

Communications Policy

Aims

To establish clear, easy to use channels of communication between the Parish Council Members, the Parish Clerk, Parishioners, and Third Parties including the Press

To provide information on important matters in an appropriate manner so as to facilitate and encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

Introduction

Each Parish Councillor has a legal duty to represent, without bias, the interest of the whole community. They will endeavour to do their best and are available to help parishioners with regard to matters relating to the parish of Pinvin.

If the matter is important, then correspondence needs to be sent to the Parish Clerk who will ensure that this will be brought before the Parish Council and dealt with in a suitable and professional manner.

It is the Parish Council's intention to comply with the following:-

Correspondence

The point of contact for the parish council is the clerk, and it is to the clerk that all correspondence for the parish council should be addressed. All correspondence to the Parish Clerk will be acknowledged within seven days of receipt, unless the clerk is on annual leave. If email is used then an acknowledgment will be sent by email.

All correspondence from the council is issued through the clerk.

Every item of correspondence issued by the council identifies that it comes from the council and gives a reply address.

If a parishioner wishes a matter to be formally discussed at a Parish Council meeting, then the Parish Clerk must be notified at least 14 days prior to the meeting to enable the item to be placed on the Agenda.

Emails relating to Parish Council business must be circulated internally only and care must be taken with the information contained therein as it can be accessible under the Freedom of Information Act.

All emails to external third parties (including District Councillors) relating to Parish Council business must be copied to the Parish Clerk.

All correspondence and communication/documents must be received by the Parish Clerk a minimum of 24 hours prior to a meeting. Exceptions to this rule are planning and other documents which require a response prior to the next meeting of the Parish Council and representations or presentations from the public & outside speakers regarding a planning issue.

The Parish Council will determine the response, if any, to correspondence received. The Parish Council reserves the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Parish Clerk's time.

If Councillors engage in correspondence as Portfolio holder or representative of the Parish Council, they must copy the Clerk into that correspondence.

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Where correspondence from the clerk to a councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).

In exceptional circumstances members of the public may keep their identity secret, but in normal circumstances the Council expects them to identify themselves, as a minimum providing a name and address; an e-mail address is not adequate.

Agenda Items for council, committees, sub-committees and working parties

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.

Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.

External Meetings

Parish Councillors should provide notes or the formal minutes of any meetings that they attend on behalf of the Parish Council to the Clerk as soon as practicable so that they may be distributed to all Councillors.

Communications with the press and public

For official communications on behalf of WPC, normally only the Clerk and Chair are given the authority to issue press releases and comments to the local media. All Councillors must refer any press enquiries to the Chair or Clerk, unless express permission has been given by the Chair of Full Council or a sub-committee, for the Councillor to speak to the press on a specific issue. Where Councillors provide such statements (verbal or written) the Clerk must be informed of their content as soon as possible.

Councillors may make comments to the press in a personal capacity.

If councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public about the council's administration or its procedures this should be dealt with under the council's adopted complaints procedure. This procedure does not cover complaints about the conduct of a member of the parish/town council.

Councillor correspondence to external parties

The clerk should be sending most of the council's correspondence. If a councillor writes to other bodies, he or she should make it clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the parish council.

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.

Communications with parish council staff

No individual councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the chair of the council, the chair of a committee or other meeting may give instructions to the clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the parish council.

E-mails:

- Instant replies should not be expected from the clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;

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- Information to councillors should normally be directed via the clerk;
- E-mails from councillors to external parties should be copied to the clerk;
- Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

SOCIAL NETWORKING (Twitter, Facebook etc.):

Members of staff or councillors using social networking through their personal or professional lives must not comment on the activities of the Parish Council to ensure that the Code of Conduct is not breached.

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All communications from the Council will:

- be polite, respectful, timely and relevant;
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, discriminatory or offensive;
- not contain content copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details subject to prior approval by the person or organisation concerned;
- be moderated by either the Chair or the Clerk unless the communication forms part of an agreed campaign; and
- not be used for the dissemination of any commercial or political advertising.

Equally, we expect any communications to the Council will:

- be polite, respectful and relevant;
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, discriminatory or offensive;
- not contain content copied from elsewhere, for which the enquirer does not own the copyright;
- not send large volumes of the same message (also called "spamming"); and
- not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.