. However, certain sensitive issues, and certain human resource issues, may be legislatively exempt from publication.

You may, of course, also initiate a written complaint by letter or email, but the council may ask you to subsequently complete their complaints form in order to keep a consistent record of communications of complaints.

Please note that before making a formal written complaint, it is advisable to contact us to ensure that the council is, indeed, the "Responsible Body" to handle your particular complaint.

The way in which a complaint is handled is then also dependent on the nature and specifics of each case. The table overleaf summarises how different types of written complaint may be handled by the council.

Nature of the complaint	How to complain	Who to complain to	Who will deal with your complaint
Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes • Procedures • services 	<p>The Clerk will provide you with a Complaint Form</p> <p>Complete the form and add any other relevant evidence to support your complaint</p>	The Clerk	<p>You will receive a written reply from the Clerk.</p> <p>The matter may have been debated by the council at a council meeting; if so, the Clerk's response will be based on the decision of the council.</p>
Financial irregularity	<p>The Clerk will provide you with a Complaint Form.</p> <p>Complete the form and add any other relevant evidence to support your complaint</p>	The Clerk/ Responsible Financial Officer of the council.	<p>The Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer of the council will provide an explanation.</p> <p>If you are not satisfied you can report the matter to the External Auditor.</p>
Conduct of an employee	<p>The Clerk will provide you with a Complaint Form.</p> <p>Complete the form and add any other relevant evidence to support your complaint</p>	<p>The Clerk, unless the complaint is about the Clerk.</p> <p>If this is the case the complaint should be sent to the Chairman, it should be sealed and marked private and confidential.</p>	<p>The complaint may be resolved or escalated and be treated as an internal disciplinary matter to be dealt with under the council's employee disciplinary procedure.</p> <p>In the event that the matter escalates, the council will provide a copy of the disciplinary procedure on request.</p>
Criminal activity	In writing, including any relevant evidence to support your concern.	The Police	<p>The Police.</p> <p>Depending on severity the matter may go to court.</p>
Conduct of a councillor	This type of complaint needs to be referred in writing to Wokingham Borough Council as the principal authority, as the council has no power to investigate the conduct of one of its own elected and co-opted members.	The Monitoring Officer at Wokingham Borough Council	<p>The Monitoring Officer.</p> <p>Matters may be lengthy if an investigation is undertaken.</p> <p>The matter may be referred for consideration by the Local Standards Committee.</p>

How the Formal 3-stage Complaints Procedure Operates

- Stage 1:** We will send you a written acknowledgement of your complaint within 5 working days. This will tell you who will be dealing with your complaint and the timeframe for investigation. We will ask you whether you wish to make verbal representation to the council and whether you wish to be accompanied. We will tell you what will happen next. You must tell us, at the outset, if you want your complaint to be treated confidentially. If so, we will comply with our obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998. The department the complaint is about will investigate and aim to resolve your complaint as soon as possible. We aim to respond within **10 working days** at this stage; however, if we need longer to investigate we will ask for your agreement to this beforehand.
- Stage 2:** If you are dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response you can ask for your complaint to move to Stage 2. This is an independent investigation by someone, nominated by the Clerk, unconnected with the service concerned. If your complaint is in connection with the Clerk, the investigation will be carried out by the Chairman of the relevant committee. At Stage 2 we aim to complete the investigation process within **20 working days** from the date the statement of complaint is received. More complex complaints may take longer. We will let you know if we need longer to respond.
- Stage 3:** If you are dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response you can refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The LGO is a national commission which is independent. The LGO will normally only consider a complaint after it has been through all stages of our complaints process.

Compliments and Suggestions

We are also looking for your positive and constructive comments to help us improve our service. Tell us what you think we do well, suggestions for improvements, or any other comments you would like to make. Please write to the address above, send an email to clerk@shinfieldparish.gov.uk, or telephone on 0118 9888220.