

# POLICY ON ANONYMOUS COMMUNICATIONS

<b>Review due</b>	<b>Amendments to Policy</b>	<b>Date Reviewed</b>
	First issue	May 2021
July 2024	None	July 2024
July 2027		



# Anonymous Communications

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy outlines how the Parish Council handles anonymous communications.

## 2 DEFINITION

- 2.1 Any communication where the person sending it cannot be identified; either because there is no identifying information, or not enough identifying information.

Examples include:

- Written or printed communications (such as letters or newsletters)
- Verbal communications (such as telephone messages or texts)
- Social media communications (where the sender's identity cannot easily be verified)

## 3 ACTION

- 3.1 If the complaint or question is straightforward then a response can be read out at the next Parish Council meeting and recorded in the minutes.

- 3.2 If sufficient detail is provided, and the matter is considered credible, then it can be investigated. Any allegations must be factual and directly related to the Parish Council's work.

The Parish Council may give consideration to the issues raised, and if appropriate it can take corrective action reviewing its procedures or activities. These actions can be read out at the next Parish Council meeting and recorded in the minutes.

- 3.3 Any alleged criminal offences, or other serious irregularities, will be passed on to the relevant authorities (again sufficient detail must be provided and the matter must be considered credible). Anyone with such information is urged to go themselves direct to the relevant authorities.

- 3.4 However, caution will be exercised when reacting to anonymous communications that appear to be malicious, potentially libellous or of an extremely personal nature. Or where the communications are habitual or vexatious.

It is important to prevent the Parish Council from being liable to being sued, as well as avoiding time being taken up with personal vendettas or frivolous issues. **In such cases the Parish Council expressly reserves the right to take no action.**

This is partly for practical reasons. Without sufficient detail, corroborating evidence or the ability to converse with the complainant to gather more facts it is very difficult to investigate allegations. In such cases responses via the minutes would likely be considered inappropriate.

It is also for reasons of transparency. It is preferable if all parties know the context of the complaint (for those being complained about, those carrying out any investigation, and residents listening to proceedings).

- 3.5 If the correspondence is harassing, abusive or threatening then it may be passed to the Police for further investigation.

## **4 WHO DECIDES?**

- 4.1 In most cases the Parish Clerk will review the correspondence and decide what action to take. If necessary, the Clerk may consult with the Chair and/or Vice Chair, or any and all Councillors. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous request or complaint will be reported to, and authorised by, the Chair.

## **5 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

- 5.1 The Parish Council urges anyone with a valid complaint to use the Complaints Procedure or send any issues of concern to the Parish Clerk, along with their contact details.

## **6 PRIVACY**

- 6.1 Where a person has contacted the Parish Council and provided contact details but has asked for anonymity then their right to privacy will be respected and the Clerk will withhold those details from Councillors or the public.

In any event personal details are not normally mentioned in the minutes when reporting requests or comments from residents.

The only caveat to this is if illegality is alleged, and in such cases details will be passed to the relevant authorities, as per section 3.3 above.

## **7 REPEATED / VEXATIOUS CORRESPONDENCE**

- 7.1 It is important to distinguish between people who make a number of complaints because they really think things have gone wrong, and people who are pursuing a personal agenda.

Repeated anonymous complaints should periodically be reviewed to establish if they have any merit, and to check the issues have been handled correctly. Action will then be taken in line with section 3 above.