DOWNTON PARISH COUNCIL

UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR POLICY

This policy has been produced to create a joint understanding of what is considered to be unacceptable behaviour when members of the public communicate with Members and Employees of Downton Parish Council. Also, to set out how the Council will respond.

This Policy was approved and adopted by a Meeting of the Council held on 12 May 2025.

Signed:	Melanie Camilleri (Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer)
Signed:	Cllr Jane Brentor (Chair)
Date:	12 May 2025

1. Purpose of the Policy

This Policy has been produced to create a joint understanding of what is considered to be unacceptable behaviour when members of the public communicate with the Members and Employees of Downton Parish Council (the Council).

The Council's aim in all of its interactions with members of the public is for it to be a positive experience.

The Council, however, will not tolerate members of the public who cause its Members and Employees to feel bullied, harassed, intimidated, undermined, or afraid.

2. Unreasonable Behaviour

The Council has a duty of care to its Members and Employees and protect them from unreasonable behaviour from members of the public: -

- in any setting about Council business
- in its various forms: face to face, telephone, social media, text message, or written

Behaviour which causes them to feel bullied, harassed, intimidated, undermined, or afraid.

Examples of 'unreasonable behaviour', whilst not exhaustive, would include: -

- shouting
- using obscenities
- making derogatory remarks
- making inflammatory statements
- raising unsubstantiated allegations
- making threats of any kind
- carrying out a physical assault
- making inappropriate references to protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010 (culture, race, religion, or gender references)

The following examples would also be characterised as 'unreasonable behaviour' because they hinder the Council's ability to go about its democratic business: -

- obsessive, persistent, prolific, and repetitious behaviour
- an insistence on pursuing unmeritorious issues, trivial points, or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- a refusal to accept that issues raised are not within the power of the Council to investigate, change, or influence

Judgement will be required to separate a person's legitimate communication from those that are unreasonable, often within the same communication.

3. How the Council deals with Unreasonable Behaviour

For individuals whose behaviour can be characterised as unreasonable (see section 2), the Council's response will be appropriate and proportionate according to the nature, extent, and impact of the unreasonable behaviour.

At a meeting of full council, Members of the Council will consider the incident based upon the facts and pass a resolution as to how it will respond. Our response may range from: -

i) a written request that the individual modifies their behaviour, and what action we will take if the warning is ignored
ii) place sanctions on the individual (see section 4)
iii) report the matter to the police and/or take legal action.

Where the behaviour is so extreme or it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of a Council Member or Employee, the incident will be reported to the police immediately with no prior warning of that action given to the individual. By the very nature of this scenario, it would not be necessary for full council to pass a resolution before taking such action.

4. Sanctions

Examples of sanctions, whilst not exhaustive, would include: -

- Being permitted to only communicate with one nominated Member of the Council or Officer of the Council
- Being permitted to only communicate in a specific way, for example, letter rather than e-mail, social media, or telephone.
- Receiving no responses to further enquiries and communications on the same matter if no substantive new issue is raised
- Receiving no response to enquiries and communications made to the Council if no substantive new issue is raised

In most cases restrictions will apply for six months, but in exceptional cases, may be extended and further action taken.

If the individual does not reside in the parish, they will be advised that all future correspondence will be ignored and left unread.

There is no route of appeal against these sanctions.

5. Unreasonable Behaviour by Members of the Council and Employees of the Council

The subject is covered under the Council's 'Complaints Policy'.

6. Vexatious Complaints

This subject is covered under the Council's 'Complaints Policy'.