

# Swynnerton Parish Council - Communications Policy

## Aim

The aim of this Policy is to state the requirements of, and provide guidance for, all the internal and external communications of Swynnerton Parish Council (the "Council"). This includes, but is not limited to, communications between Councillors, the Clerk, employees, suppliers, contractors, external organisations, the Press and public.

## Parish Council Correspondence

- The point of contact for the Council is the Clerk - correspondence for the Council should be addressed or forwarded to the Clerk.
- All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper and/or sent from the Council's .gov.uk email .
- No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party.
- Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/ documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- Miscommunication risks should be mitigated by seeking approval for significant communications.
- All internal and external correspondence is subject to Freedom of Information requests and should follow the Council's Code of Conduct.
- Confidential information must remain protected, and GDPR requirements must be observed.

## Communicating with the Public

- The Parish Council values open communication with members of the public and aims to respond courteously and promptly to enquiries.
- All official communications with the public should be clear, factual, and professional.
- Councillors and staff should only convey the Council's agreed position, avoiding personal opinions or speculation.
- For clarity, significant public communications should be provided in writing and formally approved by the Council.
- When engaging with the public informally (e.g., at events or casual meetings), Councillors must ensure they do not misrepresent the Council's views or commit the Council to any actions without proper authority. Actions can only be agreed at Council meetings.
- Anonymous enquiries or correspondence may not be acknowledged or responded to, except in exceptional circumstances approved by the Clerk.
- Any complaints from the press or a member of public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a council agenda item.
- The Clerk manages the Council's official website and social media accounts, ensuring compliance with legal and professional standards.

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- Social media posts by the Council are limited to factual, up-to-date information. Responses may be monitored and removed if deemed inappropriate.
- Councillors and staff may maintain personal online presences but must not imply Council representation or use official titles in personal posts.

## Communications with the Press

- The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the press, with the Chair of the council or relevant committee.
- 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.
- Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the press 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.
- 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.

## Personal Communications

- Councillors and staff must not use their official titles in personal communications.
- Personal views on Council decisions or actions should not be expressed publicly in a way that misrepresents or conflicts with the Council's stance.
- To mitigate a risk of misunderstanding of misrepresentation, Councillors must make clear when they are communicating 'not as a councillor' or 'as a councillor'

## Councillor Correspondence to external parties

- Wherever possible, the Clerk should send all council correspondence.
- Councillors should recognise that the views they express must be those of the Council and not their own in correspondence concerning Council business.
- If a councillor is required to correspond with external parties, they must:
  - Make clear that it is written in their official capacity
  - Express the views of the Council as agreed with the Council
  - Be authorised or delegated to do so by the Council.
  - Use professional and courteous language and ensure correspondence is factually accurate.
- A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Clerk and the recipient made aware that the Clerk has been advised.
- The Clerk will keep a copy of all letters. Letters will be scanned and stored electronically where possible.

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## Communications with Parish Council Employees or Contractors

- No individual Councillor may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee or contractor which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- Councillors must not give instructions to any employee or contractor, unless authorised to do so and with appropriate delegated powers from the Council.

## Electronic communications

- Electronic communications, such as e-mails, are subject to the same requirements as a letter or telephone call.
- Emails relating to Council business may be subject to Freedom of Information requests.
- Dedicated Council email addresses should be used for all correspondence to ensure transparency and compliance with Freedom of Information laws. Personal email addresses should be avoided as accounts will be subject to legal scrutiny.
- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk. Reasons for urgency should be stated.
- Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk.
- Emails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk.
- The Clerk will retain a record of e-mails of significance.

## Persistent Correspondence – Individuals and Groups

- The Council may limit responses to repeated or vexatious correspondence, particularly if it becomes abusive or places undue strain on resources.
- Decisions to limit correspondence must be formally resolved by the Council, with individuals informed of the decision and provided with a right to appeal.
- Correspondence from groups lacking clear official representation (e.g., without a signature from a secretary or chairman) may not be acknowledged.
- Groups will be informed if the Council decides not to respond further to their communications.

This policy was adopted at the Parish Council meeting on [ ] 2025

Date of next review: September 2027