

# Milnthorpe Parish Council

## Complaints Policy and Procedure May 2025

We always want to provide high quality service. If you feel any aspect of our service has been at fault, we want to know about it and investigate. Complaints and compliments provide useful information and feedback on the quality of our services, procedures, and practice. They help us improve our service to residents, visitors, and those working in Grange.

This policy and procedure are for members of the public considering making any complaint to the Council and applies to all services provided by the Council.

### What is a complaint?

People's perceptions differ widely. It is therefore difficult to give a precise definition of a complaint. However, for our purposes, a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about a service undertaken by Milnthorpe Parish Council or any of its employees.

For example, a complaint could be where you are not happy about:

- the service you have received from us – including our staff, volunteers, or contractors who work on our behalf.
- things you think we could have done or have not done – either by law or by established practice.
- where you think we have not followed adopted procedures or policies.
- where you think maladministration can be alleged.

**Please note - complaints about Councillors are treated differently – See page 3.**

### Our Aims

- ✓ To deal with complaints impartially, objectively, and swiftly.
- ✓ To find a solution locally, whenever possible, to the satisfaction of all parties.

### How to Complain

We want to put things right as quickly as possible, and this may usually be done if you speak directly to the staff providing the service first before moving to a formal complaint. We aim to resolve problems informally and as early as possible.

### Complaints Procedure - Stage 1

1.1 If you feel that the staff response has not dealt properly or fully with your complaint, you can contact the Council Chair.

1.2 Contacting the Council Chair can be done by telephone, email, in person or in writing. Give your name, address, relevant dates and as much information as possible to help us deal with the complaint.

1.3 Once we receive your complaint, we acknowledge receipt. We make a written record, noting your name and contact details, and the nature of the complaint.

1.4 We then investigate, obtaining further information as necessary from you, staff, or Councillors.

1.5 Within twenty working days we will send you a full written reply or let you know if our reply will take longer, explaining the reason for the delay.

1.6 If we do not hear from you within ten working days of our reply, we will close the complaint.

1.7 A record of the complaint and investigation is kept for six years.

## **Complaints Procedure - Stage 2**

2.1 We hope that by now we have resolved your complaint. However, if not, you can write again to the Chair of the Council.

2.2 If you have been through Stage 1, you are asked to give a reason why you remain dissatisfied.

2.3 The Committee, or Full Council, depending upon the circumstances, then investigate the complaint following the procedure outlined below:

### **Complaint Hearing Procedure at Council**

- a. We consider whether the circumstances warrant exclusion of the press and public.
- b. The Chair introduces all present and explains the procedure.
- c. The complainant or their representative outlines the grounds of the complaint.
- d. Members can ask any question of the complainant or their representative.
- e. If relevant, the Parish Clerk or other member of staff explains the Council's position.
- f. Members can ask any question of the Parish Clerk or other members of staff.
- g. Parish Clerk or staff, then the complainant are offered the opportunity of a last word.
- h. The Parish Clerk, staff, and the complainant leave the room while members decide whether the grounds for the complaint have been made. If a point of clarification is necessary, all parties are invited back.
- i. The parties return to hear the decision or are advised when the decision will be made (the Council can defer deciding if it needs to wait for legal advice or further information).
- j. The decision is confirmed in writing within twenty working days - with details of any action to be taken.
- k. Decisions on complaints may be announced in public at a future Council meeting.
- l. A record of the complaint and investigation is kept for six years.
- m. We aim to complete the whole Stage 2 procedure within eight weeks.

### **Complaints Procedure - Stage 3**

If you are still dissatisfied following Stage 2, then you can complain to the Council with ultimate responsibility, which is Westmorland and Furness Council. They will normally only look at a complaint once the local stages have been completed.

### **Complaints about Councillors**

These are covered by the Code of Conduct for Members (see below). If a complaint against a Councillor is received by the Council, we will refer it to the Monitoring Officer at Westmorland and Furness Council. Further information on the process of dealing with complaints against Councillors may be obtained from Westmorland and Furness Council.

### **What else is not covered by this policy and procedure?**

- Influencing Council decision making - the appropriate time for this is by raising your concerns before the Council debates and votes on a matter. You may do this by writing to the Council in advance of the meeting at which the item is to be discussed. If you are unhappy with a Council decision, you may raise your concerns with the Council, but Standing Orders prevent the Council from re-opening issues for six months from the date of the decision, unless there are exceptional grounds to consider this necessary and the special process set out in the Standing Orders is followed.
- Internal staff complaints - these are dealt with through the Council's grievance and disciplinary procedures.

### **Councillors must observe our 'Code of Conduct'.**

Broadly, this requires Councillors:

- Not to discriminate unlawfully.
- To treat others with respect.
- Not to do anything to compromise the impartiality of Council employees.
- Not to disclose confidential information.
- Not to stop anyone gaining access to information they are entitled to.
- Not to conduct themselves to bring their office or the Council into disrepute
- Not to use their position to improperly secure an advantage, or disadvantage, for anyone.
- Not to use the Council's resources for unauthorised political purposes.
- To declare any pecuniary interest in any matter that comes before the Council and, if appropriate, not to take part in the decision. Where the interest declared is deemed to be pecuniary, Councillors are not permitted to take part in the decision on that matter.
- To register pecuniary interests (a copy of the register is available for public inspection).