

### Complaints Procedure

Thornley Parish Council is committed to providing a quality service for the benefit of the people who live or work in its area or are just visiting. If anyone is dissatisfied with the standard of service received from this Council, or is unhappy about an action or lack of action by the Council, its Officer and its Members, this Complaints Procedure sets out how a complaint can be made and how we shall try to resolve that complaint.

Thornley Parish Council has adopted this complaints procedure for considering complaints either made by complainants direct or referred back to the Council from other bodies to which they have been made. This procedure follows the best practice code issued by the National Association of Local Councils (Circular 2/86) with additions.

Please note that the appropriate time for influencing Council decision-making is by raising any concerns and information that may assist the Council in making a decision, is before the Council debates and votes on the matter. This may be done by writing to the Council in advance of the meeting at which the item is to be discussed. There may also be the opportunity to raise concerns in the public participation section of Council meetings. Please note that the Council will not re- open issues for six months from the date of the decision, except as set out below.

It should be noted that this Complaints Procedure does not apply to complaints by one Council employee against another Council employee, or between a Council employee and the Council as employer.

There are a number of ways we will deal with a complaint, depending on what the complaint relates to. This procedure only applies to complaints received by the Council in writing. If the complaint is received verbally by the Clerk or a Councillor, wherever possible they will try to satisfy the complainant immediately. Where this is not possible, the complainant will be asked to put the complaint in writing so it can be dealt with under this process.

The Clerk to the Council (or Chair or Vice Chair as appropriate) shall maintain a detailed register of all correspondence, telephone calls, meetings and action taken relating to the complaint.

### Conduct of Members

Complaints relating to the conduct of Members shall immediately be referred to Durham County Council's Monitoring Officer and shall not be dealt with under the Parish Council's Complaints Procedure (see contacts at the end of this document).

### Financial Irregularity

When a complaint relates to a financial irregularity, local electors will be informed that they have a statutory right to object to the Council's audit of accounts pursuant to s.16 Audit Commission Act 1998.

### Criminal Matters

Complaints relating to criminal activity of any Members or Officers of the Council shall immediately be referred to the Police.

### Complaints regarding the Clerk

Any complaint regarding the conduct of the Clerk to the Council shall be considered by a committee comprising the Chair of the Council, the Vice Chair of the Council and one other Member of the Council who shall be elected by the full Parish Council for that purpose.

The complaint must be in writing and will follow the process as complaints regarding the Council's procedures, administration and decision making as outlined below, except once a decision is reached it will be final. In all circumstances a complaint against the clerk will warrant the exclusion of the public and press whilst the matter is being considered.

The complainant shall be given the opportunity to speak during the Meeting. The complainant should then outline the grounds for complaint and thereafter may be asked questions by Members and the Clerk to the Council. The Clerk to the Council will be given an opportunity to speak and questions may be asked by the complainant or Members.

The Clerk to the Council and the complainant will then be asked to leave the room whilst committee Members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been met. If a point of clarification is necessary, both parties shall be invited back.

The Clerk to the Council and the complainant shall be given the opportunity to wait for the decision, but if the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day they should be advised when the decision is likely to be made and when it is to be communicated to them.

The decision, and any further action to be taken, shall be confirmed in writing to the complainant within ten working days.

Any decision on a complaint shall be announced at the next Parish Council Meeting, in public, however certain details may not be made public if the Committee directs.

#### **Complaints regarding the Council's procedures, administration and decision making.**

Wherever possible, the Clerk will try to resolve your complaint immediately. If this is not possible, the Clerk will normally try to acknowledge your complaint within seven working days.

The Clerk will investigate each complaint, obtaining further information as necessary from you and/or members of the Council.

If you do not wish to report your complaint to the Clerk, you may make your complaint directly to the Chair of the Council who will report your complaint to the Council.