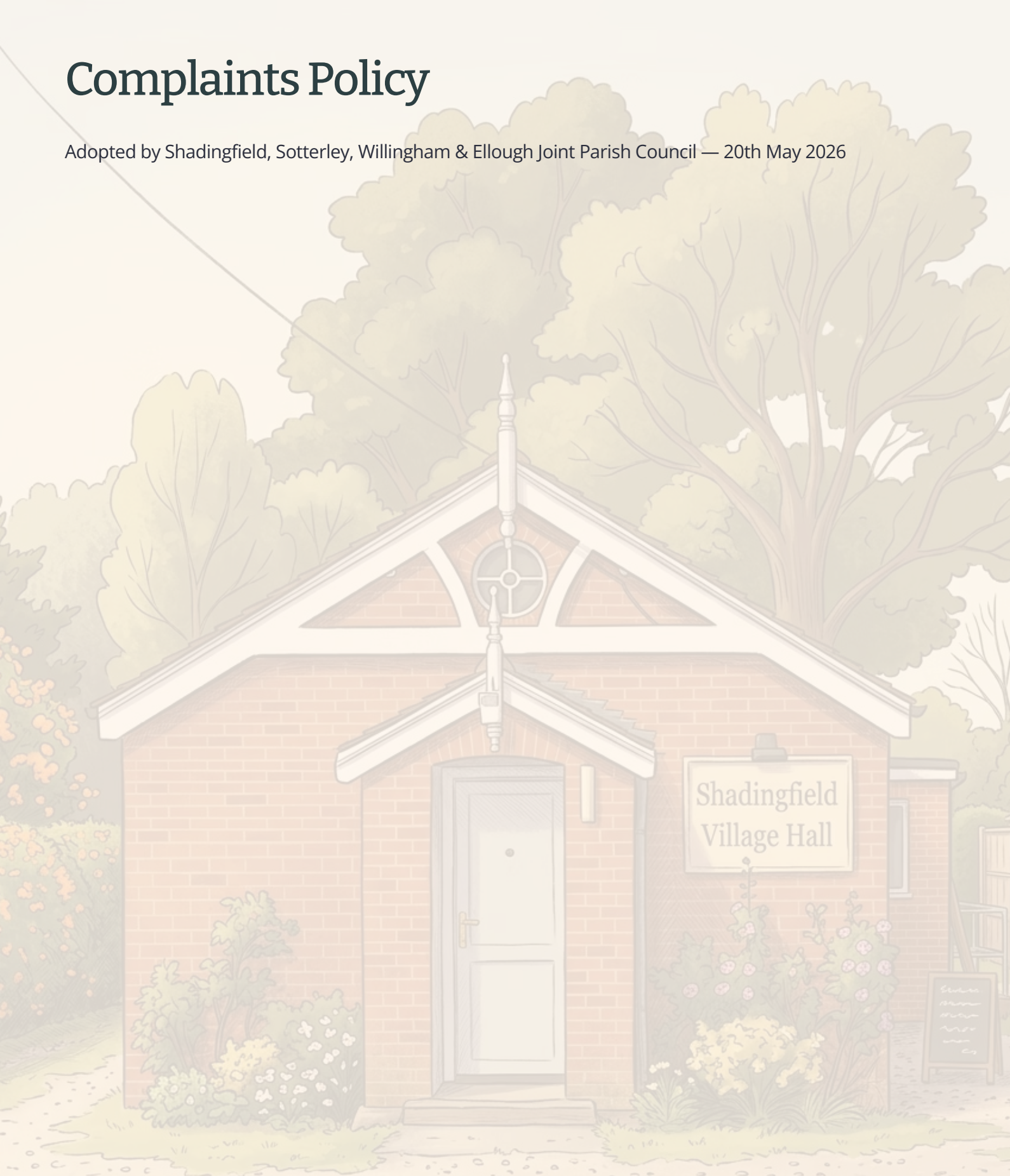
Complaints Policy

Adopted by Shadingfield, Sotterley, Willingham & Ellough Joint Parish Council — 20th May 2026



This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if legislation or best practice changes.

Next review: April 2028.

Introduction

The Parish Council is committed to providing high-quality services to residents and to anyone who interacts with the Council. This policy sets out how complaints will be handled to ensure they are dealt with promptly, fairly and consistently. The aim is to resolve concerns wherever possible and to ensure complainants feel heard, respected and treated impartially.

What Is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about:

Actions or Inaction

The Council's actions or lack of action

Standard of Service

The standard of service provided by the Council

Conduct

The conduct of someone acting on behalf of the Council

ⓘ This policy applies to complaints made by members of the public. It does **not** apply to complaints about councillor conduct, employee conduct, financial irregularities, criminal matters, or Freedom of Information (FOI) or data protection requests.

Complaints Outside This Policy

Certain matters must be referred to the appropriate external bodies:

Type of Issue	Where to Refer
Financial irregularity	The Council's auditor (details available from the Clerk).
Criminal activity	Suffolk Police (101 for non-emergencies; 999 in an emergency).
Councillor conduct	Monitoring Officer, East Suffolk Council (under the Code of Conduct).
Employee conduct	Managed under the Council's Disciplinary or Grievance Procedure. Complaints regarding the Clerk should be addressed to the Chair, marked 'Confidential'.
FOI / Data Protection	Council's FOI/DP procedures; with an onward right of appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Anonymous Complaints

⚠ Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated unless they raise a serious safeguarding, criminal or public interest concern.

Informal Complaints

Most concerns can be resolved quickly and informally. Informal complaints may be made by phone, email, in person or in writing.

By Phone

Contact the Clerk or Chair directly by telephone.

By Email

Send your concern to the Clerk or Chair via email.

In Person

Attend the Council office or a meeting to raise your concern directly.

In Writing

Submit a written letter addressed to the Clerk or Chair.

Informal complaints should be directed to the Clerk, unless the complaint concerns the Clerk, in which case it should be directed to the Chair. If a councillor receives a complaint, they must notify the Clerk or Chair immediately. The Clerk or Chair will acknowledge the concern, seek to resolve the issue promptly, and explain any actions taken.

Formal Complaints

Submitting a Complaint

Formal complaints must be made in writing to the Clerk or, if the complaint concerns the Clerk, to the Chair. Complaints must be submitted within **12 months** of the incident or becoming aware of the matter. The complaint should include:

- Name, address and contact details
- Details of the complaint and the impact on the complainant
- Relevant documents or evidence
- The specific outcome the complainant is seeking

The Clerk or Chair will acknowledge receipt within **ten working days**.

Consideration of the Complaint

The complaint will be considered by the full Council at its next scheduled meeting. The complainant will be informed of the date, invited to attend, and permitted to bring a representative. Any additional documents must be submitted **seven clear working days** before the meeting.

At the Meeting

The Council will consider whether to exclude the public and press by resolution under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. The procedure at the meeting is as follows:

1. ### Chair Explains Procedure

   The Chair opens the meeting and sets out the process to be followed.

2. ### Complainant Outlines Complaint

   The complainant presents their complaint; councillors may ask questions.

3. ### Council's Position Presented

   The Clerk (if not the subject of the complaint) explains the Council's position.

4. ### Complainant Withdraws

   The complainant withdraws from the meeting while councillors deliberate.

5. ### Decision Communicated

   The decision will be communicated verbally at the meeting where possible.

After the Meeting

A written decision will be issued within **fourteen working days** following the meeting, including the outcome, reasons for the decision, and any actions to be taken.

Complaints About the Clerk

Complaints about the Clerk will be handled as an employment matter under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. While details remain confidential, the Council will notify the complainant whether the complaint has been upheld and what steps have been taken to improve future delivery.

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

⊗ Where a complainant persists unreasonably, behaves abusively, or repeatedly raises issues already addressed, the Council may apply its **Habitual or Vexatious Complainants Policy**.

Final Decision

The decision of the Parish Council is final. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman does not consider complaints about parish councils.

Record Keeping

The Clerk will maintain a confidential record of all complaints. A summary of complaints received and their resolution—without identifying individuals—will be included in the Clerk's report to full Council on an annual basis.