PRISTON PARISH COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Adopted: November 2026

Next review: August 2028

Responsible officer: Parish Clerk

1. Introduction

Priston Parish Council is committed to providing an effective, transparent and fair service to the residents of Priston and to anyone who comes into contact with the Council.

The Council welcomes comments, feedback and suggestions about its activities and services. It recognises that, occasionally, things may go wrong or people may be dissatisfied with the way in which the Council has acted or carried out its responsibilities.

This procedure explains how a formal complaint may be made, how it will be investigated and how the Council will respond.

The Council will aim to deal with all complaints promptly, fairly, objectively and courteously, and to learn from complaints in order to improve its services.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the actions, inactions, administration, procedures or services of Priston Parish Council.

Examples include:

- Failure to follow the Council's agreed procedures or Standing Orders.
- Failure to provide a service which the Council is responsible for providing.
- Unreasonable delay in responding to a request or carrying out an action.
- Incorrect information or advice provided by the Council.
- Dissatisfaction with the way in which a Council service has been delivered.
- A concern about the conduct of an employee in carrying out their duties, where this relates to the Council's provision of services.

The Council will distinguish between a complaint about the way a decision was made and disagreement with a decision itself. A decision properly taken by the Council will not automatically be reconsidered simply because someone disagrees with it.

3. Matters not covered by this procedure

This procedure does not cover the following matters, which are dealt with under separate arrangements:

a) Complaints about councillor conduct

Complaints alleging that a Parish Councillor has breached the Council's Code of Conduct must be referred to the Monitoring Officer at Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES), which is the principal authority responsible for considering such complaints.

The Parish Council cannot investigate or determine allegations of breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct through this procedure.

b) Financial irregularities

Allegations of financial irregularity should be raised through the appropriate external audit arrangements. Local electors also have statutory rights under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

c) Criminal activity

Allegations of criminal activity should be reported to the police or other appropriate authority.

d) Freedom of Information and data protection

Complaints concerning requests for information, access to personal data or the handling of personal information will be dealt with under the relevant statutory procedures.

e) Matters outside the Council's responsibility

Where a complaint relates to a service or matter for which the Parish Council is not responsible, the complainant will be directed to the appropriate organisation wherever possible.

4. How to make a complaint

Complaints should normally be submitted in writing to parishclerk@priston.org.uk, however if the complaint concerns the Parish Clerk, it should be addressed to the Chair of the Parish Council, marked "Private and Confidential", and sent to the Chair's email address which is available on the website:
https://www.priston.org.uk/parish_council.html

The complaint should include:

- The complainant's name and contact details.

- A clear description of the matter being complained about.
- Relevant dates, times and events, where known.
- Details of any steps already taken to resolve the matter.
- What outcome or action the complainant would like the Council to consider.

A standard complaint form is not required.

The Council recognises that some people may need assistance in making a written complaint. Anyone requiring help with this should contact the Parish Clerk. If a complainant wishes to remain anonymous, this should be made clear to the Parish Clerk.

5. Informal resolution

Before making a formal complaint, individuals are encouraged, where appropriate, to contact the Parish Clerk to see whether the matter can be resolved informally, or to see the Chair of the Council if the complaint is regarding the Parish Clerk.

Many concerns can be resolved through an explanation, clarification, correction or other straightforward action without the need for a formal investigation.

However, individuals are not required to attempt informal resolution before submitting a formal complaint.

6. Acknowledgement and initial assessment

The Parish Clerk will acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint within five working days.

Where the complaint concerns the Parish Clerk, the Chair of the Council will be responsible for acknowledging receipt and arranging for it to be considered.

The acknowledgement will:

- Confirm that the complaint has been received.
- Explain the next steps in the procedure.
- Confirm whether any further information is required.
- Explain the anticipated timescale for a response.

The Clerk or Chair will consider whether the complaint falls within the scope of this procedure or should be referred to another authority or procedure.

7. Investigation and consideration of the complaint

The Council will ensure that complaints are considered fairly and impartially.

The Parish Clerk will normally investigate complaints in the first instance, unless the complaint concerns the Clerk or there is another reason why the Clerk should not be involved.

Where necessary, the Chair or another appropriate councillor may arrange for the investigation to be undertaken by an uninvolved councillor or a small group of councillors.

The investigation may include:

- Reviewing relevant Council records, correspondence, minutes and documents.
- Obtaining information from relevant councillors, employees or other individuals.
- Seeking clarification from the complainant.
- Considering whether the Council has acted in accordance with its policies, procedures and statutory responsibilities.

The complainant may be invited to provide further information or clarification.

The Council will aim to complete its investigation and provide a written response within 30 working days of acknowledging the complaint.

If the complaint is particularly complex or requires additional investigation, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and given an indication of when a response can be expected.

8. Outcome of the complaint

Following consideration of the complaint, the Council will write to the complainant explaining:

- Whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.
- The reasons for the Council's decision.
- Any action the Council proposes to take, where appropriate.
- The complainant's right to request a review of the decision.

Where a complaint is upheld, the Council may, as appropriate:

- Apologise for any failure or inconvenience.
- Correct an error or omission.
- Review or improve an existing procedure.
- Take steps to prevent a similar problem occurring again.
- Provide an explanation or clarification.

- Consider other reasonable remedial action within its powers.

The Council will not normally disclose confidential information about individual employees or councillors as part of its response.

9. Request for a review (Stage Two)

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the initial investigation, they may request a review.

The request must be made in writing within 20 working days of receiving the Council's response and should explain why the complainant believes the matter has not been properly addressed.

The review will be undertaken by a panel of at least three councillors who have not previously been involved in the complaint or its investigation.

Where the complaint concerns the Parish Clerk, the panel will also ensure that the Clerk has no involvement in determining the outcome.

The panel will:

- Review the original complaint and the investigation.
- Consider any additional information provided by the complainant.
- Decide whether the original decision was reasonable and whether the procedure was followed correctly.
- Determine whether any further action is required.

The panel may invite the complainant to attend a meeting to explain their concerns, if it considers this would assist its consideration of the matter.

The complainant may be accompanied by a friend or representative at any such meeting.

The panel will aim to reach a decision within 30 working days of receiving the request for a review.

The complainant will receive a written response setting out the panel's decision and the reasons for it.

The decision of the review panel will be the Council's final response under this procedure.

10. Confidentiality and data protection

All complaints will be handled sensitively and in accordance with the Council's obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation.

Information about a complaint will only be shared with councillors, employees or other individuals who need to know in order to consider or investigate the matter.

The Council will take reasonable steps to protect the identity and personal information of complainants.

Where a complaint is considered at a Council or committee meeting, the Council will consider whether the public should be excluded from the relevant part of the meeting in accordance with the applicable legislation and meeting procedures.

The Council will not publish personal or confidential information about individual complaints.

11. Unreasonable or persistent complaints

The Council is committed to treating all complainants fairly and respectfully.

However, where a complaint is considered to be repetitive, unreasonable, abusive or disproportionate, or where an individual repeatedly raises matters which have already been fully considered, the Council may take reasonable steps to manage further correspondence.

This may include:

- Explaining that the matter has already been considered and that the Council's position remains unchanged.
- Requesting that further correspondence is restricted to genuinely new information.
- Limiting communication to a single nominated point of contact.

Any such action will be proportionate and will not prevent the Council from considering significant new information or a legitimate new complaint.

12. Recording and monitoring complaints

The Parish Clerk will maintain a confidential record of formal complaints received, the action taken and the outcome.

The Council may periodically review complaints to identify recurring issues and opportunities to improve its services and procedures.

Any reporting to the Council will avoid unnecessary disclosure of personal or confidential information.

13. Review of this procedure

This procedure will be reviewed periodically by the Parish Council to ensure that it remains appropriate, effective and consistent with relevant guidance and legislation.