

Blundeston & Flixton Parish Council

Persistent and Vexatious Complainants Policy

1 Introduction

Blundeston & Flixton Parish Council (“the Council”) aims to provide high quality services to all of our customers. However, when things fall short of this standard, we will deal with those who have a complaint fairly, honestly and properly through the Council’s Complaints Procedure.

In those case where our customers, staff, councillors or the council as a whole suffer adversely from persons making repeated, frivolous or persistent complaints or who do so in a threatening, abusive or difficult way our Persistent and Vexatious Complainants Policy will be applied.

This policy applies to all stages of the Council’s Complaints Procedure.

2 Unreasonably persistent complainant behaviour

Unreasonably persistent complainants are those complainants who, because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with an organisation, hinder the organisation’s consideration of their, or other people’s complaints.

Single incidents may be unacceptable, but more often the difficulty is caused by unreasonably persistent behaviour that is time consuming to manage and interferes with proper consideration of the complaint.

The following list, whilst not exhaustive, provides examples of behaviour by complainants which may be described as unreasonably persistent. (In these examples a “contact” may be in person, by telephone, letter, email, or SMS Text Message). We will not tolerate behaviours such as:

- Behaviour which is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious and/or is designed to cause extreme distress, bully, humiliate and intimidate specific individuals and/or the Council as a whole
- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- Refusing to co-operate with the complaints investigation process;
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the Complaints Procedure or within the power of the Council to investigate, change or influence;

- Repeatedly demanding special treatment / immediate escalation to the Chairman or higher body;
- Making unjustified complaints about those who are trying to deal with issues;
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds, including denying or changing statements that were made at an earlier stage or introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage;
- Raising numerous, detailed but unimportant questions; insisting they are all answered;
- Covertly recording meetings and conversations;
- Submitting falsified documents from themselves or others;
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue;
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous Council staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses;
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations that the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints;
- Refusing to accept the decision;
- Repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

3 Complainants who behave in an unacceptable / vexatious manner

The Council recognises that customers who feel dissatisfied with the service they have received may feel angry about their treatment. However, the Council has a duty of care to its staff / councillors and will take all necessary steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of them.

Examples of unacceptable or vexatious behaviour include any action or series of actions which are perceived by the staff member or councillor to be deceitful, abusive, offensive or threatening, whether they are delivered verbally or in writing or a combination of the two. This includes not only behaviour directed at them, but also their families or associates.

If a staff member or councillor feels threatened by a complainant they will report their concerns and the reason for them to the Parish Clerk or the Chairman.

4 How we will respond

When we believe a complainant to be behaving in an unreasonably persistent or vexatious manner, we will tell them why and ask them to change their behaviour.

If their behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict the complainant's contact with the Council. Any such restrictions will be evidence based, appropriate and proportionate.

Any decision to take action will be taken by the Council and in arriving at such a decision any relevant factors such as disability, language or illness will be fully considered.

The most likely options will be:-

- Putting in place contact in a particular form (e.g. by letter only);
- Requiring contact to take place with a single named member of the Council;
- Restricting telephone calls to specific days and times;
- Limiting the duration of telephone calls;
- Asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their contact;
- Closing the complaint;
- Repeated calls may be deemed to be harassment and as such may be reported to the police.

In cases where this becomes necessary, we will write to tell the complainant why we believe their behaviour is unacceptable, what action we are taking and its planned duration. We will also tell them that we will review the arrangement after 6 months and advise them how to challenge the decision if they disagree with it and to whom such an appeal should be lodged.

This can be done by writing to Jayne Cole, Chief Executive Officer, Local Council Public Advisory Service, The Vision Centre, 5 Eastern Way, Bury St..Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 7AB or by email to ceo@lcpas.co.uk

In taking the action described above, it must be emphasised that this part of the policy will only be used as a last resort and after all other reasonable measures have been taken to resolve complaints or complainant behaviour.

Judgement and discretion will be applied to ensure that contact from the complainant about matters other than the complaint are not ignored, resulting in potential failures to respond to a request for service or an emergency.

Action taken under this policy must be undertaken in consultation with the Chairman, Vice Chairman or the Parish Clerk.

This policy was adopted by the council at its meeting held on 21 July 2025
Date of next review – July 2026