

Wortwell Parish Council Communications Policy

Adopted: February 2018

Reviewed: June 2024

Next Review Due: June 2027

Objective

Wortwell Parish Council's interaction with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying needs and measuring satisfaction. Effective information, news and media relations are an essential factor.

Policy

1. Parish Council Correspondence

- a) 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.
- b) The Parish Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies.
- b) The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- c) No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party.
- d) All official correspondence should be sent by the clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper, or by email if appropriate.
- e) 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).
- f) Where an email is being issued from the clerk, any blind copy (bcc) recipients must be named in the body of the email, but their email address will not be seen.

2. Agendas for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

- a) 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.
- b) Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda
- c) Where the Clerk or a councillor wishes fellow councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

3. Councillor Correspondence to External Parties

- a) As the Clerk should be sending most of the council's correspondence from a councillor to other bodies, if correspondence is to be sent under the name of a duly authorised councillor, when issued, it will be clear that it is written in the official capacity as authorised by the parish council.
- b) A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Parish Council or one'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.

c) Emails sent by councillors using Wortwell Parish Council email address to other bodies, must be appropriate and work-related.

d) Councillors are expected to ensure their personal opinions do not come across as being those of the council or bring the council into disrepute or are contrary to the council's Code of Conduct or any other policies.

- When participating in communication, the Clerk and councillors should meet the following criteria:
- Be responsible and respectful, informative and transparent.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment.
- Refrain from making controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
- Avoid personal attacks and hostile communications.
- Have permission to publish images from the persons or organisations in the image before being published.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
- Not contain content that may violate laws or regulations such as libel or copyright.

4. Communications with Parish Council Staff

a) Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more members sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the council).

b) Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.

c) Emails should be kept to a minimum.

d) Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk.

e) Reasons for urgency should be stated.

f) Information to councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk.

g) Emails from councillors to other external parties should be copied to the Clerk.

h) Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so

i) Emails will be acknowledged within five working days.

j) Where possible a substantive answer will be provided in answer to correspondence within 28 working days or earlier if feasible. If it is not possible to answer within this time, the individual will be informed why that is the case.

5. Communications with the Press and Public

a) The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the Council.

b) Press reports from the council, its committees or working parties should be from the Clerk.

c) If a Councillor receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Council this must be referred immediately to the Chair, Vice Chair or Clerk.

d) If the matter refers to an area not covered by existing policy the matter must be referred the full Council before a formal reply is given; otherwise, responses should always consider the Council's policies.

e) The Council should make every effort to respond promptly to requests for information. Any enquiry or requests for statements must never be answered immediately and can only be responded to by the Clerk after consultation with and authorisation by the Chair or Vice Chair, and wherever possible using a formal 'Press Release Statement'.

f) No information of a confidential nature may be disclosed. No matter relating to the conduct or capability of a Councillor at a meeting can be disclosed.

g) Unless a councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it

clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view

h) Unless a councillor is certain that they are reporting the view of the council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.

i) 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.

6. Meetings with the Clerk or other Officers:

a) Wherever possible, an appointment should be made.

b) Meetings should be relevant to the work of the Council.

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

7. General Data Protection Awareness

a) Whilst Parish Councils are expected to comply with Data Protection legislation, individual councillors will also need to ensure that they protect an individual's personal data whether it is stored electronically or as a hard copy. This applies only to living individuals rather than the deceased, companies, other authorities and charities.

b) Personal data includes names and addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses and IP addresses.

c) Councillors are required to implement the following measures to comply with legislation.

- Only use Wortwell Parish Council email account for parish council correspondence.
- Ensure all Parish Council correspondence includes Wortwell Parish Council footer containing the Privacy Statement or a link to the relevant page on the website.
- Ensure that all devices (computers, laptops, tablets, phones) are password protected.
- Not forward on emails or email threads as they may contain personal data
- Delete emails which are no longer required.
- Where possible, direct all correspondence to the Clerk, who can obtain the necessary consent.
- Where possible, avoid holding an individual's information in a Councillor's home or on a Councillor's own PC. If a Councillor needs to hold any information containing personal data on behalf of the Parish Council, it needs to be stored securely in a locked cabinet or, if on a PC, in an encrypted folder.
- Ensure their anti-virus software and operating system is up to date.
- Ensure their computer's fire wall.
- Inform the Parish Council of any breaches as soon as possible and at least within 24 hours.

8. Website and Newsletters

a) Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

b) The website is regularly updated and kept up to date.

c) Content is prepared using information provided by the Clerk, councillors, local authorities and third parties, and will relate to: -

- Minutes and agendas of public meetings
- Advertising events and activities that take place in the parish
- Good news stories linked to the parish
- Vacancies on the Parish Council
- Sharing information from external sources and groups e.g., police, local authority
- Announcing new information

10. Parish Council Noticeboard

The notice board will be kept updated by the Parish Clerk to ensure that members of the community who are less active online are kept aware of key information.