

Normandy Parish Council

Serving Our Community through working in Partnership

Communications Policy

1. Aim

1.1. The aim of this Policy is to state the requirements of, and provide guidance for, all Normandy Parish Council (“the Council”) internal and external communications. This includes, but is not limited to, communications between Councillors, the Clerk, employees, suppliers, contractors, external organisations, the Press and public.

2. Parish Council Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer

2.1. The Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Council and as such should be the point of contact to whom all correspondence requiring action from the Council are sent and from whom replies should be made to residents on parish matters.

2.2. Moreover the Clerk is the only person as the Responsible Financial Officer who can make binding commitments or contracts on behalf of Normandy Parish Council. For this reason the Clerk should act as signatory on contracts or orders being placed by the Council.

2.3. All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper.

2.4. 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.

2.5. 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.

3. Communications with the Press and Public

3.1. The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the press, with the Chair of the council or relevant committee.

3.2. 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.

3.3. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the press 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.

3.4. 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.

3.5. Any complaints from the press or a member of public, this should be dealt with under the Council’s adopted complaints procedure, or via a council agenda item.

4. Communication with the Parish

4.1. The Council will keep residents informed of its activities, projects, forthcoming events and public information, including County and District Council activities through the Website, Noticeboards, annual public forums and Minutes.

5. Councillor Correspondence to external parties

- 5.1. The Clerk should send all Council correspondence where this relates to residents' issues, press communications, contract matters, orders which create any form of commitment or obligation or relates to the official business of Council.
- 5.2. Councillors Communication occurring as a result of working parties where the terms of reference have been agreed by the Council and which do not fall within section 5.1 may be sent by Councillors
- 5.3. If a councillor is required to correspond with external parties, he/she must:
 - 5.3.1. Make clear that it is written in their official capacity;
 - 5.3.2. Express the views of the Council
 - 5.3.3. Be authorised or delegated to do so by the parish council.
- 5.4. If not, the councillor must state that the views expressed are their own personal views and not those of the Council.
- 5.5. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Clerk and noted accordingly on the correspondence (e.g. "copy to the Clerk"), so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.
- 5.6. The Clerk will keep a copy of all letters. Letters will be scanned and stored electronically where possible.

6. Communications with Parish Council Employees or Contractors

- 6.1. 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 or to another employee or contractor which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- 6.2. Councillors must not give instructions to any employee or contractor, unless authorised to do so and with appropriate delegated powers from the council.

7. Electronic communications

- 7.1. Electronic communications, such as e-mails, are subject to the same requirements as a letter or telephone call.
- 7.2. It is the Clerk's responsibility to keep councillors without internet access informed of the Council's business.

- 7.3. Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk. Reasons for urgency should be stated.
- 7.4. Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk.
- 7.5. E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk.
- 7.6. Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
- 7.7. Emails relating to Council business may be subject to Freedom of Information requests.
- 7.8. The Clerk will retain a record of e-mails in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

8. Social Media

8.1. 'Social media' is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Examples of social media websites include:

8.1.1. Social networking (e.g. www.facebook.com)

8.1.2. Video sharing (e.g. www.youtube.com)

8.1.3. Micro-blogging (e.g. www.twitter.com)

8.2. The Parish Council does not have any designated Social Media Accounts.

8.3. Councillors may share key information about Parish Council Activities on the Normandy Parish Council Facebook for the sole purpose of publishing information about the work of the Parish Council to a wider audience subject to the following conditions:

8.3.1. Prior approval must be granted by a Council resolution. Urgent information can be published by the Clerk in accordance with 3.1 above.

8.3.2. Social Media must not be used in the recruitment process for employees or new councillors, other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements.

8.3.3. Councillors should be familiar with the terms of use and adhere to these at all times.

8.3.4. No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain i.e. available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in publicised policies and procedures.

8.3.5. Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.

8.3.6. Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.

8.3.7. Copyright laws must be respected.

8.3.8. Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.

8.3.9. Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval.

8.3.10. Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.

9. Meetings

9.1. Councillors are summoned to attend Public Meetings by the Clerk. Only exceptional reasons for non-attendance will be accepted by the Council.

9.2. The Clerk will notify councillors of the Agenda, date, time and location of the Meeting.

9.3. The Public are invited to attend all Meetings.

9.4. The Press are welcome to attend Council Meetings.

9.5. Any recording or filming of the proceedings must be submitted to the Clerk, and the Chairman notified prior to the meeting.

9.6. The Council must meet all reasonable requests to accommodate the press and respect the privacy of any attending public.

9.7. In the situation where Council business is discussed in closed session, the Council may be approached for comment on items discussed, with due respect to the confidentiality issues.

9.8. The requirements and procedures of a Meeting are detailed in the Council's Standing Orders.

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

10.1. An Agenda should be clear and concise and contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision.

10.2. The public should be able to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.

10.3. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.

10.4. Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Clerk.