HEADON-CUM-UPTON, GROVE & STOKEHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints Policy

Introduction

Headon-cum-Upton, Grove & Stokeham Parish Council is committed to dealing with all complaints, enquiries, requests for information and correspondence fairly, consistently, transparently and objectively.

The Parish Council recognises that members of the public have a right to raise concerns, challenge decisions, submit complaints and request information. However, the Council also has a duty to ensure that its limited resources are used effectively and that councillors, employees, volunteers and contractors are protected from unreasonable, abusive, persistent or vexatious behaviour.

This policy sets out how the Council may deal with any conduct to be deemed unreasonable or vexatious conduct whilst ensuring legitimate concerns continue to be considered appropriately.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Complaints.
- General correspondence.
- Requests for information.
- Freedom of Information requests.
- Subject Access Requests.
- Social media communications.
- Telephone calls.
- Face-to-face interactions.
- Conduct at Council meetings.

This policy should be read alongside:

- Complaints Procedure.
- Freedom of Information Policy.
- Subject Access Request Procedure.
- Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Councillors' Code of Conduct.
- Standing Orders.

What is an Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaint?

A complaint or communication may be considered unreasonable or vexatious where the nature, frequency or manner of contact places a disproportionate burden on the Council or its representatives. The Council will consider each case individually and will not determine a complaint to be vexatious solely because it is challenging, critical or persistent.

Examples of Unreasonable Behaviour

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Repeatedly raising substantially, the same complaint after it has been fully investigated and responded to.
- Refusing to accept a decision after the Council's procedures have been exhausted.
- Submitting excessive volumes of correspondence.
- Making multiple complaints about the same issue through different channels.
- Demanding responses within unreasonable timescales.
- Pursuing unrealistic outcomes.
- Providing incomplete or changing information that prevents resolution.
- Contacting multiple councillors and officers simultaneously on the same matter.
- Recording or filming individuals in an intimidating manner.
- Refusing to engage with the Council's procedures.

Examples of Vexatious Behaviour

Examples may include:

- Personal attacks against councillors, staff or volunteers.
- Abusive, offensive or threatening language.
- Unfounded allegations of misconduct, dishonesty or corruption.
- Repeated allegations after investigation and conclusion.
- Publication of misleading or knowingly false claims.
- Attempts to damage the reputation of councillors, employees or the Council.
- Encouraging others to submit complaints or contact the Council as part of a campaign.
- Harassment through email, social media, telephone or written correspondence.
- Anonymous or pseudonymous communications intended to intimidate or disrupt Council business.

Social Media

The Council welcomes public engagement through social media. However, social media must not be used to:

- Harass, bully or intimidate councillors, employees or volunteers.
- Publish false or misleading allegations.
- Share private or confidential information.
- Encourage abuse towards individuals.

The Council may retain screenshots and other evidence where inappropriate behaviour is identified.

Action Available to the Council

Where behaviour is considered unreasonable or vexatious, the Council may:

- Issue a written warning.
- Restrict communication to a single point of contact.
- Require communications to be made in writing.

- Place limits on the frequency of contact.
- Decline to respond to repetitive correspondence.
- Close a complaint where all relevant procedures have been exhausted.
- Refer matters to the Monitoring Officer.
- Seek legal advice
- Report matters to the Police where appropriate.

Any restrictions imposed will be proportionate, reasonable and reviewed.

Decision Making

Any decision to classify conduct as unreasonable or vexatious will be made by the Parish Clerk in consultation with the Chair of the Council, or by the Full Council where appropriate.

The decision will:
- Be evidence-based.
- Be proportionate.
- Take account of the circumstances of the case.
- Be recorded in writing.

The individual will normally be informed of the reasons for the decision and any restrictions being applied.

Review of Restrictions

Restrictions will normally be reviewed after 6 months or as deemed appropriate.
The Council may remove restrictions where behaviour has improved.
The Council may extend restrictions where unreasonable or vexatious behaviour continues.

Record Keeping

The Council will maintain a log of:
- Complaints.
- Correspondence.
- Emails.
- Meeting incidents.
- Telephone calls.
- Social media posts.

Such records may be used to identify patterns of behaviour and support future decisions.

Equality and Fairness

The Council will apply this policy fairly and consistently.
The Council will not classify a person as vexatious simply because they are persistent, challenging, demanding or critical of Council decisions.
This policy is intended to address behaviour rather than individuals.

This Unreasonable and vexatious Complaints Policy was adopted by HUGS Parish Council at its meeting on 2nd November 2026, minute ref. 26/119.