



FOREST ROW PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1. Correspondence/Information to the Parish Council

1.1 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.

1.2 The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

1.3 No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party.

2. Councillor Correspondence to Other Agencies

2.1 All personal correspondence as a Parish Councillor to other agencies should make it clear that the views are the expression of the personal opinions of the writer and not necessarily those of the Parish Council.

2.2 A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Parish Council or one'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.

3. Communications with Parish Council Staff

3.1 Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (this would be two or more members sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the council and not an individual, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Council, committee or other meeting).

3.2 Telephone calls should be:

- kept to a minimum
- appropriate to the work of the Parish Council

3.3 Emails:

- emails should be kept to a minimum
- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk, reasons for urgency should be stated
- matters for information to the other councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk
- E-mails to other agencies should be copied to the Clerk
- Members should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so
- There will be a direct link to this email address from the Parish Council website
- Emails will be acknowledged within five working days
- Where possible a substantive answer will be provided in answer to correspondence within 28 working days or earlier if feasible. If it is not possible to answer within this time period, the individual will be informed why that is the case.

4. Meetings with the Clerk or other Officers:

4.1 An appointment may need to be made.

4.2 Meetings should be relevant to the work of the Council.

4.3 Members should be clear about the matters they wish to discuss.

5. Communications with the Press & Public

5.1 The Clerk will discuss all press reports, or comments to the media, with the appropriate Lead Councillor or Chairman.

5.2 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.

5.3 Unless a Councillor has been specifically 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.

5.4 Unless a Councillor is absolutely 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.

5.5 If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure.

6. Vexatious Conduct and Communication

6.1 The Parish Council's adopted definition of vexatious correspondence is "...correspondence that is, by nature, manifestly unjustified, inappropriate or improper" (adapted from the ICO, dealing with vexatious requests, section 14, page 6, FOI see: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-freedom-of-information/refusing-a-request/>).

6.2 It shall be for the Parish Clerk, where necessary in conjunction with the Chairman, to determine any correspondence as being "vexatious". The Clerk will use the indicators found in the above ICO document on pages 7 and 8 as a point of reference when considering email traffic that is potentially vexatious and take into account any legal or statutory obligations placed upon the Council to respond

6.3 If an individual is determined by the Clerk to have requested information vexatiously, then the Clerk shall issue the individual with a formal refusal notice in line with the Freedom of Information Act. If an individual is entering into more general vexatious correspondence with the Parish Council, then the Clerk shall notify them that their correspondence is considered vexatious and the Parish will not entertain any further correspondence with them on that issue

6.4 If an individual continues to engage with the Council on matters where the Clerk has already indicated they are acting vexatiously, or is repeatedly raising a range of issues with the Council that appear to have no serious purpose or value, then the Clerk may refer the matter to the next Parish Council meeting. The Parish Council can then determine whether any additional measures can and should be taken.

Policy due for review: May 2021
