

Willingham Parish Council

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Introduction

Willingham Parish Council (the Council) is committed to regular and open communications. The Council welcomes opportunities to engage with the local community and the wider public via the press and online platforms. This document covers the Council's approach to communications and defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council for:

- Communications – channels and principles
- Press
- Website
- Social Media
- Filming and recording of meetings
- Emails
- Correspondence
- Document management

Policies in this paper have been drawn from national guidelines and best practice examples from other parish councils.

Communications – channels and principles.

1. The Council's communications will be open, honest and accessible.
2. The first point of contact for letters and emails to the Council is the Parish Clerk.
3. Publicity generated by the Council will be appropriate, lawful, cost effective, objective, and even-handed. All communications will have regard to equality and diversity and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.
4. The Council notice board will be used for the publication of agendas, minutes and other Council information. In addition, the Council will use other channels of communication available to it whenever possible. This includes use of the

Council website (www.willinghamparishcouncil.gov.uk), Facebook, Twitter, Council newsletters in the Willingham News and local newspapers.

5. Councillors will have their own opinions on issues. Whilst they can express those views and play an active part in local discussions, it is essential they do not *predetermine* a position or decision in advance of hearing all the relevant information or prior to relevant Council resolutions being made. Councillors must not make up their minds until they have heard any contrary views. It is important that Councillors can demonstrate that, whatever their individual views, they remain open for discussion and persuasion when the Council meets to consider matters and vote on resolutions.

Press

6. Press releases and resulting media coverage increase public awareness of the Council's activities.
7. Press releases to promote a decision or the work of the Council will be prepared and issued by the Parish Clerk or the Chair.
8. Enquiries from journalists should, whenever possible, be directed to the Parish Clerk or the Chair. Reactive press releases can be prepared and issued in response to a specific question or as a rebuttal to a published article. Such statements should be dealt with in a timely fashion.
9. The Clerk or Chair will base media responses on:
 - a. Adopted minutes and resolutions of the Council
 - b. Statements and/or media lines agreed/resolved by the Council
10. Statements and media responses must reflect the Council's opinion and any agreed '*tone of voice*' for communications.
11. Statements, written quotes and press releases issued on behalf of the Council must be circulated promptly to all Council members and the Clerk, with a brief update on the context of the press enquiry.
12. Individual members of the Council can contact the press, give interviews, write letters-to-editors or produce articles *as individuals*. However, unless they have authority from the Council they should not use the *Councillor* prefix with

their names and should make it clear at all times that the views they express are their own and do not necessarily represent the Council in any way. Individual members should consider the implications and context of media enquiries and the potential impact of publicity on the Council's legal responsibilities or activities.

13. Members must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct when dealing with the media.
14. The Council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information under the Freedom of Information Act and will comply with requests for information.
15. Journalists are welcome and are encouraged to attend Council meetings (including committee meetings) and are entitled to receive agendas, reports and minutes on request.
16. The Council will not quote any Councillor in a news release or involve them in proactive publicity events during an election period.

Digital Communications

We understand that not all residents will have access to digital and social media channels such as the website and emails, whether by choice, cost, competence or accessibility. Traditional methods of communication – noticeboards and articles in the Willingham News will form a significant part of our communications.

Website

17. We will aim to update the Council's website regularly. The site will include
 - a. Agendas and minutes of all meetings
 - b. Forthcoming events, local news and useful information
 - c. Council's policies and procedures
 - d. Useful links
 - e. Information and contact details of Councillors and the Clerk.
18. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative, respectful and accurate.

Social media

Parish Councillors will not engage in public communication via websites/Facebook/Twitter etc on behalf of the Parish Council

The Parish Council will not respond to enquiries or comments made via social media. If residents wish to raise an issue with the Parish Council, they should communicate directly through the Parish Clerk as outlined under Correspondence below.

- 19.** When using Social media, it must be made clear that Councillors are posting as individuals.
- 20.** Social media content should be objective, balanced, informative, respectful and accurate.

Emails

- 21.** The status of emails:
 - a.** Email is regularly used for the management and administration of the business of the Council.
 - b.** Emails should be regarded as having the same legal status as hard-copy written documents for the purposes of production, use, retention and disclosure. They are not to be treated as different from paper documents.
 - c.** In common with printed forms of communication, email messages cannot be guaranteed to be private and secure:
- 22.** Production and use of emails:
 - a.** Councillors must use their council email address for all Council related correspondence and not for personal emails.
 - b.** All Council business emails must be copied into the Clerk unless confidentiality relating, for example, to staff issues applies.
 - c.** Councillors should use personal and professional courtesy and consideration in emails, respecting others and complying with Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct
 - d.** Emails should be open and straightforward – for instance, writers should make it clear when the contents of an email should be treated as confidential

- e. If offended by the content or tone of an incoming message Councillors should seek a second opinion to check out their interpretation and make sure their response is objective.
- f. Councillors should always respect the privacy of others, remembering that e-mail can be just as intrusive as unsolicited phone calls or letters.
- g. Councillors should respect the confidentiality of information encountered inadvertently in e-mails or other records.
- h. Councillors should check with the sender if there is any doubt about the authenticity of a message.
- i. Councillors should avoid the use of jargon which might be misunderstood or unknown to the receiver.
- j. Members should take care not to give the impression in emails that they represent the Council (unless authorised to do so).
- k. Councillors and staff must ensure that critical Parish Council information is not stored solely within the email system.
- l. Email users must take all necessary precautions against the introduction of viruses into the system.
- m. All Councillors and staff must adhere to the Council's Information Technology policy adopted in November 2025

Filming and Recording of Meetings

23. The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 makes provision for the filming of council meetings (including committees and sub-committees). Where filming or recording occurs, Councillors should be mindful of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, any potential infringements of copyright and, in the case of members of the public attending or invited to speak at meetings, individual rights to privacy.

Council Correspondence

24. All correspondence for the Council should be addressed to the Clerk, who is the first point of contact for the Council. Communication ideally should be in written form, either by email or letter.
25. The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

26. All official Council correspondence should be sent by the Clerk.
27. All correspondence to the Parish Clerk will be acknowledged within seven working days of receipt, unless the Clerk is on annual leave. If email is used, then an acknowledgment will be sent by email.
28. If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a Parish Council meeting, then the Parish Clerk will have to be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda. All correspondence and communication/documents must be received by the Parish Clerk a minimum of 36 hours prior to a meeting.
29. The Parish Council will determine the response, if any is required, to correspondence received. The Parish Council reserves the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Parish Clerk's time. Correspondents will be informed that the matter will not be pursued, and the reason given why.
30. The Clerk sends out the Council's correspondence to other bodies. Should it become appropriate or necessary for a Councillor to issue correspondence in his/or her own name, this must be authorised by the Council and the correspondence must make it clear that it is being written in an official capacity and has been authorised by the Council.

Adopted at meeting of Willingham Parish Council held on 18th May 2021



Mandy Powell
Parish Clerk