



Correspondence, Media, Website, Whatsapp & Social Media Policy

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.

The Clerk will deal with all routine correspondence which does not commit WHPC to spend money, enter into a legal agreement or give an opinion and will report all other correspondence to the next Parish Council meeting (with copies being provided to councillors ahead of the meeting as considered appropriate by the Clerk) and action as appropriate. If urgent action is required, the Clerk will consult with the Chairman, or if the Chairman is not available with the Vice Chairman. The vast majority of correspondence is in email form. The Clerk will use her discretion when deciding what to send on to councillors.

All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper.

Any correspondence between councillors or with members of the public or outside bodies in connection with Council business must be copied to the Clerk.

Where correspondence from the Clerk 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).

Communications with the Press and Public

The Clerk will clear all urgent press releases, or comments to the media, with the Chairman of the council or the Chairman of the relevant committee.

A Councillor should only express views on behalf of, or appearing to

- a. represent the Parish Council, if they have been instructed to do so by the Council or, if it
- b. reflects the agreed policy of the Council
- c. If a councillor is communicating via social media or traditional media they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view, unless they have been asked to represent the Council.

- d. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a Council agenda item.

Communications with Parish Council Staff

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, sub-committee or working party with appropriate delegated powers from the council).

No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Council, the Chairman of a committee, working party or other meeting, may give instructions to the Clerk which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

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; E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk; Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

Meetings with the Clerk or other officers:

Wherever possible an appointment should be made.

Meetings should be relevant to the work of that officer;

Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

Media Communications and Articles

Council must approve all non-urgent media contributions either at a full meeting or by email (email circular asking for approval – 5 days' notice is acceptable for speed, no reply from a councillor is assumed to be acceptance)

For content that changes such as local club calendars etc. – council can approve the page purpose and allow that organisations nominated person to put changes in place via our web master / parish clerk

Non-urgent media statements - press statements are all pre-approved by email circular or at a meeting.

An exception – Chairman (or Vice Chairman if the Chairman) and Clerk can agree a statement in an emergency and use discretion – usually circulating council and giving as much time as feasible for comment.

Private statements by councillors that address parish issues – must include a statement that these are personal views and not those of council.

Statements that are not related to WH Parish do not need this if no mention is made of WH or Councillorship

Website & Social Media

The Council is committed to operating a website hosted by a 3rd party provider, having no other connection with WHPC. The present host is Cuttlefish. The current system is a “Content Management System” where the Council itself has direct control of day-to-day editing and updating.

The Website shall contain material the Council is required by law to publish and that arises from Council business, such as agenda, minutes, policies, information about the Council and Councillors. It may also include any material that has been commissioned by the Council, such as reports or surveys or material that is directly derived from these.

The Website shall in principle not contain material of a deliberately contentious, offensive, or disputatious nature, or material that criticises or implies criticism of one or more members of the public, individual Councillors, groups of Councillors or the Council as a whole.

Regardless of what has been voted on by Council, the Website shall not contain any material that is libelous or defamatory or in any way against the law or which could expose the Council to legal challenge.

The day-to-day working of the Website is subject to the control of the Clerk and they are empowered by Council to make routine updates to the Website without prior reference to Council.

The Clerk will be fully responsible for all Facebook & Twitter comments and will ensure that such platforms are regularly updated. Updating the social media accounts (but not the official council website) can be delegated to a named councillor should the need arise.

If at any time the Council feels that information on the website or social media is inappropriate, then the Clerk will amend immediately.

Whatsapp messages

The purpose of the Whatsapp message group is to confirm meeting arrangements between councillors, for example, lifts required to and from meetings, meeting locations etc
It may also be used to send notifications out to councilors.

It is not to be used for any discussions.

It is also not to be used solely to report issues to the Clerk, any information for the Clerk should be sent via Email as well as reported on Whatsapp. It cannot be guaranteed that the clerk will see messages sent on Whatsapp.