

## NEW BUCKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

### Aims of this policy

This document aims to set the standard for engagement both within the Council and with its community. Communication is two-way – telling people about the Council, and listening to what people say about the services they would like to see. The Council is committed to providing open and transparent information about its business.

### Purpose of good communications

Good communications will enable the Parish Council to:

- better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities
- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about issues, services and opportunities in the parish, the district and region
- be an effective voice of the community
- maintain and enhance the reputation of the PC

### The main principles of communication from the Council

All methods of outward communication should:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant
- be concise
- not disclose information which is confidential
- reflect the views of the Parish Council not the individual
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- not promote political parties, personal interests or commercial ventures
- not publicise personal information

### Methods of communication that may be used by the Parish Council

- Parish Council meetings
- The Parish Council Noticeboard
- Email
- Post
- Telephone
- Website
- New Buckenham Parish News
- Social Media

### Parish Council Meetings

All Parish Council meetings are open to the press and public and under the council's standing orders time will be set aside at each meeting for public comment. Residents, local organisations, District Councillors, the local press and police will be encouraged to attend Parish Council meetings and bring to the Council any proposals or comments they may have. After the conclusion of the public speaking section however, members of the public are not permitted to contribute to further agenda items unless permission is granted by the Chairman

An initial draft of the minutes will be produced by the Clerk and issued to all Councillors by email for review. A subsequent draft will be published in Parish News. The Agenda and Minutes of the meetings are published on the council website following approval at a council meeting.

Where residents bring to the Parish Council significant issues or projects that require input from the Parish Council, and cannot be accommodated within the time frame of the regular monthly meetings, a working group may be established consisting of interested residents and Councillors which will report back to the Council.

On occasion it may be necessary for the Council or a Committee to exclude the public if the confidential nature of the business to be discussed means their presence at the meeting may be prejudicial to the public interest.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council (which includes using a mobile phone or tablet, or web forums such as Zoom) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present.

### The Role of the Clerk

The Clerk forms a pivotal role as a communications link between the Parish Council and its stakeholders. It is therefore essential that all forms of correspondence must go via the Clerk with the minimum requirement of a copy to the Clerk and to the Chair. This will ensure that the Parish Council records are properly kept.

All post received by the Clerk should be opened promptly and dealt with in an appropriate manner. The Clerk will respond where required to all correspondence (post and emails) **within 5 working days**, either with a full response or with details of when the Parish Council will consider its response. The Clerk will provide a list of correspondence to the Parish Council as appropriate at the Parish Council meetings.

### Email

In order to manage the proliferation of emails the following guidelines will be followed:

- The Clerk will decide on the appropriateness of forwarding emails sent to the Parish Council; this is most likely to be to the Chairman in the first instance.
- Instant replies to emails should not be expected from the Clerk but if the enquiry is urgent reasons should be stated; ideally replies should not be delayed beyond **5** working days.
- When responding to an external email the Clerk will include a copy to appropriate Councillors if it is relating to a matter in which they are involved.
- Using the 'Reply All' option has the advantage of keeping everyone in the loop but Councillors may wish to consider if it is really relevant to everyone on the distribution list.
- When forwarding emails caution should be exercised particularly if there is a long email chain involved. What information is being forwarded and to whom?
- It is not appropriate for draft documents circulated by email to be forwarded outside the Parish Council unless it is to an individual directly involved with the project.

### Website and Social Media

Social media offers great potential for building relationships and improving services but should be used as just a part of the communications strategy. In responding to comments noted on social media, individual councillors may engage with contributors, and should encourage them to raise any questions or issues directly with the Council or one of its members.

Note:

The Director of Public Prosecutions has published guidelines for the application of current statute law to prosecutions involving social media communications. The guidance is structured by conduct, relating different sorts of conduct to different potential offences, some of the statutes which have a bearing are: - Data Protection Act 1998 - Freedom of Information Act 2000 - Human Rights Act 1998 - Equalities Act 2010 - Defamation Act 2013 - Malicious Communications Act 1988 - Communications Act 2003.

Please also refer to New Buckenham Parish Council's Data Protection Policy.

July 2021