

RESPONSE FROM COMPLAINANT TO WCR

Dear Madam

Thank you for your email of 20th July 2026.

That email and its enclosures raise a number of issues.

Please allow me to do two things.

Firstly, do you the courtesy of answering your specific points.

Secondly, step back and see if we can get to the core of the issues and find a way forward.

Emails noted in your 4 bullet points

All of these issues were motivated by some combination of

- a. A concern that the Parish Council was repeating behaviours where an external independent organisation or organisations had found a failure to comply with appropriate statutory or other requirements. (Failure to declare interests, failure to supply information/withholding agenda papers).
- b. A legal requirement which appears not to have been met.
- c. A desire to avoid referring matters externally, and thus avoid costs and tensions.

“Fol” additional 2 bullet points

The email dated 29th June to the Deputy Clerk was not an Fol request.

The email dated 22nd June was indeed an Fol request.

Unfortunately, it appears that some of the information covered by that request has not been supplied.

Whilst on the subject of correspondence, I would ask you to consider a couple of case studies.

Firstly, the correspondence following my email of 29th June. If you care to examine that, I think you will see that a system that was working perfectly well in a streamline and efficient way, was brought to a close and replaced with what appears to be, some misguided correspondence. For the avoidance of doubt, I am not sure the Clerk was responsible for the tone or content of the emails which went out under her name.

Secondly, I would invite you to look at the correspondence regarding Councillor XXXXX foul language. Had the Parish Council dealt with this appropriately at the time, or immediately afterwards, there would have no need to make a formal referral.

The Parish Council may consider foul, sexual language by a councillor in a public meeting, to be minutiae or nit-picking. I must respectfully disagree if that is the case.

Again, I am not sure the Clerk was responsible for the tone and content of the emails which went out in her name.

Complaints regarding general behavioural impact

Of course, this is hearsay, but if we are to consider such statements, then we must consider the resignation of a previous member of staff and the resignation of a councillor, both motivated by concerns over governance.

The previous Deputy Clerk did advise me, that a fellow parishioner had asked her if she had indeed resigned as a result of XXXX. The former Deputy Clerk told me in no uncertain terms, that that was not the case, and made it crystal clear, that she had advised the parishioner of that.

Similarly, a number of people have said critical things about the Parish Council.

I take the view that we should stick to matters of fact and evidence, rather than assertion.

“personally disparaging”

Firstly, it is absolutely not the case that I would ever intentionally be personally disparaging towards the Clerk. I would respectfully say, when one considers the email in total, I think it is equally possible to come to the conclusion, that the author was seeking to raise something politely, but clearly. (They have got that wrong but if so it was a mistake not mischief).

I would ask you to bear in mind that external agencies have previously confirmed, and are currently investigating governance breaches regarding the CLT, by the Chair and Vice-Chair.

I am genuinely concerned that the Clerk has been put in a difficult position – she has already been admirably honest and transparent, and said to me that she does not have any particular experience or training in this area.

Nonetheless, I shall be much more careful in future with my statements which are intended to be supportive, in case that they are not taken that way.

“If your behaviour becomes an immediate threat to the safety or well-being of its staff or councillors”

To even allude to that possibility does you and the Parish Council no credit whatsoever. It says much more about the Parish Council than it does me.

Let's be clear about three matters of fact.

The Chair of the Parish Council used the f word when addressing me in one of our informal meetings.

I have had disparaging remarks, made in a public meeting, by a councillor, without any moderation from other councillors.

I have been told I am “an idiot” by a councillor.

Not once, have I responded in kind.

In my opinion, it would do your credibility some good to withdraw that remark. It just goes too far.

Unreasonable complaints procedure

I have read the enclosure. Thank you for appending it.

I have only ever made one complaint to Ashwell Parish Council. It took the Parish Council 14 months to consider it.

During the course of those 14-months, the Parish Council introduced new policies to deal with complaints and retrospectively applied them to my complaint.

At the conclusion of its consideration, the Parish Council refused to tell me what, if any, part(s) of my complaint were upheld.

Let us park those uncomfortable truths and go to the heart of the issue.

The key underlying issue

The Parish Council previously unanimously resolved to approve a paper, containing the statement "Ashwell Parish Council welcomes challenge". Given the level of personal hostility towards me and negative briefing about me, I can say, that is not my experience. I have even had a letter sent to the planning authority, effectively objecting to a favourable decision the planning authority made in respect of my property (enclosed).

I spent some 4 decades in local government. I undertook governance intervention work on behalf of the Local Government Association and the Audit Commission. I was a statutory officer for over 20 years and was on a sounding board

set up by government to assist with the establishment of the Standards Board for England.

I am in a difficult position. If I genuinely feel, and I do, that there are serious governance issues in Ashwell Parish Council, then I feel I must not ignore them. I try to raise them politely and professionally with the Parish Council. I used to do so in meetings and was told to write to the Clerk.

The greatest governance concern I have, is not that human beings have shown their fallibility, rather, that there appears no real capacity to acknowledge a problem, apologise for it and adjust behaviour so it cannot happen again. Rather, from my perspective at least the Parish Council tends to shoot the messenger.

If the majority of referrals I had made to external agencies had been found to have no merit, then I think there would be a case to consider in respect of vexation. However, that is not the case. Quite the opposite. The overwhelming majority of any formal referrals I have made have been found to have merit, or have sufficient merit that requires ongoing investigation.

While ever that remains the case, then I would respectfully suggest, the case for a person being vexatious might have the appearance of apparent bias. That appearance of apparent bias might be amplified by the fact that three of the four councillors, who attended the meeting to approve your appointment, had an interest to declare. I am also aware, that meeting granted a dispensation to those three councillors. I am not entirely sure if the councillors voted on their own dispensation or the one

unconflicted councillor, voted to grant the other three a dispensation.

Looking at the positives

I would gently remind that it was not that long ago, that I reminded the Parish Council, it was in danger of losing some £17,000 of Section 106 money. Thankfully, due to that alert, and probably only due to that alert, that loss was avoided.

I also recently helped risk manage the Section 106 ask in respect of a new development amounting to well over £100,000. What I did was find a form of words which provided more flexibility for the use of the S106, in the event that there was not a new pavilion built.

I have previously assisted on understanding planning matters. (I currently work in that field for large commercial developments – the last site I was involved in was Universal Studios 500 acres).

A vexatious person would not seek to assist. They would not go out of their way to draft helpful amendments to S106 requests.

What next?

I have said previously, and I repeat here, that I am very happy to sit down with any unconflicted parties, and see if we can work out a less tense way for someone who has some genuine concerns, to have them considered with an open-mind. After all, whenever they have been considered by an external agency, they have invariably been found to have some merit.

The uncomfortable truth is, the current track record and number of issues under investigation, does not signify a Parish Council which does not have some underlying governance issues.

In short, the situation is not nearly as one sided as some might wish to state. I do believe reasonable people can and should resolve these issues informally.

I say again, I am willing to do that. Indeed, it is my strong preference. If the Parish Council prefers more formal routes, then that of course is their decision.

Needless to say, I would be willing to have an informal discussion with you, if that helps.