

## **Holbrook Parish Council – General Communications Policy**

(to be read in conjunction with the HPC's Policy for Communicating with the Media)

### **Aim**

Our aim is to:

- a. Keep people informed of the Parish Council's actions
- b. Encourage stakeholders to actively participate in influencing Council decisions for the future of the parish

### **Purpose**

This policy covers both internal and external communications. It sets standards for how communications are delivered in an open, clear and timely way. It sets out responsibilities for both the Clerk and Councillors. It seeks to ensure communications are handled in a consistent way.

### **Target audiences**

External communications between the Clerk or Councillors with residents, or anyone who has an interest in the parish because they live, work or visit the area.

Internal communication between the Clerk and Councillors, and between Councillors.

### **Guidelines**

External communications should:

- a. Convey clarity of purpose
- b. Focus on the facts and be accurate
- c. Be written in plain English
- d. Be issued in a timely manner
- e. Clearly identify the sender (be that the Parish Council, the Clerk or a Councillor)
- f. Formal messages should be in the corporate style

Internal communications should also follow these guidelines and the Code of Conduct. Councillors are reminded that communications using personal email accounts still fall within the remit of General Data Protection Regulations, including being subject to Freedom of Information requests.

Matters should not be debated by email but instead debated at public meetings to uphold democratic values and transparency (sensitive or confidential issues excepted).

### **Methods of communicating**

The Parish Council uses the following ways to communicate:

- a. Meetings are open to the public, including a 'public question time' at each Parish Council meeting, and at the Annual Parish Meeting
- b. Agendas, minutes, finances and other key pieces of information covered by the Transparency Code are publicised on the website

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- c. The Parish noticeboards are used for posting agendas, minutes and other general information
- d. Residents' queries are dealt with by email, letters or phone call
- e. The Parish Papers is published 6 times a year and is delivered to all households, as well as being available on the website
- f. Press releases are issued where relevant

Residents can engage with the Parish Council:

- a. Through the open meetings mentioned above
- b. By contacting the Clerk (by letter, email or telephone)

### **Responsibilities of Councillors**

Councillors represent the community in which they live and must be guided in all communications by their Code of Conduct that encourages open, informed, timely and courteous communication at all times. Councillors should make it clear in all interactions with residents, or other third parties that they have no authority to represent the Council's view unless the matter has been agreed at a Council meeting or they have been given a specific mandate to do so at a Council meeting. It is important that Councillors do not raise the expectations of residents before a matter has been debated and agreed at a Council meeting. Councillors should immediately refer to the Clerk any complaints or concerns that relate to the Council or to their own conduct.

Councillors should be mindful of the policies and decisions of the Council and respect the integrity of fellow Councillors and of the Clerk. If Councillors do give a comment they must make it clear that this is their personal opinion and NOT from the Council.

A Councillor corresponding with a third party does so as an individual and the rules relevant to media contact (see above) apply. Unless otherwise specified the Chair should comply with this protocol in the same way as other councillors.

Any advice relevant to Council business given to a Councillor by third parties and which affects their opinion on any such matter should be declared at Council meetings.

### **Responsibilities of the Clerk**

As the Officer of the Council, the Clerk should receive all communications which will then be formally brought to the attention of the Council, and it is the Clerk who will issue all formal communications made by the Council. The Clerk is responsible for receiving correspondence and documents on behalf of the Council and dealing with them, bringing such items to the attention of the Council. The Clerk issues correspondence on the Council's behalf as instructed by the Council or in accordance with known policy.

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