

Watford Parish Council

Communication Policy

A. Parish Council Communication

- (i) The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all communication for the Parish Council should be addressed, unless a matter is resolved to be dealt with by a Parish Councillor with delegated responsibility in which case, a copy will be forwarded to the Clerk. The form of communication will only be accepted if sent by either letter, e-mail, telephone or text message.
- (ii) The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting, unless specifically resolved otherwise.
- (iii) 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. In particular, Councillors do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- (iv) All official correspondence should be sent in the name of the Parish Council using letter headed paper unless sent by email, then an official signature will be used.

B. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

- (i) Any agenda should be clear and concise. It 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.
- (ii) Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.

C. Communications with the Press and Public

- (i) The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the Council or the Chair of the relevant committee. Whenever possible, any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.
- (ii) Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- (iii) 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.
- (iv) Unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
- (v) If any Councillor receives or the Council receives a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure.

D. Councillor Correspondence to external parties

- (i) As the Clerk should be sending most of the Council's correspondence, it needs to be made clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Parish Council.
- (ii) In cases where a designated Parish Councillor is sending correspondence, a copy of the 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.
- (iii) When any matter is brought before the Parish Council at a properly-convened meeting which is relevant to Watford Parish but outside the Parish Council's immediate powers or control, it may instruct the Clerk to make representations to an appropriate authority, company, business or person, in order to take advice, make a complaint or simply inform the appropriate body of the said matter.

E. Communications with Parish Council Staff

- (i) 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 which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- (ii) E-mails:
 - Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;
 - E-mails should be replied to by both the clerk and councillors within 10 working days
 - 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.
- (iii) Meetings with the Clerk:
 - Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
 - Meetings should be relevant to the work of the Parish Council;
 - Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

The Parish Council reserve the right to amended or cancel this policy at anytime.

Adopted by Watford Parish Council – September 2019