



Policy

Vexatious or Habitual Requests and Complaints Policy

Adopted: 14-10-2026

Chairman: Cllr. R. Walker

Minute Ref.: 261014/9

Full Council

Administered by Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer to Longridge Town Council. To be reviewed every three years or sooner if circumstance's chance.

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Mission Statement

Endeavour through foresight and leadership, to enhance quality of life for residents and visitors. Working to enrich and nurture opportunity to protect and improve the built and natural environment and improve community pride.

Purpose

A policy for the management of abusive, unreasonably persistent/habitual, or vexatious requests and requesters. This policy can also be used for the management of abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints and complainants, substituting “request” and “requester” with “complaint” and “complainant” where appropriate.

1. Introduction

This policy identifies situations where a person making a request, individually or as part of a group, might be considered habitual or vexatious, and forms the Town Council's policy for responding to these situations.

- 1.1 Habitual means ‘done repeatedly or as a habit’. Vexatious is recognised in law and means ‘denoting an action or the bringer of an action that is brought purely to cause annoyance to the defendant’.
- 1.2 Indicators that a request (verbal, written, in person, by telephone or IT) is vexatious include: abusive or aggressive language; a personal grudge or completely unsubstantiated accusations against the Council, individual Councillors or specific employees; unreasonably persistent, frequent or overlapping requests; or where the effort required would be so grossly oppressive or a strain on time and resources that the Council cannot reasonably be expected to comply, regardless of the legitimacy of the underlying matter.
- 1.3 This policy is intended to assist in identifying and managing persons who seek to be disruptive through an unreasonable course of conduct.
- 1.4 The term “request” includes requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018, and any subsequent modification of this legislation.
- 1.5 Habitual or vexatious requests are time-consuming and wasteful of Clerk and Councillor resources. While the Council endeavours to respond with patience and sympathy, there are times when nothing further can reasonably be done.
- 1.6 When dealing with any request the Council will consider: the burden compliance would bring; the motive of the requester; the value or serious purpose of the request; and whether dealing with it would cause harassment or distress to employees.
- 1.7 Raising legitimate queries or criticising the progress of a request (e.g. missed timescales) should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as vexatious or unreasonably persistent — nor should mere dissatisfaction with an outcome.
- 1.8 The aim of this policy is to deal with all requests consistently, fairly and reasonably, while ensuring staff, Councillors and the Council as a whole suffer no detriment.

2. Habitual or Vexatious Requesters

- 2.1 Definition used for this policy: “The repeated and/or obsessive pursuit of unreasonable requests and/or unrealistic outcomes and/or reasonable requests in an unreasonable manner.”
- 2.2 Prior to implementation, the Clerk will send a copy of this policy to the requester as prior notification of its possible use.
- 2.3 Where requests continue and meet the Section 3 criteria, the Clerk will seek Councillors' agreement to treat the requester as habitual or vexatious and determine the appropriate action under Section 4.
- 2.4 The Clerk (or Chairman, if appropriate) will notify requesters in writing of the reasons for this determination and the action to be taken.
- 2.5 A requester's status, including compliance with any restrictions, will be kept under review; if they demonstrate a more reasonable approach, their status will be reviewed (see 6.1).

3. Definitions

- 3.1 The Council defines unreasonably persistent and vexatious requesters as those whose frequency or nature of contact hinders the Council's consideration of their or others' requests. The terms may apply separately or jointly.
- 3.2 Examples include: insufficient grounds for a complaint made purely to annoy; refusing to specify grounds despite offers of assistance; refusing to cooperate with the investigation process; refusing to accept matters are outside the policy's remit or the Council's power to influence; insisting on incompatible handling; making unjustified complaints about staff; changing the basis of a complaint mid-investigation; denying or changing earlier statements; introducing trivial or irrelevant information late; raising excessive detailed questions and insisting on answers; submitting falsified documents; a ‘scattergun’ approach across multiple staff or bodies; excessive demands on staff time; repeat complaints with minor variations presented as new; refusing to accept a decision and repeatedly arguing without new evidence; challenging historic or irreversible decisions; derogatory or abusive language; threatening language or behaviour; and repeatedly contacting staff on an already-addressed matter.

4. Imposing Restrictions

- 4.1 The Clerk will confirm the request has been or is being addressed in accordance with policy and relevant regulations.
- 4.2 In the first instance, the Clerk will consult the Council before issuing a warning; the Clerk or Chairman will write to the requester (signed-for delivery or email), enclosing this policy and explaining the concern.
- 4.3 If disruptive behaviour continues, a further letter will advise of restrictions on future contact, agreed in consultation with the Council, stating: why the decision was taken; what action has been taken; its duration; and how to appeal.
- 4.4 Restrictions will be appropriate and proportionate, typically for three to six months (reviewed quarterly in exceptional cases of extension).

- 4.5 Restrictions may include: banning telephone contact except via a third party (solicitor, Councillor, or friend); banning emails to individual or all staff/Councillors, requiring correspondence by letter only; requiring contact through one named officer or Councillor (with a named deputy); restricting call times/duration; requiring personal contact to take place with a witness present; or notifying the requester that the Council will not respond further on that specific topic.
- 4.6 Where unacceptable behaviour continues, the Clerk, in consultation with the Council, may refuse all further contact and stop any investigation.
- 4.7 Where behaviour is extreme or threatens the immediate safety of employees or Councillors, other options — including reporting to police or legal action — will be considered, and prior warning may not be given.

5. New Requests from Requesters Treated as Abusive, Vexatious or Persistent

- 5.1 New requests will be treated on their merits; the Clerk and Council will decide whether previous restrictions remain appropriate. A blanket policy is not supported, nor is ignoring genuine, well-founded requests.
- 5.2 A requester's vexatious/persistent status and any restrictions will be recorded and notified within the Council at the Clerk's or Chairman's discretion.

6. Review

- 6.1 Status will be reviewed by the Clerk and Council after three months and every subsequent three months during the policy's application.
- 6.2 The requester will be informed of the outcome if the decision is changed or extended.

7. Record Keeping

- 7.1 The Clerk will retain adequate records of each case and action taken, including: the name and address of the person treated as abusive, vexatious or persistent (or anyone so aiding them); when restrictions came into force and end; what the restrictions are; and when the person was advised.
- 7.2 The Council will receive a regular, confidential report on those treated as vexatious/persistent under this policy.

8. Appeals

- 8.1 Appeals may be made in writing within 5 working days of receiving the decision. The Council will review the decision and address the points raised; the outcome is final.