

Heighington Parish Council

Communications Policy

This Policy is designed to assist Parish Councillors and staff to effectively communicate with the general public and each other.

Objective

To provide a helpful response to telephone, or written enquiries in an efficient and polite manner.

Parish Council Correspondence

- The first point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence should be addressed.
- Written/e-mail communications if necessary should be forwarded to the appropriate staff member in a timely manner.
- The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting in a timely manner.
- No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, Committee or working party. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information or documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- All official correspondence should be sent by the relevant staff member using council letter headed paper or official e-mail.
- Where correspondence is copied to another person the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person.
- Correspondence, including e-mails should be replied to as soon as it is practicably possible. If this is a substantial period of time a "holding letter/e-mail" should be sent.

Agenda Items for Council and Committees

- The Agenda should be clear and concise and issued in accordance with legal guidelines. 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.
- Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.
- Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only" this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

Communication with the Press and Public

- The Clerk will clear all press reports or comments to the media, including social media, with the Chair of the Council or the Chair of the relevant committee.
- Press reports from the Council or its Committee should be from the Clerk or an Officer or via the reporters own attendance at a meeting.
- Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media, including social media, or public 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

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their personal view.

- 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.

Councillor Correspondence to external parties

- As the Clerk should be sending most of the Council's correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies, it needs to be made clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Parish Council.
- A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it should be sent to the Clerk and this should be noted on the correspondence so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

Communications with Parish Council Staff

- Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff unless authorised to do so either by a Committee or with appropriate delegated powers from the Council.
- No individual Councillor regardless of whether or not they are the Chair of the Council or Chair of a Committee may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee of the Council which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated powers.
- Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council
- E-mails should be dealt with in the same manner as other physical correspondence.
- Wherever possible meetings with the Clerk and other officers should be made via prior appointment.
- Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer.
- Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agenda.

Please see Media Policy for further information.