



## General Communications Policy

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# General Communications Policy

## A. Parish Council Correspondence

- (i) The main points of contact for the Parish Council are the Clerk, the Assistant Clerk, and the Finance Officer. It is to the Clerk (as the Proper Officer of the Council) that all formal correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed.
- (ii) The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting – unless the Committee or Working Party is being administered by the Assistant Clerk, in which case the Assistant Clerk will be responsible for all correspondence.
- (iii) General finance matters, such as invoices to be addressed to the Finance Officer.
- (iv) No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a Committee, Sub-committee or working party. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a ‘need to know’. The Clerk and Assistant Clerk are responsible for storing papers in their offices as per the Retention of Documents policy.
- (v) Day-to-day correspondence will mainly be undertaken by email.
- (vi) Where correspondence from the Clerk is sent to a Councillor, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman will automatically be copied into that correspondence.

## B. Freedom of Information Requests

The Clerk shall, in the first instance, handle all requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR).

## C. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

- (i) Agendas should be clear and concise. They should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
- (ii) Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.
- (iii) Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for “information only”, this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

## D. Councillor Correspondence to external parties

- (i) As the Clerk and Assistant Clerk are responsible for dealing with the Council’s correspondence it will be exceptional for a Councillor to contact other bodies. Councillors should only use the

title Cllr when writing officially on behalf of the Council. The Parish Council must authorise, in advance, any correspondence to be sent by a Councillor in their official capacity.

- (ii) A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

## **E. Communications with Parish Council Staff**

- (i) Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a Committee or Sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council).
- (ii) No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Council, the Chairman of a Committee or other meeting, or are styled "Leader" of the Council, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee, which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- (iii) Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.
- (iii) E-mails:
  - Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;
  - Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;
  - Authorised e-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk;
  - Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
- (iv) Meetings with the Clerk or other Officers:
  - Councillors may visit the office by appointment only between the hour of 10am and 1pm;
  - Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular Officer;
  - Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate Council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

## **F. Communications with other Councillors**

Councillors are reminded of the need to remain professional in all communications. Councillors must not send any form of communication electronic, or otherwise, that could be considered libellous. Councillors must abide by the Council's Code of Conduct at all time and are reminded not to commit slander at any time.

## **G. Notice Boards**

The Assistant Clerk and Clerk and an appointed Councillor to share responsibility for maintaining the Parish Notice boards.

The notice board should display:

- The full title of the Parish Council
- The name, address, telephone number and email address of the Parish office
- The Council's website address where the minutes, the Code of Conduct and other public documents may be inspected

- A list of Members of the Council with contact details (address, telephone number and Council email address)
- Venues, dates and times of meetings for the year
- Agenda for forthcoming meetings

## **H. Website**

The Internet is a significant and powerful means of communication.

The Parish Council has a hosted website via Welland Creative.

The website continues to be refined and will be updated on a regular basis. Older documents will be archived. A poorly maintained and organised website can affect the public's perception of the Council's efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of the Parish Council.

## **I. Council Newsletters**

The Assistant Clerk is responsible for producing the quarterly newsletters. The contents to be well laid out, utilising the Council's logo, easily read (clear font) in accordance with the Council's Corporate Identity policy, accessible, interesting, relevant and factually correct.

Members are requested to suggest items for inclusion within the newsletter and may produce items for the newsletter for editing by the Clerk/Assistant Clerk.

## **J. Annual Report**

The Assistant Clerk is responsible for producing the Annual Report for distribution 1 June annually. This must contain details about the Parish Council's audited accounts.

Effective communication is important to achieve and maintain a positive relationship with the community and is an essential feature of good governance.

## **K. Use of Social Media**

Worplesdon Parish Council has two active social media accounts (Twitter and Facebook). Councillors using social media for personal reasons must abide by the Parish Council's Code of Conduct at all times and should not write anything that could bring the Parish Council into disrepute or could be considered libellous.