

COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

INTRODUCTION

East Dean & Friston Parish Council understands it is important to communicate different information to various categories of people on a regular basis. This policy aims to establish who will do what and how. Some of the information contained herein is taken from the Governance Toolkit for Parish and Town Councils.

A. PARISH COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE

- (i) The point of contact for the parish council is the clerk, and it is to the clerk that all correspondence for the parish council should be addressed.
- (ii) The clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- (iii) No individual councillor or officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the parish council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. Councillors and officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information / documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know.'
- (iv) All official correspondence should be sent by the clerk in the name of the council using council letter-headed paper, or by email if appropriate.
- (v) Where correspondence from the clerk 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).
- (vi) Where an email is being issued from the clerk, any blind copy (bcc) recipients must be named in the body of the email, but their email address will not be seen.

B. AGENDAS FOR COUNCIL, COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES & WORKING PARTIES

- (i) Agendas should be clear and concise. They should contain sufficient information to enable councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
- (ii) Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.
- (iii) Where the clerk or a councillor wishes fellow councillors to receive matters for "information only," this information will be circulated via the clerk.

C. COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

- (i) The clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the chair of the council or the chair of the relevant committee.

- (ii) Press reports from the council, its committees or working parties should be from the clerk or an officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- (iii) Unless a councillor has been authorised by the 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.
- (iv) Unless a councillor is certain that he/she is reporting the view of the council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
- (v) If councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a council agenda item.

(vi) Social Media

The use of social media is currently restricted to the website. Posts are prepared by office staff using information provided to the office by other local authorities, third parties and councillors and will relate to:

- Minutes and agendas of public meetings
- Advertising events and activities that take place in the parish
- Good news stories linked to the parish
- Vacancies both on the Parish Council and for staff
- Sharing information from partners e.g., police, library, health
- Announcing latest information
- Re-sharing information from Parish related groups e.g., schools, sports clubs, community groups

Emails will be used to distribute information about council business.

D. COUNCILLOR CORRESPONDENCE TO EXTERNAL PARTIES

- (i) As the clerk should be sending most of the council's correspondence from a councillor to other bodies, if a letter is to be sent under the name of a duly authorised councillor it will be issued by the parish council office and it will be clear that it is written in their official capacity as authorised by the parish council.
- (ii) A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the council or a councillor's role within it, should be sent to the clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g., "copy to the clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the clerk has been advised.
- (iii) E-mails sent by councillors using their East Dean & Friston Parish Council email address to other bodies, must be appropriate and work-related and must always cc to clerk.
- (iv) Councillors must only use bcc if that person's email address is not to be divulged; at the same time, the councillor must make it clear that the email is being bcc'd to a named third party.
- (v) When using their own social media pages, councillors are responsible for what they post and should be mindful regarding who can see their personal social media sites. Councillors must not give the impression that their posts represent the parish council, or that they are providing information on the council's behalf.

- (vi) Councillors are expected to ensure their individual opinions do not come across as being those of the council or bring the council into disrepute or are contrary to the council's Code of Conduct or any other policies.

In brief, for staff and members, remember when participating in any online communication, e.g., email or Facebook;

- a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief, and transparent.
- b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- c. Do not present yourself in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure individual opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
- d. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or in red print for emphasis.
- e. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications.
- g. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
- h. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- i. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
- j. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel or copyright.

E. COMMUNICATIONS WITH PARISH COUNCIL STAFF

- (i) Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more councillors sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the council).
- (ii) No individual councillor, regardless of whether they are the chair of the council, the chair of a committee or other meeting may give instructions to the clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- (iii) Telephone calls to staff members should be appropriate to the work of the parish council.
- (iv) E-mails to staff members:
 - Instant replies should not be expected from the clerk;
 - Reasons for urgency should be stated;
 - Information to councillors should normally be directed via the clerk;
 - E-mails from councillors to external parties must be copied to the clerk;
 - Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
- (v) Meetings with the clerk or other officers:
 - Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
 - Meetings should be relevant to the work of that officer;
 - Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

F. GENERAL DATA PROTECTION AWARENESS

Whilst parish councils are expected to comply with Data Protection legislation, individual Councillors will also need to ensure that they protect an individual's personal data whether it is stored electronically or as a hard copy. This applies only to living individuals rather than the deceased, companies, other authorities, and charities.

Personal data includes:

- Names and addresses
- Telephone numbers
- Email addresses
- IP addresses

Councillors are required to implement the following agreed measures to comply with legislation:

- Only use East Dean & Friston Parish Council email account for parish council correspondence
- Ensure all parish council correspondence includes the East Dean & Friston Parish Council footer containing the Privacy Statement or a link to the relevant page on the website (this will be provided by the Clerk)
- Ensure that all devices (computers, laptops, phones) are password protected
- Not forward on emails or email threads as they may contain personal data
- Delete emails which are no longer required
- Where possible direct all correspondence to the Clerk who can obtain the necessary consent
- Where possible avoid holding an individual's information in a Councillor's home or on a Councillor's own PC. If a Councillor must hold any information containing personal data on behalf of the Parish Council, it needs to be stored securely in a locked room or cabinet or if on a PC, in an encrypted folder.
- Ensure their antivirus software and operating system is up to date
- Ensure their computer's firewall is turned on
- Inform the Parish Office of any breaches as soon as possible and at least within 24 hours.

G. COMPLAINTS

Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this, and other policies could result in action being taken.

H. REVIEW PERIOD

This Policy will be reviewed bi-annually.

Approved: 7th November 2024

Reviewed: November 2026