

WHADDON PARISH COUNCIL

Communications Policy and Protocol

May 2024

Review Date: May 2025

1. Introduction.

Whaddon Parish Council (WPC) is committed to providing a quality service for the benefit of the people who live and work in the Parish or who are visitors to the area. WPC sees effective two-way communication as a key part of this commitment. WPC will provide communications assistance to those who need it under the Equalities Act 2010.

2. Communications Structure.

WPC is committed to putting in place and maintaining robust communication structures;

- Incoming and outgoing written communications via the postal services
- Outgoing written communication via hand deliveries
- Incoming and outgoing electronic communications via its dedicated email system
- A dedicated parish council phone line
- Incoming and outgoing communications via its website
- Outgoing communications via social media
- Two-way communications via the Public Forum at parish council meetings and other ad hoc meetings arranged by the council.

3. Communications Protocols

- WPC will endeavour to promote good two-way communications by responding as promptly as possible to communications, and ensuring information is made freely available, within current guidance and legislation, and within the boundaries of good governance.
- WPC will make contact information for Councillors and Clerk and communication routes to contact them freely available, unless the contact information is considered sensitive, where alternative contact arrangements will be made.
- All communications and correspondence of a formal nature and requiring a formal response, e.g. raising a concern or complaint, an invoice for payment, a grant application, etc., must be communicated in writing either by postal service or via email to the Clerk via the council's dedicated email system.
- On an informal basis or in cases of emergency WPC will respond to incoming communications via informal communication methods not listed in Sec. 2, such as social media, WhatsApp, I-messenger, text, Facebook posts, etc. However, this is not a formal or reliable method of contact with the council and should be avoided. WPC does not undertake to monitor or respond to incoming communications other than by the incoming routes in Sec. 2.
- The council will not respond to or act on anonymous communications.
- The council endeavours to support the community with helpful information via its various communications routes. However, it will not promote or advertise or publish or allow to be published any materials not in line with its role as a parish council in any of its communications. Nor will it advertise or promote 'for profit' businesses, except as paid-for advertising in limited and appropriate contexts such as the Parish Magazine.
- The Council will comply with statutory requirements on providing information to the public via displayed notices and its website. Further information is available in the Publication Scheme.
- In addition, WPC will endeavour to keep people informed through community engagement; including the Parish Magazine, the website, WPC Email Alerts and social media posts. From time-to-time house to house leaflet drops also take place.

4. Parish Council Correspondence and Communications

- The Clerk is the primary point of contact for the parish council's correspondence and communications.
- WPC aims to present professional, accurate and consistent communications to all audiences.
- Unless there is a substantial reason, the council's correspondence should be received and sent via the Clerk, who communicates in their official capacity on behalf of and authorised by the council. The Clerk communicates for the Council as a whole not an individual councillor.

- No individual Councillor or Officer can or should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information conducted in the name of the parish council.
- Confidential information will only be shared with Councillors and Officers on a 'need to know' basis in compliance with UK GDPR legislation.
- Councillors should refer to the code of conduct for more guidance on standards of conduct to apply to their communications.
- Councillors and officers must not bring the council into disrepute through inappropriate communications either directly or by inference, in any capacity.
- Councillors and officers must not set up social media accounts on behalf of the council without prior discussion and agreement of the Council.
- WPC is an a-political council and Councillors must make clear that any political views expressed are a personal opinion of the Councillor acting as an individual, not of the council.
- Councillors are precluded from promoting their personal interests and opinions using council communication routes. During the run-up to elections 'Purdah' requirements must be implemented.
- Councillors and officers must not divulge sensitive and/or confidential information to third parties, e.g., prices and details of tenders, information covered by UK GDPR, sensitive information, etc.

5. Agendas and Minutes.

See Standing Orders.

6. Communications with the Press and with the Public

- The Clerk will clear all press releases or comments to the media or public with the Chair ahead of publication (and Councillors if feasible and time permits).
- Unless reporting the pre-authorized and formal view of the council, councillors and officers must make it clear they are expressing a personal opinion when communicating to the press or public.
- Councillors and officers receiving a complaint from the press and/or public can only express a personal opinion on the matter and must refer it to be dealt with under the council's complaints procedure.

7. WPC Email Alerts

WPC holds a database of subscribers to its Email Alert system. From time-to-time information relating to the parish and local council and to the police is circulated to subscribers, e.g. road closures, parish events, planning matters, meetings, etc. Subscribers must request to be added to the list and may opt out on request at any time. This database is strictly managed under UK GDPR requirements; divulging of subscriber details or circulating non-council/police information is not permitted.