HARWELL PARISH COUNCIL

FEEDBACK & RESOLUTION POLICY

Accessible formats: This policy is available in large print, audio, or other accessible formats on request. Contact the Clerk Team.

1. Purpose and Philosophy

Why This Policy Exists

Harwell Parish Council is committed to delivering accessible, responsive, and accountable services to our community. This policy explains how we respond when something isn't working as it should — and how your feedback helps us improve. This policy also fulfils the Council's requirement to have a formal Complaints Policy, setting out how formal complaints are made, investigated, and decided.

We want to know when:

- Something has gone wrong or could have been handled better
- Our processes are unclear or difficult to navigate
- You didn't get the response or service you expected
- You feel as if you have been let down or not listened to
- You have additional information that you feel would have changed our response
- You have suggestions for how we could improve

Our approach: Most concerns are resolved quickly through conversation. Where that doesn't work, we have clear pathways for informal feedback and formal complaints.

Feedback isn't a burden, it's information that helps us serve you better. This policy explains how we will listen, respond, and learn. We can't promise a certain outcome, but we do commit to listen and try to work through things with you.

2. Understanding different types of feedback

Not all concerns are complaints, and not all complaints need a formal process. This section helps you understand the different pathways. But if you're not sure, just contact us and we'll help you work it out.

Real-Time Resolution (fixing things on the spot)
Most issues are resolved immediately through conversation. If you contact the Clerk Team or any councillor with a question, concern, or problem, we'll do our best to:

- Listen and understand the issue from your perspective
- Explain what happened, or how we see the situation
- Put it right if we got it wrong
- Help you get what you need so the outcome is understood and agreed

This isn't a formal process, it's just good service. You can raise concerns by phone, email, or in person at any time.

Service Feedback (Tier 1: informal resolution)
If we can't resolve your concern on the spot, or if you'd prefer a more structured response, you can ask for it to be treated as service feedback.
This includes:

- Questions about why something happened the way it did
- Dissatisfaction with how a service was delivered
- Disappointment in an attitude or comment from any council team member or contractor
- A request for a formal response, apology, commitment to change
- Concerns that processes were unclear or unhelpful
- Suggestions for improvement

The Clerk Team will acknowledge your concerns within 2 working days and within 5 working days (or sooner if possible) will explain what happened and, where appropriate, what will change.

Formal Complaint (Tier 2: structured investigation)
A formal complaint is appropriate when:

- Informal resolution (Tier 1) didn't resolve your concern
- You believe the Council has failed in its legal duties or breached its own procedures
- The matter involves allegations of staff misconduct or serious maladministration
- You prefer to make a formal complaint from the outset

Formal complaints follow a structured process (see Section 4) and may be considered by Full Council.

Data Protection Complaints
This policy also covers complaints about how the Council has collected, used, stored, shared or protected your personal data, including how a Subject Access Request has been handled. This is a distinct statutory right under section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018.

You can raise a data protection complaint through Real-Time Resolution, Service Feedback (Tier 1), or a Formal Complaint (Tier 2), whichever fits the seriousness of your concern. Whichever route it takes, we will acknowledge your complaint within 30 days, in line with section 164A. Our normal timescales in this policy already meet that requirement.

We record data protection complaints separately in our Service Feedback Register so that we can demonstrate, if asked by the Information Commissioner's Office, how these complaints specifically have been handled.

Outside This Policy
Some matters fall outside this policy:

- **Complaints about councillor conduct**
  Code of Conduct complaints should be directed to the Monitoring Officer at Vale of White Horse District Council. This is a legal requirement and we cannot deal with these concerns directly.
- **Disagreement with Council policy decisions** (e.g., planning responses, budget priorities)
  This is a matter for democratic engagement (attend meetings, submit representations, stand for election), not a service complaint
- **Criminal allegations**
  Should be reported to the police
- **Matters covered by insurance claims**
  Though feedback may be provided on how the incident was handled.
- **Anonymous concerns**
  We're open to hearing concerns informally, but we cannot investigate or respond if we don't know who you are (exception: safeguarding or criminal matters, which will be escalated appropriately)

3. How to Raise Feedback or a Complaint

We've tried to make this as straightforward as possible.

For Real-Time Resolution or Service Feedback (Tier 1)
Contact the Clerk Team:

- Clerk & RFO: Bryan Urbick, clerk@harwellparish.gov.uk, 07749 361957
- Deputy Clerk & RFO: Louise Edmonds, l.edmonds@harwellparish.gov.uk, 07568 722203

You can also speak to any councillor, who will connect you with the Clerk Team. You can contact us by phone, email, letter, or in person. There's no form to fill in, just tell us what's on your mind.

Councillor contact details are available on the Members of Harwell Parish Council page of the council website.

If Your Feedback is about the Clerk & RFO, please contact any of the following:

- Deputy Clerk & RFO deputyclerk@harwellparish.gov.uk, 07568 722203
- Chair of Council: Cllr Vaughan Humphries, v.humphries@harwellparish.gov.uk
- Chair of Staffing Committee: Cllr Lucy Lacy, l.lacy@harwellparish.gov.uk

If Your Feedback is about the Deputy Clerk & RFO, please contact any of the following:

- Clerk & RFO: Bryan Urbick, clerk@harwellparish.gov.uk, 07749 361957

- Chair of Council: Cllr Vaughan Humphries, v.humphries@harwellparish.gov.uk
- Chair of Staffing Committee: Cllr Lucy Lacy, l.lacy@harwellparish.gov.uk

For Formal Complaints (Tier 2)
Please put your complaint in writing to:

- Clerk & RFO (if the complaint does not concern the Clerk & RFO directly)
- Chair of Council (if the complaint concerns the Clerk & RFO)

You can send your complaint by email or letter. We've included an optional template in Appendix C if that's helpful, but you don't have to use it.

Need Help?
If you're not sure which pathway is right, or if you need support submitting feedback or a complaint (e.g., accessible formats, interpreter support, help organizing your thoughts), just contact us. We'll work it out together.

4. What Happens When You Raise Feedback or a Complaint

Real-Time Resolution
When you contact us with a concern, we'll try to resolve it immediately in conversation.

This might mean:

- Answering your question
- Explaining what happened and why
- Correcting an error or misunderstanding
- Taking immediate action to put something right

If we resolve your concern this way, we'll make a brief note of the issue and how it was resolved. This helps us spot patterns and improve our services - but it won't trigger a formal process.

Service Feedback (Tier 1)
If your concern can't be resolved on the spot, or if you ask for a more formal response, we'll treat it as service feedback.

What happens:

a. **Acknowledgement within 2 working days**
   We'll confirm we've received your feedback and let you know who's looking into it.
b. **Response within 5 working days (or sooner if possible)**
   We'll explain:
   a. What happened
   b. Why it happened (if we got something wrong, we'll say so)
   c. What we're going to do about it (if anything needs to change)

c. **Logging and learning**
All service feedback is logged (anonymously) in our Service Feedback Register. We review this quarterly to identify themes and improvements. Data protection complaints are tagged separately within the Register so they can be reported on individually if required.

If the feedback concerns the Clerk & RFO or Deputy Clerk & RFO:
The Chair of Council or Chair of Staffing Committee will handle the response, following the same timescales.

If you're not satisfied with the response:
You can ask for your concern to be escalated to a Formal Complaint (Tier 2).

Formal Complaint (Tier 2)
We hope most concerns are resolved through conversation or informal feedback. But we recognise that sometimes a formal process is needed - either because informal resolution didn't work, or because you need the assurance that your concern has been properly heard and independently considered. Formal complaints follow a structured process to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability.

What happens:

a. **Acknowledgement within 3 working days**
We'll confirm receipt of your complaint and explain the next steps.
b. **Understanding what happened**
The Clerk & RFO (or Chair of Council, if the complaint concerns the Clerk & RFO) will work to understand what happened and why. This may include:
    a. Reviewing relevant documents, emails, or records
    b. Speaking to staff or councillors involved
    c. Gathering the full context
    d. Discussing the matter directly with you to ensure we've understood your concerns properly
c. **Attempt at resolution**
Before referring the matter to Full Council, we'll try to resolve your complaint through discussion. This isn't about defending a decision but rather about understanding what went wrong and whether we can put it right together. You'll be given an opportunity to comment on our findings, and we'll explore a good way forward that addresses your concerns.
d. **Referral to Full Council (if unresolved)**
If we can't resolve your complaint, it will be considered at the next available meeting of Full Council. You'll be:

    a. Notified of the date and given the opportunity to attend
    b. Invited to explain your complaint in person (if you wish)
    c. Given the option to submit written representations instead

e. **Decision**
The Council will decide whether to uphold your complaint and what action (if any) should be taken. The decision will be made in public unless there are legal or confidentiality reasons to discuss the matter in private session. The outcome will always be announced publicly.

f. **Written outcome within 10 working days of the Council meeting**
We'll write to you explaining:
   a. The Council's decision
   b. The reasons for the decision
   c. Any action the Council has agreed to take
   d. What we've learned and whether anything will change as a result

The Council will aim to conclude Tier 2 complaints within 12 weeks of receipt, in line with Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman guidance. Where complex matters or external advice requirements mean this timeline cannot be met, we will keep you informed of progress.

Note: Where a complaint involves potential personal injury, property damage, or financial loss that may be covered by the Council's insurance, the matter must be notified to the Council's insurers in accordance with policy terms. The Clerk & RFO will coordinate with insurers where required. See also the Council's Scheme of Delegation regarding insurance claims.

Confidential matters:
The Council will consider whether the circumstances of your complaint require discussion in private (e.g., if it involves personnel matters, legal advice, or information that is sensitive to you personally).

If the matter affects you directly and involves sensitive personal information, you may be invited to participate in the private discussion, or we may ask your permission to share relevant details with councillors in confidence.

However, the final decision and any actions taken will always be made public - we'll just protect the private details.

If Further Advice is Needed
If your complaint raises complex legal or procedural issues, we may need to seek external advice before responding. Where external advice is required to respond properly to a formal complaint, this shall be treated as routine expenditure where within delegated limits, or reported under emergency provisions if urgent and within the £2,000 threshold. If this happens, we'll let you know and deal with your complaint at the next Council meeting after we've received that advice.

5. When We Can't Find a Way Forward

We're committed to hearing concerns and working through them with patience and openness. But sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts, we reach a point where further contact isn't helping — where we've explained our position, you've explained yours, and we're not finding common ground. This isn't anyone's fault. Sometimes we simply have to agree to disagree.

When this might happen
We may reach this point when:

- We've thoroughly addressed the same concern multiple times, and no new information or perspective is emerging
- The outcome you're seeking isn't within our legal powers or resources, and we've explained why - but we also understand you still disagree
- Further discussion is going in circles rather than moving toward resolution
- The amount of time required to continue the conversation is preventing us from serving the wider community
- Contact has become difficult in a way that's making it hard for us to help, or is causing distress to you or our team.

When this happens, we may need to bring the conversation to a close - not because your concern doesn't matter, but because continuing in the same way isn't working for either of us.

What we'll do

If we believe we can't find a way forward, we will:

a. **Talk to you first** (where possible and safe) to explain why we think we're stuck and to check whether there's something we've missed or a different approach that might help
b. **Be clear about what happens next**, which might include:

   I. Agreeing that we've reached the end of what we can resolve together
   II. Limiting contact to written communication only (if the nature of contact has become difficult)
   III. Responding at set intervals rather than to every message (if the volume of contact is unsustainable)
   IV. Pausing further discussion on this specific issue, while remaining open to new concerns
c. **Confirm this in writing**, explaining:

   I. Why we believe we can't find a way forward
   II. What this means for future contact on this issue

III. That you're still welcome to raise new, separate concerns
IV. That you can still participate in Council meetings and the democratic process

Important safeguards

- Decisions will be made by the Clerk & RFO in consultation with the Chair of Council (or by the Chair of Council and Chair of Staffing Committee if the matter involves the Clerk & RFO)
- We'll review the situation periodically (at least annually) to see whether circumstances have changed
- This applies only to the specific matter that's been exhausted. You may still raise new concerns
- You can still participate in public participation at Council meetings, submit representations, and engage in local democracy

Why this matters

We want to serve you well — but we're also a small team with limited capacity. Sometimes the most honest and respectful thing we can do is acknowledge that we've reached the limits of what further discussion can achieve, and agree to disagree.

This isn't about shutting people out. It's about being realistic when a conversation has run its course, so we can protect our team's capacity to serve the whole community.

6. How We Learn From Feedback

Feedback isn't just about resolving individual concerns, it's about understanding where we can do better.

Every piece of feedback tells us something: where our communication wasn't clear, where our processes didn't work as intended, where expectations didn't match reality, or where we simply got something wrong. We take that seriously.

What we do with feedback

<u>Service Feedback Register</u>
All service feedback (Tier 1) and formal complaints (Tier 2) are logged in our Service Feedback Register. This is an internal record that tracks:

- The nature of the concern (anonymised)
- How it was resolved
- Whether any changes were made as a result
- Themes and patterns over time

We don't log names or personal details — just the substance of what we're learning.

Quarterly reviews

The Clerk Team maintains an up-to-date summary of feedback themes and actions taken on the Council website. We're also working on a service dashboard that will make this information even easier to access and understand. At least quarterly, we review the full Service Feedback Register with Full Council to identify:

- Recurring themes — Are multiple people raising similar concerns?
- Process gaps — Where are things breaking down?
- Communication issues — Are we being clear enough about what we do and why?
- Service improvements — What could we change to prevent the same issue happening again?

This isn't about blame or performance management. It's about striving to get better at how we serve our community.

Annual reporting

Once a year, we'll include a summary in the Annual Report to residents covering:

- How many pieces of feedback we received (Tier 1, Tier 2)
- Common themes
- What changed as a result; specific examples of improvements made because of feedback
- Trends over time (are we getting better at this?)

This keeps us accountable. It shows residents that feedback doesn't disappear into a void but rather shapes how we work.

7. Review and Adoption

This Feedback and Resolution Policy was originally adopted by Harwell Parish Council on 13th January 2026, though modified and approved on 14 July 2026 to reflect the requirement (from June 2026) for a specific data protection complaints procedure. The full policy will be reviewed annually at the Annual Meeting of the Council as per Standing Order 5j(xvi), or sooner if:

- Changes in legislation require it
- Experience shows that the policy isn't working as intended
- Feedback from residents or staff suggests improvements

Signed: Chair of the Council

Dated: 14 July 2026

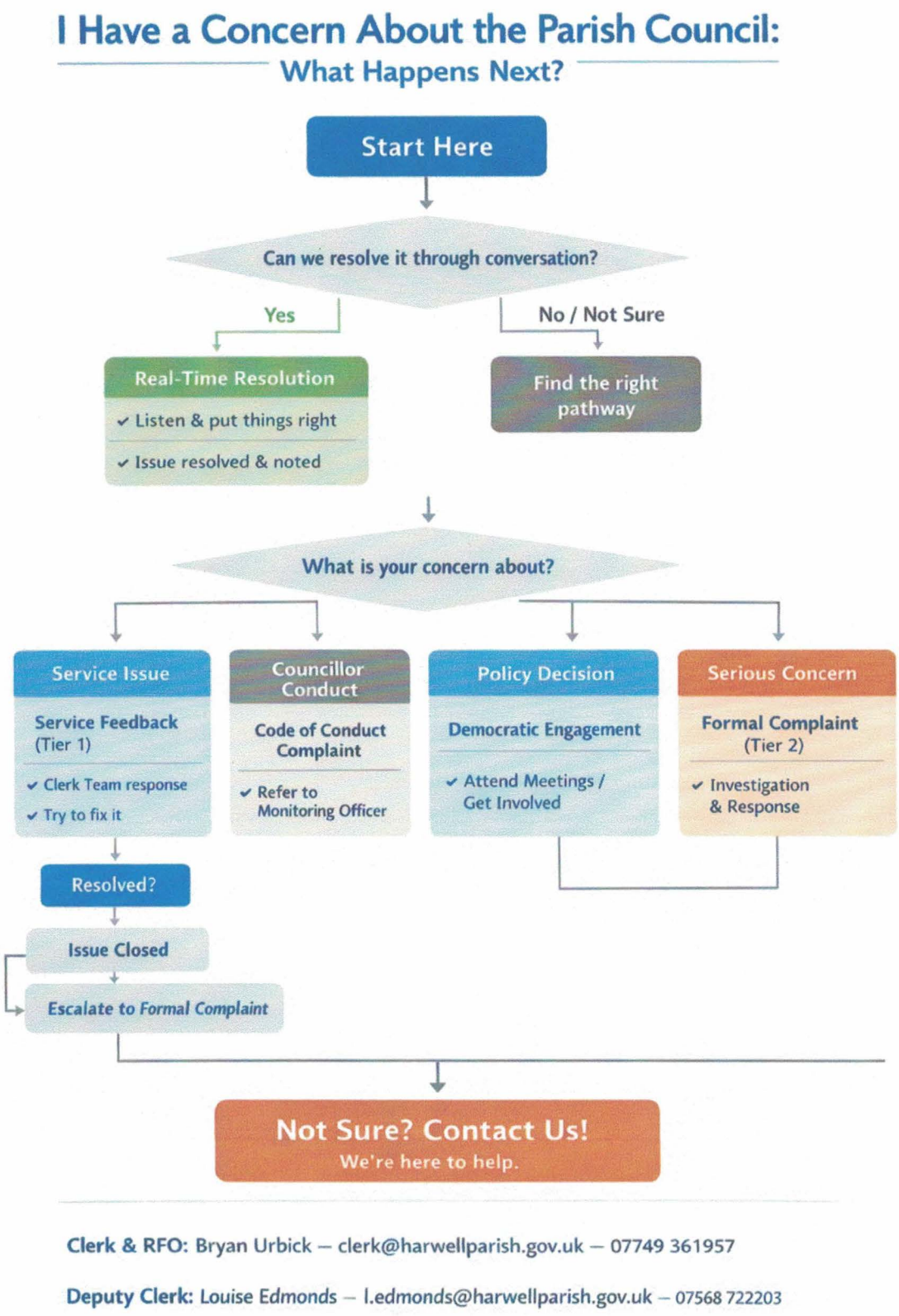
Appendix A – Service Feedback Log

Date	Tier	Nature of Concern (theme/category)	How Resolved	Action Taken/ Change Made	Closed (Y/N)	Notes/Outcome

Themes/Categories:

- Communication (e.g., unclear information, no response received)
- Service delivery (e.g., missed action, delay, process issue)
- Staff/contractor conduct
- Website/accessibility
- Data protection (e.g., handling of personal data, SAR requests, security)
- Policy disagreement
- Other

Appendix B: Feedback & Complaints Pathway (Flow Diagram)*



Clerk & RFO: Bryan Urbick – clerk@harwellparish.gov.uk – 07749 361957

Deputy Clerk: Louise Edmonds – l.edmonds@harwellparish.gov.uk – 07568 722203

**This diagram summarises the pathways described in this policy; the written policy always takes precedence.*

Appendix C: Optional Complaint Form

Do I need to use this form?

No. You can raise feedback or complaints by phone, email, letter, or in person — whichever works best for you.

Some people find it helpful to use a form to organise their thoughts, so we've provided this optional template. But you don't have to use it, a simple email or letter is absolutely fine.

Your Details

Your name: _____

Contact details (so we can respond):

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Your Concern

What happened? (Please describe what you're concerned about)

When did this happen? (If relevant)

Who was involved? (If relevant — e.g., which staff member, councillor, contractor)

What You'd Like to Happen

What would help resolve this for you? (e.g., an explanation, an apology, a change in how we do things)

Supporting Information (optional)

If you have any documents, emails, or other information that would help us understand your concern, please attach them or let us know.

What Happens Next

Once you submit this form (or contact us in any other way), we'll:

- *Acknowledge your concern within 2 working days (service feedback) or 3 working days (formal complaint)*
- *Let you know who's looking into it*
- *Respond as quickly as we can*

How to Submit

Email: clerk@harwellparish.gov.uk
Post: Harwell Parish Council, Harwell Village Hall, High Street, Harwell OX11 0EX
In person: Contact the Clerk Team to arrange, or drop into the office during opening hours.

Privacy notice:
We'll handle your information in line with our Privacy Policy. Your personal details won't be shared publicly, but we may need to share relevant information with councillors or staff to investigate your concern.