

## EARNLEY PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATION POLICY

### Introduction

Effective communication is important to achieve and maintain a positive relationship with your community and an essential feature of good governance.

### A. Parish Council Correspondence

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.

- i. The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- ii. 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. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- iii. All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the council using Council letter headed paper.
- iv. Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to xx).
- v. When a letter or email is received the clerk will action it in one of the following ways:
  - If it is a routine enquiry about a task the Clerk is delegated to deal with without consulting the Council (see scheme of delegation) the clerk will acknowledge receipt of the correspondence, deal with the query and notify the sender within 14 days as to what action has been taken.
  - If a letter or email is received about an issue which is not one of tasks delegated to the Clerk, the Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the correspondence and will notify the sender of the date of the meeting when it will be discussed. The correspondence will be forwarded to all parish councillors. The sender will be invited to attend the open forum at the start of the meeting to discuss his/her query with the Council and to stay for the meeting to hear the Council's discussion. Any decision made at the meeting will be included in the minutes which will be published on the Council's website.
  - The Council will not respond to vexatious, abusive or threatening letters or emails
  - Any letters or emails sent to individual councillors will be forwarded to the Clerk to be included on the next agenda.

### B. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

In accordance with Paragraph (1)(4)(a) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, agendas will be published no later than 3 clear days before a meeting (this excludes

the day of publication and the day of the meeting - Saturdays are included within this calculation).

Agenda should be clear and concise. They should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.

- (ii) Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.
- (iii) Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

### **C. Communications with the Press and Public**

If the Clerk or Councillor is contacted by the Press this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted Media Relations Protocol.

Unless a Councillor has been 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.

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.

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

### **D. Councillor Correspondence to external parties**

- (i) As the Clerk should be sending most of the council's correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies, it needs to be made clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Parish Council.
- (ii) A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor'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.

### **E. Communications with Parish Council Staff**

- (i) Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the council).
- (ii) No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chair of the Council, the Chair of a Committee or other meeting, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- (iii) Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.
- (iv) E-mails:

- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;
  - Information for Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;
  - E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk;
  - Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
- (v) Meetings with the Clerk or other officers:
- Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
  - Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;
  - Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

#### **F. The Parish Notice Board**

Earnley Parish Council has three notice boards (location plan attached), the notice boards should display:

- The full title of the parish council;
- The name, address, telephone number and email address of the clerk;
- The council's website address;
- A list of Members of the council with contact details (telephone number, email) and their political group, if this is relevant locally;
- Venues, dates and times of meetings for the year;
- Agenda for forthcoming meetings;
- If practicable, minutes of meetings or a summary of recent decisions and;
- Where the minutes, the code of conduct and other public documents may be inspected.

It is essential that the Clerk ensures the notice boards are kept up to date and notices replaced regularly.

#### **G. Council Newsletters**

Earnley Parish Council will produce a minimum of two newsletters per year as an effective way of keeping in touch with the community.

#### **H. Website**

It is essential that the website is kept up to date on a regular basis and that older documents are archived.

#### **I. Social Media**

Social Media includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Blogs and various discussion forums
- LinkedIn

Earnley Parish Council does not currently subscribe to any social media accounts as a corporate body. Councillors must ensure that when making a comment on their personal social media accounts that they make it clear that they are posting as an individual and not in their capacity as a Councillor, you are still a councillor.

**J. Filming of Council Meetings**

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 makes provision for the filming of Local Council meetings (or a committee or sub-committee of the Council).

If a Council meeting is filmed by a member of the press or public, or if the Council itself is filming the meeting this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted filming, videoing, photographing, audio recording and broadcasting at Council meeting policy.

- Think image - ensure the meeting demonstrates that the Parish Council is an effective decision making group and demonstrates its worth to the electorates and the public
- Standing Orders - when members of the public are invited to speak - does the member of the public want to be filmed?
- Think copyright - is there anything to be shown which infringes copyright?
- Think advertising - is there anything on show which could be perceived as advertising or demonstrating a preference?

Signed K. Marting Chairman Earnley Parish Council

Dated 24<sup>th</sup> November 2016 Minute Number 121.16(4)

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