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POLICY - COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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Ripley Parish Council is committed to providing the best service it can for the benefit of the people who live or work in its area or are visitors to the locality. This Complaints Procedure sets out how any dissatisfaction regarding the standard of the service that has been received from this Council or any action, or lack of action, by this Council can be brought to their attention and how the Council will try to resolve any issues. Ripley Parish Council believes a complaints procedure demonstrates that the Council:

- Wishes to provide a good service
- Values feedback
- Undertakes its business in an open and honest manner
- Wishes to deal with complaints fairly

The Council believes that complaints and suggestions provide a valuable opportunity for improving its services and performance. This Complaints Procedure applies to complaints about council administration and procedures and may include complaints about how council employees have dealt with your concerns.

What is a complaint?

For the purposes of this procedure, a complaint is defined as: *An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council or its staff affecting an individual, group or organisation*

This definition covers most complaints – such as:

- Dissatisfaction with the administration of policy and decisions
- Delays in responding to service requests
- Failure to achieve standards of service
- Failure to fulfil statutory responsibilities
- Employee's behaviour or attitude

How we deal with complaints

Most complaints will be reviewed by the Clerk whose responsibility it is to investigate, as necessary, and respond as quickly as possible. On receipt of a complaint, the Clerk, Chairman of Committee or Chairman of the Council, whichever is applicable, shall (except where the complaint is against their own actions) try to settle the complaint directly with the complainant in a timely and efficient manner. If the complainant is not satisfied with the action taken, the complainant will be asked to put the complaint officially in writing to the Clerk. This may be by letter or by e-mail. The Clerk will

usually acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days. In normal circumstances a response should be sent within ten working days. Where this is not possible an interim response should be sent giving an indication of when a full reply can be expected. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the full response, this fact should be drawn to the attention of the Chairman of the Council. In consultation with other Members, as necessary, and after obtaining any further relevant information, the Chairman will issue a further response.

Should the complainant indicate that he would prefer not to put the complaint to the Clerk he shall be advised to put it in writing to the Chairman of the relevant Committee or the Chairman of the Council. The Clerk or the Council (as appropriate) will investigate each complaint, obtaining further information as necessary from the complainant and/ or staff or members of the Council. The Clerk or Chairman shall bring any written complaint which cannot be settled to the next meeting of the council, and the Clerk shall notify the complainant of the date on which the complaint will be considered. The Council shall consider whether the circumstances surrounding any complaint should be discussed in the absence of press and public, but any decision on a complaint dealt with in this way shall be announced at the next Council meeting in public session.

The Clerk or Chairman of the Council will notify the complainant of the outcome of the complaint and of what action (If any) the Council proposes to take. The time frame for this is usually 20 working days but, in exceptional cases, this may be extended. The complainant will be notified.

Complaints about Members of Ripley Parish Council

All Councillors have signed an undertaking that they will observe the Council's Code of Conduct. The Code – which is the Model Code of Conduct for Members approved by Parliament – specifies a Councillor's obligations. Alleged breaches of the Code must be reported in writing to the Monitoring Officer at Guildford Borough Council.

Complaints about services provided by other public organisations

Given that some public services in Ripley are provided by either Guildford Borough Council or Surrey County Council – and that the division of responsibilities between public bodies can often be confusing – Ripley Parish Council will advise and, if appropriate, assist those wishing to pursue complaints against other public organisations providing services in the parish.

This Complaints Procedure does not apply to:

Complaints from one Council employee against another Council employee, or between a Council employee and the Council as an employer. These matters are dealt with under the Council's disciplinary and grievance procedure.

Complaints against Councillors are covered by the Code of Conduct for Members. If a complaint against a Councillor is received by the Council, it will be referred to the Monitoring Officer of Guildford Borough Council. Further information on the process of dealing with complaints against Councillors may be obtained from the Monitoring Officer.

Complaints concerning financial irregularities should be directed to the Parish Council's external auditors. Contact details may be obtained from the Clerk.

Complaints concerning criminal activity which should be reported to the Police.