



Local Resolution Protocol for Community and Town Councils

Revision	Revised by	Date	Approved by council	Date
01	IW Donaldson	20/07/17	<i>Pauline Wood-Williams</i>	21/09/17
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Background

The Public Service Ombudsman has agreed to the principle of referring some complaints against Members back to Community and Town Councils for a local resolution. However to date there has not been a common process for Community and Town Councils to follow in dealing with such matters. To assist the sector, One Voice Wales has drawn up the following as a model protocol which any Community and Town Council can use in dealing with such complaints.

Councils wishing to use this process should first of all be clear about its purpose and intention, formally adopt it and ensure that all Councillors are provided with a copy for their attention. The Council should then determine the framework through which it is operated which may require the establishment of a Committee or Panel or an extension of the terms of reference of an existing Panel or Committee such as a Complaints Panel or Committee. In the case of establishment of a new Panel it is important that terms of reference are prepared and approved by the Council. In either case it will be important for Councils to document in the terms of reference as to what will happen if there is a lack of cooperation shown by the member concerned or a breakdown occurring during the operation of the process. For example, in such cases the default position might be that the matter is referred to the Public Ombudsman for Wales.

The Local Resolution Process

Issues which should be considered under this process;

Low level complaints about Members, including:

- Minor complaints from Members about Members
- Minor complaints from Officers about Members
- Members alleged to have not shown respect and consideration for others – either verbally or in writing.

Issues which should *not* be considered under this process;

Complaints which must be directed to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, including:

- Complaints instigated by a member of the public
- Serious complaints – breaches of the Code of Conduct/failure to disclose interests/bullying/abuse of position or trust/repeated breaches
- Complaints made by the Clerk
- Vexatious, malicious or frivolous complaints
- Members' complaints about officers which should be dealt with using the Council's internal complaints process
- Repetitive low level complaints

The Process

The complaint

The complaint should be sent to the Clerk of the Council to undertake a first sift to ensure that the complaint is at a low level and should not be dealt with by way of a complaint to the Ombudsman. If appropriate, therefore, the Clerk should firstly seek an early resolution of any such dispute by liaising informally with the individual members concerned prior to the resolution process described below. It is vitally important that the 'accused' member is given full details of the complaint against them so that in the interests of natural justice they are in a position to prepare their response to the accusation.

Resolution Process

The involvement of the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council in the following process is not to adjudicate on the complaint, but to attempt to get the members/officers involved to come to an agreement as to how the issue(s) could be resolved on an amicable basis.

The Clerk will act as a facilitator for the resolution process below.

If the complaint is between Members other than the Chair of the Council, the Clerk and the Chair will meet individually with the complainant and Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint is between Members, one of whom is the Chair of Council, but not the Vice Chair, the Clerk and the Vice Chair will meet with the complainant and Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by an officer/employee, but not the Clerk, against a Member other than the Chair of Council, the Clerk and the Chair of Council will meet with the officer and the Member subject of the complaint to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by an officer/employee, but not the Clerk, against the Chair of Council, the Clerk and the Vice Chair of Council will meet with the officer and the Chair to seek an agreed resolution.

If the complaint has been made by the Clerk, then it is likely to be best practice that this complaint is forwarded by way of a complaint to the Ombudsman.

Possible results of the process

If an agreement is reached by Members and/or officers during this Stage then no further action is required. If agreement cannot be reached the aggrieved Member/officer would always have the opportunity of referring the matter to the Ombudsman.

Examples of agreements might include issue of a letter of apology, a written undertaking or commitment not to breach the Code of Conduct in the future, a commitment to undertake training or an agreement that on the basis of the evidence that no further action should be taken and the matter be closed.

Time for the process

It is the intention that all of the processes can be completed as quickly as possible to resolve the issue. However exact timing will depend on the availability of individuals to attend the meetings.