

## **Harvington Parish Council - Communications Policy.**

Harvington Parish Council aims to establish clear, concise channels of communication between the Parish Council, other authorities, Council members, the Press and residents of Harvington.

Each member has a duty to represent without bias the interests of the whole community; however members cannot respond to communications on behalf of the Council, except within the conditions set out in the policy.

### **1. Correspondence.**

- The overall point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk as the Proper Officer, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council, its Committees or Working Parties should be addressed.
- No individual Councillor or Officer shall be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of Harvington Parish Council, its Committees or Working Parties.
- All correspondence addressed to the Parish Council, its Committees or Working Parties will be placed on a Parish Council agenda.
- The Proper Officer will deal with all correspondence following a meeting
- All official written correspondence from the Parish Council, its Committees or Working Parties should be sent by the Proper Officer using Parish Council letter headed paper.
- All official e-mails from the Parish Council, its Committees or Working Parties will be sent by the Proper Officer from the Parish Councils registered email address.
- Where correspondence from the Proper Officer to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).

### **2. Agenda Items for Parish Council, Committees and Working Parties.**

- Agenda should be clear and concise. It should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for a member of public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
- Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.

### **3. Communications with the Press and Public**

- The Proper Officer will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chairman of the Parish Council or Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council or the Chairman of the relevant committee. A copy of all press reports and comments to the media will be sent to Parish Councillors at the first opportunity.
- Press reports from the Parish Council, its Committees or Working Parties should be from the Proper Officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Parish Council to speak to the media 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**.
- Unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Parish Council that has made a decision about any issue, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a **personal view**.
- If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, it will be dealt with in accordance with the Parish Council's Complaints Procedure.
- In the event of the Proper Officer being on annual leave, on sick leave or in an emergency situation, the Council authorises the Chairman in consultation with the Vice-Chairman to make a delegated decision on such communications with the Press as they jointly deemed to be appropriate on behalf of the Parish Council. Emails may be sent in the delegated circumstances from the 2 members private email address, but the email must include in the email body the title "On Behalf Of Harvington Parish Council" and a copy of the communication sent to the Proper Officer and Parish Councillors.

#### **4. Communications with Parish Council Clerk.**

No individual councillor regardless of position may give instructions to the Clerk which are inconsistent or conflict with council decision or arrangements for delegated power.

#### **5. Councillor Correspondence to External Parties**

- The Proper Officer is responsible for Parish Council correspondence. A Councillor corresponding to other bodies needs to make clear that correspondence is written in their official capacity and has been authorised to do so by the Parish Council.
- A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Parish Council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Proper Officer, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Proper Officer has been advised.
- No member of the Parish Council will issue a communication of any type which would appear to commit the Parish Council to any course of action.

#### **6. E-mails:**

- Instant replies should not be expected from the Proper Officer; reasons for urgency should be stated.
- All emails should be dealt with in a professional manner.
- Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Proper Officer;
- E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Proper Officer;
- Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
- All emails should be seen by only the person intended. Particularly care taken when sending confidential information and not copied in to those not authorised to see the information.

#### **7. Social Media.**

- Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet i.e. Facebook, My space, Twitter and other micro blogging sites, 'You tube' and other video clips and podcast sites, Blogs and discussion forums.
- Social media can be an effective way for councillors to interact with residents and support local democracy. Some additional guidance is needed in support of the member code of conduct to protect both councils, and their councillors, particularly in regard to standards, libel, copyright, data protection, bias and pre-determination; as well as encouraging good online etiquette.
- The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication whilst conducting the business of the council or acting, claiming to act, or giving the impression you are acting as a representative of the council.
- Councillors should be aware that anything published on a social media can be accessed by anybody with an internet connection and, once it has been posted, will be a permanent online record. A common sense approach should be adopted by all.
- When using personal social media parish councillors must be mindful of the information they post in a personal capacity.
  - a) Have regard to the code of conduct and ensure that, when online, you treat others with respect and conduct yourself in a manner that will not bring your council into disrepute.
  - b) Think before you comment – even if a post is deleted hastily it could have been read several times and may have been indexed and duplicated online beyond reach. It could also potentially have already had a screenshot taken and saved as a permanent record.
  - c) Be aware of your blurred personality online. Even if posting online in a personal capacity it is likely that you will be seen as acting as a representative of your council.
  - d) When posting online in a personal capacity it is likely that you will be seen as acting as a representative of your council. Check privacy settings are in place.

- e) By publishing information obtained through your position as councillor, you will be seen as acting as a representative of your council. Councillors should never publish anything online taken from a private meeting or private e-mails unless first discussed and agreed with the Council.
  - f) Beware of misinterpretation and do not enter into an online debate as the content may be considered defamatory, illegal or could damage reputation and relationships that might cause embarrassment and bring the Council into disrepute.
  - g) Avoid publishing information regarding a forthcoming or ongoing matter yet to be determined e.g. planning matter. Any indication of bias or predetermination could result in the decision being challenged
  - e) Publish personal data of individuals without permission as this is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.
  - f) Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council.
  - g) Someone else's post, i.e. 're-tweeting' on twitter or sharing on Facebook, may be interpreted as a councillor agreeing, endorsing or supporting its content. Be aware that stating that the views posted or shared on social media are not your own, will not exonerate you from possible investigation.
  - h) Avoid anything which could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of any individual(s); i.e.
    - i) Making offensive or derogatory comments related to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, or age;
    - ii) Using social media to bully or harass another individual;
    - iii) Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or providing links to such content.
- Be aware that anything you say online could appear in the papers and create media interest, which the council will have to address.
- Councillors will be personally responsible for their social media presence. The council takes no responsibility for social media content or maintenance on behalf of individual councillors. Councillors need to be aware that if you engage with social media you may be held personally liable for copyright and trademark breaches, defamation, contempt of court and privacy infringements on their online presence.

### **8. Communication channels:**

- Notice Boards x 4
- Village Newsletter x 11 annually.
- Website
- Parish Council meetings - slot available for residents to speak.

**Policy adopted by the Parish Council at its meeting held on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2018.**

**To be reviewed annually.**