



WEST HANNINGFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

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POLICY FOR MANAGING UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT, PERSISTENTLY UNREASONABLE OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

Re-adopted with amendments: 13th April 2026

1. PURPOSE

West Hanningfield Parish Council (“the Council”) aims to provide accessible, fair and timely responses to all complaints and information requests.

However, in rare cases, the behaviour of a complainant may become unreasonably persistent or vexatious and place a disproportionate burden on Council resources.

This policy sets out how such situations will be managed fairly, consistently, and transparently.

2. PRINCIPLES

The Council will:

- treat all complainants with respect
- distinguish between persistent complaints made in good faith and vexatious behaviour
- ensure fair and proportionate handling of concerns
- ensure staff wellbeing and safety
- ensure Council resources are used appropriately

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- complaints
- correspondence

- Freedom of Information requests
 - contact with Councillors or staff
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4. DEFINITION

A complainant may be considered unreasonably persistent or vexatious where their behaviour or contact is likely to include one or more of the following:

- repeated pursuit of issues already fully addressed through the Council's procedures
- refusal to accept reasonable and documented explanations
- excessive or disproportionate contact (by any method)
- continual raising of new or unrelated issues to prolong contact
- refusal to define the specific issue of concern
- repeated abusive, aggressive or harassing behaviour
- unreasonable demands that place disproportionate burden on staff or Council resources
- conduct that creates a health and safety risk to staff or Councillors

The Council recognises that complainants may act out of frustration or distress and will apply judgement and proportionality in all cases.

5. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This policy is applied in line with:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000 (including Section 14(1) for vexatious requests)
 - Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
 - applicable Equality and Data Protection legislation
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6. DECISION MAKING

The decision to apply this policy will be made by:

- the Clerk (Proper Officer), and
- the Chairman of the Council

The decision will be:

- based on evidence
 - recorded in writing
 - reviewed periodically
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7. POSSIBLE ACTIONS

Where behaviour is assessed as vexatious or unreasonably persistent, the Council may apply proportionate restrictions, including:

- limiting contact to one method of communication
- requiring communication via a single named officer
- restricting contact to written correspondence only
- limiting frequency of responses
- placing time limits on telephone communication
- requiring meetings to be held only in the presence of a witness
- refusing to progress repeated or previously resolved complaints
- closing complaints that have exhausted Council procedures

In exceptional circumstances, the Council may:

- restrict access to Council premises
 - refer matters to the Police where appropriate
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8. NOTIFICATION

Where restrictions are applied, the Council will confirm in writing:

- the reasons for the decision
- the nature of restrictions applied
- the duration of the restriction
- how the complainant may request a review

The Council will always aim to maintain at least one reasonable channel of communication, normally written correspondence.

9. REVIEW

Any restrictions will be reviewed at least every 12 months.

They may be lifted earlier if behaviour improves or circumstances change.

10. STAFF SAFETY

The Council has a duty of care to its staff.

Where behaviour becomes abusive, threatening or aggressive, staff may terminate contact immediately.

The Council's internal safety procedures (including escalation procedures for abusive behaviour) will be followed where necessary.

11. RECORDING AND MONITORING

All decisions under this policy will be:

- documented
 - stored securely
 - reported to Council for transparency where appropriate
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12. COMPLAINTS ABOUT THIS POLICY

Decisions made under this policy are not subject to a formal internal appeal process.

However, individuals may request that the Council review the application of restrictions if circumstances materially change.

APPENDIX A – RESTRICTED CONTACT LOG (SUMMARY)

Complainant details

- Name:
- Contact details:
- Reference number:

Reason for restriction (summary):

- brief description of behaviour pattern

Evidence considered:

- summary of correspondence / incidents

Decision:

- restriction type applied:
- start date:
- review date:

Approved by:

- Clerk:
- Chairman: