

# 2023

## Deddington Parish Council

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# COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

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## **1. The aims of this policy**

1.1 Deddington Parish Council (PC) recognises its role at the heart of the community and prioritises the need for an effective communications strategy between the Council and the community, within the Council, and with outside bodies.

1.2. The Council recognises that the services it provides must reflect the needs of parishioners and the locality. It wants to ensure that communication is two-way: listening to what parishioners would like the PC to do and informing people of what the Council does and is planning to do. The Council is committed to consulting the community and providing open and transparent information about its business.

## **2. Legal requirements and restrictions**

2.1. This policy is subject to the Council's obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and current data protection regulations.

2.2 In line with FOI requirements, councillors should use their formal 'dpc' email addresses in correspondence relating to council business.

2.3 The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law or by the Council's Standing Orders or Code of Conduct (accessible on the Council's website <https://www.deddingtonparishcouncil.org/policies.html>).

2.4 Elections: In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself ('purdah') all publicity about candidates and other politicians is halted. During this period PC publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members.

## **3. The main principles for all forms of communication**

3.1 The PC will ensure that it communicates with parishioners in a timely and effective manner to consult and inform them about matters which affect the Parish.

3.2 All methods of communication should:

- be civil and relevant
- be concise
- not disclose information which is confidential
- reflect the views of the PC as agreed at Parish Council meetings, not of 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
- not publicise personal information

#### **4. Methods of communication**

- PC noticeboards
- Email
- Post
- Telephone
- Parish Council website (<https://www.deddingtonparishcouncil.org>)
- Parish website Deddington OnLine (DOL): <https://www.deddington.org.uk/>
- Parish magazine *Deddington News* (DN): in print and at <https://www.deddington.org.uk/deddington-news/>
- Social media sites: several in Deddington, Clifton and Hempton
- Public meetings
- Surveys
- Newsletter: The PC may in exceptional circumstances publish a newsletter if there is large amount of information to be conveyed to the Parish

*(Further details in sections 5–14)*

#### **5. Parish Council meetings**

5.1 All PC 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. Parishioners, District and County Councillors, and the local press are encouraged to attend PC meetings and bring to the Council any proposals or comments they may have.

5.2 On occasion the PC may need 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.

5.3 As required by government legislation, the photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council is normally permitted with the provisos listed in the Standing Orders (see PC website). The Parish Council may make an audio or video recording of any meeting.

#### **6. Noticeboards**

6.1 The Clerk will maintain up-to-date noticeboards located throughout the Parish. Contact details for the Clerk, agendas for its meetings and other information relating to Parish Council business will be displayed.

#### **7. Email**

7.1 The Parish Council's preferred form of communication is by email. The PC's email account is monitored by the Clerk during office hours. Face-to-face meetings or phone calls are acceptable if more appropriate for the matter in hand.

7.2 The following guidelines will be followed:

- The Clerk will decide on the appropriateness of forwarding emails sent to the PC to relevant (or all) Councillors.
- Some emails which are of general information to the community may also be forwarded to the editors of DN and DOL
- When responding to an external email the Clerk will include a copy to appropriate Councillors if it relates to a matter in which they are involved.
- When forwarding emails, caution should be exercised particularly if a long email chain is involved. What information is being forwarded and to whom?
- It is not appropriate for draft documents circulated by email to be forwarded outside the PC unless they are to an individual directly involved with a project.

## **8. Post**

8.1 The PC office is in the Windmill Centre and has a dedicated post box near the main door. Post should be addressed to the Parish Office, Windmill Centre, Hempton Road, Deddington OX15 0QH.

## **9. Telephone**

9.1 The PC office telephone (01869 337447) will be answered during office hours by the Clerk. An answer machine will receive messages when the office is closed and the Clerk will respond as soon as is practicable.

## **10. PC Website**

10.1 The PC will maintain a website which will include the following information:

- Details of PC meetings: schedule, agendas and minutes
- Details of each working group and its responsibilities
- Contact details for Councillors and the Clerk
- Financial reports and council policies
- Emergency Plan
- Details concerning burials and the Hempton Road cemetery
- Details of any significant ongoing projects with up-to-date reports
- Details of organisations, facilities, sources of information, volunteering opportunities in the parish of Deddington, including snow wardens and litter picking

## **11. Parish media, including social media**

11.1 The PC recognises that it is important always to establish public backing for any proposal, so working groups and the council as a whole are encouraged to engage with parishioners by using flyers, social media, face-face meetings (Covid permitting) or other methods listed below.

11.2. Deddington OnLine (DOL), the parish website, will be used as a communication channel to inform parishioners of PC projects.

11.3. *Deddington News* (DN), the parish magazine, will also be used to keep parishioners informed.

11.4. Social media: The PC will use social media sites on occasions where it feels this will benefit the public. The Clerk or a nominated Councillor will be responsible for posting anything relating to PC business on social media sites once the content has been agreed by the Chair/Vice-chair and Clerk. This forum will be used only for the dissemination of information and the PC will not engage in online 'chat'. However, inaccurate reporting may be corrected. Any response or correspondence concerning the PC should be directed to the Clerk via email, phone or letter.

11.5 Any Councillor who has their own social media accounts is advised that they should use them with caution and always make it clear that their opinions are their own and not those of the PC when commenting on issues relating to Deddington Parish Council (see also section 16 below).

11.6 The Clerk will have authority to request the removal of any posts made by third parties which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

## **12. Press**

12.1 The press are welcome to attend all PC meetings and will be provided with an agenda and draft minutes of previous meetings (if requested from the Clerk in advance). The Clerk will be the main point of contact for the press and may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information or make a statement relating to its business. The Clerk will consult with the Chair, Vice-chair or Chair of the relevant working group regarding the content of any press release. It is important that all information shared with the press accurately represents the policies and views of the PC as a body. This should be borne in mind if a Councillor is interviewed. Information of a confidential or slanderous nature must never be disclosed (see also section 16 below).

## **13. Public meetings**

13.1. When there is an issue of parish-wide significance and the PC wishes to put forward proposals and/or assess public views, the PC may call a public meeting. Venues to be of a suitable size, Covid-secure and, if possible, equipped with a hearing loop.

## **14. Surveys**

14.1 On occasions the PC may wish to canvass parishioners' opinions on matters of significance to the parish as a whole.

14.2 Questionnaire to be drawn up, and responses analysed by the relevant working group, who will report back to the PC.

14.3 Questions to be phrased in a neutral, non-leading fashion. Other organisations conducting surveys on behalf of the PC will be expected to follow a similar process and adhere to our standard of neutrality.

14.4 Method of distribution to be decided by the PC as appropriate. This could include: a section in *Deddington News*, an online survey, (e.g. on Survey Monkey) with paper copies made available.

14.5 Results when published will be anonymised.

## **15. Parish Council Office – the role of the Clerk**

15.1 The Clerk performs a pivotal role as a communications link between the Parish Council and its stakeholders. All forms of correspondence should go via the Clerk, with the minimum requirement of a copy to the Clerk to ensure that PC records are properly kept and relevant Councillors briefed. The Parish Council will not consider any anonymous correspondence.

15.2 If a matter requires a longer discussion an appointment can be made to meet with the Clerk during opening hours.

## **16. Policy for individual councillors**

16.1 The PC's communications with the media should represent the corporate position of the Parish Council. This policy does not seek to regulate Parish Councillors in their private capacity. If the views of a Parish Councillor differ from those of the Parish Council, the Councillor must make this distinction clear.

16.2 Subject to the obligations on Parish Councillors not to disclose information referred to in section 2.1 and not to misrepresent the Parish Council's position, Councillors are free to communicate their position and views. However, communications should:

- be lawful and truthful
- be even-handed
- have regard to the Parish Council's policies, particularly Equality and Diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity (e.g. elections).
- these conditions to apply, especially, to social media posts

## **17. What Deddington Parish Council asks its parishioners to do**

- Review the noticeboards and/or the PC website and/or the parish magazine and website for information about meetings and events on a regular basis
- Recognise engagement opportunities by responding to surveys, letters, questionnaires, etc.
- Address comments, suggestions or complaints in writing by email, letter, or telephone, to the Clerk using contact information above; or by filling in the form on the Parish Council website; or raise them in person by attending the monthly PC meetings

## **18. Review**

18.1 This policy will be reviewed annually, along with other PC policies, and updated in line with current legislation.