



## **COMMUNICATION POLICY**

### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to define what will be undertaken to communicate with parishioners and media. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations, rather to provide guidance on finding out about the actions of your parish council.

References to “council” should be read as Witheridge Parish Council in this document; the council’s website address is [www.witheridgepc.org](http://www.witheridgepc.org).

### **2. Approach**

The council is accountable to parishioners for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications using the council’s limited resources to maximum effectiveness.

To achieve this:-

- 2.1.** A schedule of council meetings will be available on the council website, together with agendas published 3 clear days prior to any given meeting again on the council website and council noticeboards.
- 2.2.** All council meetings are open to parishioners and media to attend with the exception being during discussions of regulated confidential matters usually restricted to staffing matters and contractual arrangements arising.
- 2.3.** There will be an opportunity for those attending council to ask questions.
- 2.4.** All council draft minutes will be usually be published within two weeks of a given meeting on the council’s website with a printed copy made available on the main parish noticeboard in The Square Witheridge.
- 2.5.** All council policies will be available on the council website.
- 2.6.** All council provided services will be detailed on the council website.
- 2.7.** When significant parish matters arise from time to time updates will be provided on the council website.
- 2.8.** When deemed appropriate links from the Witheridge Parish Council Facebook account maybe used to signpost information.

### **3. Contact With The Media**

- 3.1.** The Councillors and clerk should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the council in all their dealings with the media. Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and determine appropriate action to be taken.
- 3.2.** When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the council’s solicitor before any response is made.
- 3.3.** There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Members and clerk that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number; disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision.



**COMMUNICATION POLICY**

- 3.4.** In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the clerk or in their absence the Chairman before any response is made to the media.
- 3.5.** All formal requests for comment regarding council policy on any matter should be directed to the clerk in the first instance. If unavailable, the Chairman should be contacted.
- 3.6.** When responding to approaches from the media, the Chairman or clerk are authorised to make contact with the media. All responses to the press should be drafted by the Chairman with the assistance of the clerk for accuracy regarding council current policy on the matter being responded to and its lawfulness.
- 3.7.** Responses drafted on any matter may however be directed to another councillor with the assistance of the clerk and others for accuracy and lawfulness. In this instance the Chairman should be made fully aware of the response and agree to its contents.
- 3.8.** Statements made by the Chairman and the clerk should reflect the council's opinion. If council does not have an official position on the matter raised, this should be stated as council's current position.
- 3.9.** Other Councillors can communicate with the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the council. Councillors are at liberty to communicate with the press in their own right as representatives of their parish. However, they must always maintain that they speak as individuals and not on behalf of council and comply with the Code of Conduct.
- 3.10.** There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the council office.

Action	Minute Reference
Adopted:	
Amended:	