

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Aims

This policy aims to establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication in relation to members of the public, other agencies, fellow members, the press and Parish Council staff. Each Parish Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community. Although a Councillor will always try to help with regard to matters relating to the parish, an individual Councillor (including the Chairman) cannot make a decision on behalf of the Parish Council.

Principles for all forms of Communication

The Parish Council will ensure that it communicates with residents in a timely and effective manner and informs and consults them about matters which affect the Parish.

All methods of communication should:

- reflect the views of the Parish Council not of the individual
- be civil, tasteful and relevant
- be concise
- not disclose information which is confidential
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- not promote political parties
- not publicise personal information

All Councillors are provided with a Council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting Council business. Emails / correspondence received by the Council's staff or Members may be disclosed following a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or following a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998, under the General Data Protection Regulation, or in the course of legal proceedings.

- Do not write anything in communications that might be construed as offensive or discriminatory.
- Do not make negative comments about an individual, including members of the public, Members or officers.

Council letterheaded paper may be used by the Clerk when preparing communications from any Councillor if requested, but must only be used to convey information that has been authorised by the Parish Council and must not be used to convey personal views.

Internal Communications

E-mails should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.

Matters for information to the other Councillors should include the Clerk. 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 subcommittee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council). No individual Councillor may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated powers.

Means of Communication with the public

Parish Council Meetings

All Parish Council meetings are open to the press and public and, under the Council's standing orders, time is allocated at each meeting for public comment (Open Forum). Residents and local organisations are encouraged to attend Parish Council meetings and bring to the Council any proposals or comments they may have.

Website

Information is published on the Parish Council website in the interests of transparency and to provide residents with information about its activities. This includes Parish Council meeting agendas, the minutes of Parish Council meetings, policies, Parish projects, planning etc.

Notice boards

There are three Buckland Parish Council noticeboards: one in Buckland Village, one in Buckland Road near the canal, and one at Dancersend. These display contact details for the Parish Clerk and Councillors, the notice of meeting dates, any statutory notices and other items of interest. More comprehensive information is available on the Parish Council website.

Correspondence

All correspondence to the Parish Council should be addressed to the Clerk. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the Parish Council for their attention at the next meeting. If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a parish council meeting, then the Clerk must be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda. The Parish Council will determine the response, if any, to correspondence received. The Parish Council reserves the right not to respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Clerk's time. All official correspondence from the Parish Council should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Parish Council. In exceptional situations, when it is appropriate for a Parish Councillor to issue correspondence in his/her/their own name, such correspondence must be authorised by the Parish Council.

Social Media

The Parish Council has a separate Social Media policy.

Annual Parish Meeting

This is a meeting of the whole Parish and not the Parish Council. This is an annual meeting which takes place in April. The meeting is called by the Chairman of the Parish Council and the Clerk issues the agenda and takes the minutes. All agenda items should be sent to the Clerk at least 10 days in advance of the meeting.

Communication with the Public

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. Depending on the issue raised it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- refer the matter to the Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- request an item on a relevant agenda

Communication with the Press

The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Chairman and two other Parish Councillors. Parish Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and not the view of the Parish Council.

Adopted March 2023