



HIGHWOOD PARISH COUNCIL GRIEVANCE POLICY

1. Introduction

This policy is based on and complies with the 2015 ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures ([acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)) and the ACAS guide on discipline and grievances at work ([acas.org.uk/media/1043/Discipline-and-grievances-at-work-The-Acas-guide/pdf/DG_Guide_Feb_2019.pdf](https://www.acas.org.uk/media/1043/Discipline-and-grievances-at-work-The-Acas-guide/pdf/DG_Guide_Feb_2019.pdf)). It also takes account of the Equality Act 2010, the Employment Rights Act 1996, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The policy aims to encourage and maintain good relationships between the Council and its employees by treating grievances seriously and resolving them as quickly and fairly as possible. It sets out the arrangements for employees to raise concerns, problems, or complaints about their employment with the Council.

2. Scope and Principles

- This policy applies to all employees of Highwood Parish Council.
- The Council is committed to applying this policy fairly, consistently, and without discrimination on any protected characteristic.
- Employees have the right to raise grievances without fear of victimisation or reprisal.
- The Council will ensure confidentiality and handle all grievance information in accordance with GDPR.
- The Council will provide reasonable adjustments to support employees with health conditions or disabilities throughout the grievance process.
- The Council will provide appropriate training to councillors and staff involved in grievance procedures to ensure fair and consistent handling.
- The Council may conduct grievance meetings remotely or in a hybrid format with agreement from all parties.

3. Employee Rights and Representation

- Employees have the right to be accompanied or represented at any grievance or appeal meeting by a workplace colleague, a trade union representative, or a trade union official.
- The companion may address the meeting, present the employee's case, and confer privately with the employee but cannot answer questions on the employee's behalf, address the meeting against the employee's wishes, or prevent the employee from explaining their case.
- Employees and their companions must make all reasonable efforts to attend scheduled meetings. If the companion is unavailable, the employee may request a postponement and propose an alternative date within five working days of the original meeting, unless unreasonable.

4. Informal Grievance Procedure

- Employees are encouraged to raise grievances informally and as soon as possible with their line manager to seek a prompt resolution.

- If the grievance concerns the line manager, the employee should raise it with the Chairman of the Staffing Committee or another appropriate committee member.
- If the grievance involves a councillor, the informal stage may involve the councillor with the consent of both parties.
- Informal resolution is encouraged but not mandatory; employees may proceed directly to the formal procedure if preferred.

5. Formal Grievance Procedure

- If informal resolution is not possible or appropriate, employees may submit a formal grievance in writing to the Chairman of the Staffing Committee.
- The Staffing Committee will appoint a sub-committee of three members (excluding any councillor with direct involvement in the grievance) to hear the grievance. The sub-committee will appoint a Chairman.
- The sub-committee may appoint an independent investigator to gather facts before the grievance meeting if the case is complex.
- Investigations may include interviews with the employee, witnesses, councillors, or members of the public.
- The investigator will present a report summarising findings to the sub-committee.

6. Notification of Grievance Meeting

- The employee will normally be invited in writing to a grievance meeting within 10 working days of the Council receiving the grievance, or longer if an investigation is required.
- The notification will include:
 - Names of the sub-committee members and Chairman.
 - Date, time, and place of the meeting (reasonable notice provided, normally within 25 working days).
 - Right to be accompanied.
 - Copy of the grievance policy.
 - Confirmation regarding witnesses and submission of evidence.
 - Findings of any investigation.
 - Invitation to request reasonable adjustments for the meeting.

7. The Grievance Meeting

- The Chairman will introduce the sub-committee members to the employee.
- The employee or companion will present the grievance and evidence.
- The Chairman and sub-committee members may ask questions to understand the grievance and desired outcomes.
- Witnesses may be questioned by both parties.
- The employee or companion may sum up the case.
- The meeting may be adjourned for further investigation if necessary.

8. Outcome and Notification

- The sub-committee will provide a written decision within five working days of the meeting.
- The decision letter will include any action the Council will take and information on the right to appeal.
- Grievances raised in good faith that are not upheld will not result in disciplinary action.

9. Appeal Procedure

- Employees dissatisfied with the outcome may appeal in writing to the Staffing Committee within five working days of receiving the decision, stating the grounds for appeal.
- Grounds for appeal may include:
 - Failure to follow the grievance policy.
 - Decision not supported by evidence.
 - Inadequate or inappropriate action.

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- New evidence.
- An appeal panel of three members (who have not been involved previously, or if insufficient members, other councillors including Staffing Committee members) will hear the appeal.
- The appeal panel will appoint a Chairman.
- The employee will be notified in writing of the appeal meeting details with reasonable notice (normally within 25 working days).
- The employee may be accompanied.
- At the appeal meeting, the panel will hear the employee's reasons for appeal.
- The panel will notify the employee of the decision in writing within five working days.
- The appeal panel may uphold or overturn the original decision.
- The appeal decision is final.

10. Special Considerations

- Grievances involving councillors: Formal grievance procedures do not apply to code of conduct complaints against councillors. Such complaints must be raised informally and, if unresolved, referred to the Monitoring Officer at Chelmsford City Council.
- Health and Safety Concerns: If the grievance concerns workplace safety, the employee should raise this at the informal stage. The Council will take appropriate action under health and safety or dignity at work policies.
- Mediation: The Council may consider mediation at any stage to resolve disputes, with the consent of all parties.
- Whistleblowing: For grievances involving serious wrongdoing or malpractice, employees should consider the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

11. Confidentiality and Data Protection

- Information about grievances will be restricted to those involved in the process.
- Records will be confidential and held in accordance with GDPR.
- Grievance records will be retained for 6 years from the conclusion of the grievance, or as per the Council's data retention policy.
- Audio or video recordings of grievance proceedings are prohibited unless agreed as a reasonable adjustment for medical reasons.

12. Time Limits and Extensions

- Time limits in this policy are guidelines and may be extended by mutual agreement.
- If an employee unreasonably delays raising a grievance or appeal beyond the time limits without agreement, the Council may decline to consider it.

13. Training and Support

- The Council will provide training to councillors and staff involved in grievance procedures to ensure fair, consistent, and lawful handling.
- Employees are encouraged to seek advice from their trade union or workplace representative.

For further information or assistance, employees should contact the Parish Clerk or Chairman of the Personnel Committee.