
COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

It is essential that all communications are dealt with promptly, efficiently and positively. The Parish Council are very keen to hear parishioners' comments and are committed to ensuring comments/information contribute to continuous service improvement. Important information about areas of improvement can be obtained both from a single communication and from a pattern.

Parish Logo

Use of the Parish Logo is prohibited without the prior agreement of the Clerk.

Electronic Communication

The normal first point of contact for the Parish Council is the Parish Clerk. The Clerk's duties include the day to day running of events. All emails from outside the Parish Council should normally be addressed to the office: clerk@berryfieldspc.org this email address to be listed in all communications from the Parish Council, on website and letterhead.

Depending on their nature enquiries this will either be answered by the Clerk or a holding email will be sent and the email will be forwarded to the relevant Councillor(s). The Councillor will respond as soon as practicable and will send their response to the Clerk who will send it on their behalf from the Parish Council office.

If the Clerk believes that the matter should be referred to the full council, the correspondent will be advised that this needs to be discussed at the next Parish Council meeting and placed on the agenda.

Written Communications

All written communications should normally be received through the Office (Berryfields Parish Council's registered address). All responses to such communications should be made via the Office. If the Clerk believes that the matter should be referred to the full council, they will advise that this has to be discussed at the next Parish Council meeting and placed on the agenda.

When individual Councillors receive direct communications from Parishioners on any matter, which are within the remit of the Parish Council they should forward a copy to the Clerk or, in the case of verbal communications that require a response, ensure that the Clerk is informed.

In responding to any communications from Parishioners, Councillors should make it clear that they are giving their personal views unless it is a matter on which the Council already has agreed Policy.

No Councillor may commit the Council to any course of action which has not been discussed, agreed and minuted by a meeting of the Council.

Reports for the Council/Agenda Items

In the case that an individual Councillor wishes to send out a report prior to a Parish Meeting this should be sent via the Clerk. Agenda items are to be sent 7 working days prior to the meeting. This will then ensure that all information is correct and placed on the agenda. (Legal requirement is for three clear days' public notice for Council meetings and 5 clear days for Annual Council & Parish Meeting, good practice gives one week's notice if possible for all meetings). Reports are not required for all agenda items, i.e. normal updates.

Press & Media

The Parish Council may from time to time produce a Press Release on the basis of the Council's agreed policy or action. Any such Press Release must be agreed by the relevant Councillor, the Chairman, the Clerk, and where relevant the Council's legal advisor.

Press Releases will give details of who is to be contacted for further information; this will normally be the Clerk plus one or more Councillors.

Any other approach from the media must be referred to the Clerk. Ask the journalist or person calling their name and number and pass on to the Clerk. Give the Journalist the Clerk's contact details. The Clerk may then contact the relevant Councillor(s) for assistance in framing a response.

All agreed Press Releases will be circulated to Councillors for information prior to being submitted to the media.

Councillors are free to express personal views via letters to the press, comments on websites and via social media but in all cases should make it clear that they are expressing a personal view and not the policy of the Council.

Social Media

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication provides the Parish Council with the opportunity to communicate with people immediately, in real time and in a way which improves further the communications between the Council and residents, businesses and organisations it works with and serves.

The Council has a website, Facebook page, and uses email to communicate with residents and others. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.

The Council Facebook page aims to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the parish and promote the community in a positive way and all councillors and staff must have this aim in mind when posting information.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;

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- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information;
- If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Clerk to the Council or the administrators of the page;
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, it asks that the public adhere to the following guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.
- The site is not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, it will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. It should not include personal/private information in social media posts to the Council.

Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and it will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, it is expected that users make direct contact with the Council's Clerk and/or members of the Council by pressing the contact button on the Facebook page which is linked directly to the Council's 'contact us' page on its website, or by emailing the Clerk on clerk@berryfieldspc.org.

The Council retains the right to remove comments or content which includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements.
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be either to ignore, inform the sender of its policy or to send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given the limited resources available.

Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page.

The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

WhatsApp

Use of the mobile phone application WhatsApp has become more and more relevant, largely replacing texting as one of the most popular forms of communication and with the ease of sending photographs and images, this is a much more instant way of assisting to deliver the Council's services and facilities, albeit in a more informal way. All WhatsApp messages that require a formal decision or resolution are always backed up by emails and at Parish Council Committees (delegated powers) and Meetings.

WhatsApp also differs from other forms of social media such as Facebook or Twitter in that comments cannot be seen publicly. Instead, they can only be viewed by individuals who are part of a particular WhatsApp focus group. It can assist with checking on grounds maintenance work and street furniture and means a more speedy and efficient service delivery to our residents because this form of communication is shared more instantly.

All WhatsApp groups set up by the Parish Council comply with GDPR.

Document History

Approved and adopted	June 2021	(version 1)
Reviewed by Parish Council	September 2023	(version 1)