

## **CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

The use of digital and electronic communication enables City of Durham Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Parish Council and between the Parish Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Parish Council has a website (<http://cityofdurham.parish.durham.gov.uk/>) and uses e-mail to communicate. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

Communications from the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, respectful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- Be compliant with GDPR policies adopted by the Council;
- Only official Council gov.uk e-mail accounts will be used to carry our Parish Council business (Members and staff should be aware that all email correspondence from .gov.uk e-mail accounts is subject to Freedom of Information requests);

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Parish Council's Facebook page and e-mails are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abusive language will not be tolerated and may be referred to the appropriate authorities.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Parish Council members or staff, will not be tolerated and may be referred to the appropriate authorities.
- Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws and the Right of FOI; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.

### **Parish Council website.**

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or the Clerk may forward a query from a member of the public to one of our Parish Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

### **Parish Council email.**

The Clerk to the council has their own email address. The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and they aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as they can. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with correspondence received and passing on any relevant e-mails to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Emails to the Parish Council become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

### **SMS (texting).**

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

### **Internal communication and access to information within the Parish Council.**

The use of electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement. Parish Councillors are expected to abide by this policy in all their work on behalf of the Parish Council.

As more and more information becomes available electronically, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Parish Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Parish Council's policy and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation). Members should be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails and avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option (whilst ensuring that the people who need to know the information are copied in) and ensure that email trails have been removed.

### **External Communications.**

Councillors must ensure that in any verbal or written communication with any persons or other bodies they identify whether or not they are speaking in a personal or an official capacity, or behalf of a constituent, or on behalf of the Parish Council. They must not approach any organisation or individual for information or provide information that may give the impression that they are doing so on behalf of, or for, the Parish Council or its committees, unless expressly asked to do so by the Parish Council.

### **Code of Practice**

In all Parish Council communications, parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they present in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

All communications should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- present personal opinions as that of the council
- express any views which may have a Party political bias present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- present information that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- present any information that infringes copyright of others
- present any information that may be deemed libel
- do anything which may constitute bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- use offensive language or make inflammatory remarks relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

**Date adopted:** May 2022

**Date to be reviewed:** May 2023