



## **WINSLEY PARISH COUNCIL - COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

### **Introduction**

This document sets out the Council's approach to communications and defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council for:

- Communications – channels and principles
- Press
- Website
- Filming and recording of meetings
- Correspondence

Policies in this paper have been drawn from national guidelines and best practice examples from other parish councils.

### **Communications – channels and principles**

1. The Council's communications will be open, honest and accessible and at all times be in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct.
2. The Council is committed to open and clear communication and engagement, letting people know what is going on, giving them a voice and involving them in the decisions that affect them and their community. It is about clear communication and development of relationships that help the Council deliver better services and projects giving value for money.
3. The first point of contact for letters and emails to the Council is the Parish Clerk.
4. Publicity generated by the Council will be appropriate, lawful, cost effective, objective, and even-handed. All communications will have regard to equality and diversity and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.
5. The Community notice board(s) located within the Parish and the Community Website (*winsley.org*) will be used for the publication of agendas, minutes and other Council information.
6. In addition the Council will use other channels of communication available to it whenever possible. This includes but not limited to 'The Winsley Weaver' and 'Winsleybay / Facebook'.
7. Councillors express their views and play an active part in local discussions, although it is essential they do not *predetermine* a position or decision in advance of hearing all the relevant information or prior to relevant Council resolutions being made. It is important that Councillors can demonstrate that, whatever their individual views, they remain open for discussion and persuasion when the Council meets to consider matters and vote on resolutions.
8. When dealing with any personal data, Winsley Parish Council recognises its responsibility to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018. The GDPR state that personal data must be processed lawfully, fairly and transparently; collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes; be adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary for processing; be accurate and kept up to date; be kept only for as long as is necessary for processing and be processed in a manner that ensures its security.

### **Press**

9. Press releases and resulting media coverage increase public awareness of the Council's activities.
10. Press releases to promote a decision, the work of the Council, or in response to a specific published article will be prepared and issued by the Parish Clerk in a timely fashion.
11. All enquiries from journalists should be directed to the Parish Clerk.
12. The Clerk, will base media responses on:
  - a) Adopted minutes and resolutions of the Council



- b) Statements and/or media lines agreed/resolved by the Council
- 13. Statements, written quotes and press releases issued on behalf of the Council must be circulated promptly to all Council members by the Clerk, with a brief update on the context of the press enquiry.
- 14. Individual members of the Council can contact the press, give interviews, write letters-to-editors or produce articles as individuals. However, unless they have authority from the Council they should not use the Councillor prefix with their names and should make it clear at all times that the views they express are their own and do not represent the Council in any way. Individual members should consider the implications and context of media enquiries and the potential impact of publicity on the Council's legal responsibilities or activities.
- 14. The Council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information under the Freedom of Information Act and will comply with requests for information.
- 15. Journalists are welcome to attend Council meetings and are entitled to receive agendas, reports and minutes on request.
- 16. The Clerk will not quote any Councillor in a news release or involve them in proactive publicity events during an election period.

## **Digital Communications**

- 17. Not all residents will have access to digital and social media channels such as the website and emails, whether by choice, cost, competence or accessibility. Traditional methods of communication – the Community Noticeboards and The Winsley Weaver will provide a basis for communications.
- 18. The Parish Council holds and maintains an electronic e-mail address book. This is used solely for communicating information considered of relevance and importance to those included in the address book. Messages are sent using “Bcc” to avoid sharing of addresses and in every case an invitation to “unsubscribe” from receiving future e-mails is included.

## **Website**

- 19. The Community Website (*winsley.org*) is a timely, comprehensive and cost-effective channel funded and maintained by the Parish Council.
- 20. The Community Website will be updated with relevant Parish Council information, as required. The site will include:
  - a) Information and contact details of Councillors and the Clerk.
  - b) Council’s policies and procedures
  - c) Agendas and minutes of meetings
  - d) Forthcoming events (including a village diary), local news and useful information
  - e) Useful links
  - f) Listing of local businesses, organizations, clubs, etc.
- 21. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative, respectful and accurate.

## **Filming and Recording of Meetings**

- 22. The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 makes provision for the filming of council meetings (including committees and sub-committees). Where filming or recording occurs, Councillors should be mindful of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, any potential infringements of copyright and, in the case of members of the public attending or invited to speak at meetings, individual rights to privacy.



## **Council Correspondence**

23. All correspondence for the Council should be addressed to the Clerk, who is the first point of contact for the Council. Communication ideally should be in written form, either by email or letter.
24. The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
25. All official Council correspondence should be sent by the Clerk on council headed paper if by letter. When by e-mail, full contact details of the Clerk will be included.
26. All correspondence to the Parish Clerk will be acknowledged within seven days of receipt, unless the clerk is on annual leave. If email is used then an acknowledgment will be sent by email.
27. If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a Parish Council meeting, then the Parish Clerk must be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda. All correspondence and communication/documents must be received by the Parish Clerk a minimum of 24 hours prior to a meeting. Exceptions to this rule are planning and other documents which require a response prior to the next meeting of the Parish Council and representations or presentations from the public & outside speakers regarding a planning issue.
28. The Parish Council will determine the response, if any is required, to correspondence received. The Parish Council reserves the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Parish Clerk's time. Correspondents will be informed that the matter will not be pursued and the reason why given.
29. If Councillors engage in correspondence as a representative of the Parish Council, they must copy the Clerk into that correspondence.
30. The Clerk sends out the Council's correspondence to other bodies. Should it become appropriate or necessary for a Councillor to issue correspondence in his/or her own name, this must be authorised by the Council and the correspondence must make it clear that it is being written in an official capacity and has been authorised by the Council.
31. No individual councillors should communicate with companies/individuals with which the council has a contractual relationship. All enquiries should go through the Clerk.

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Cllrs John Barnes, Paul Fitzpatrick & Parish Clerk, Selina Jobson

December 2017 – Policy introduced

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