

Beaworthy Parish Council

Communications Policy

Beaworthy Parish Council (BPC) articulates and represents the views and needs of the local community. It provides information on important parish matters affecting the community and encourages comment from interested individuals and groups.

The overall aim is to make Council communications a two-way process: to give people the information to understand accurately what BPC does, whilst also enabling BPC to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

The principles of these Guidelines apply to Parish Councillors and the Clerk to BPC. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.

Methods of Communication

The Council will use a variety of methods of communication based on what reaches its intended audience most effectively and efficiently. Over 80% of the population generally use electronic communication now (Office for National Statistics), so this is the Council's preferred and primary method of communication. However, we recognise that not all people are able to, or wish to use electronic methods of communication, so we will continue to utilise different media and approaches in order to reach our communities, including notice boards at St Albans Church and the new Village Hall.

Who is Communicating?

The **Parish Clerk** has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies.

The Parish Clerk is provided with a council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business. The Clerk's duties require both oral and written communication with the community. These communications need to be conducted with courtesy and professionalism at all times.

Elected members will be approached by members of the community as part of their role.

- a) How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Councillors will reflect on BPC. Enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter or email.
- b) When in doubt about how to respond to an enquiry, the guidance of the Parish Clerk will be sought.
- c) Councillors should avoid making any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to say they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to BPC or its responsibilities.
- d) Depending on the issue, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:
 - give factual information and refer the member of the public to the relevant minutes on the Parish website.
 - refer the matter to the Parish Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate.

- request, through the Parish Clerk, that an item is placed on a relevant agenda.
 - investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Parish Clerk, including the wording of any response.
- e) Councillors must ensure that all communication with the public on council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of BPC regardless of the councillor's individual views on any subject.
- f) The content of the Council's website is managed by the Clerk. However, it is the responsibility of all Councillors to check it regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and inform the Clerk if issues arise.

Councillor Correspondence to Other Agencies

- a) If expressing personal views in their private capacity, Councillors are not permitted to use their title "Councillor" and staff are not permitted to use their job title. This would imply that you are stating Council policy.
- b) A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Parish Council or one'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.
- c) Councillors and Staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law.
- d) Councillors must act with integrity and observe the Members' Code of Conduct at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.

Communications with Parish Council Staff

- a) Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (this would be two or more members sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the council and not an individual, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Council, committee or other meeting).
- b) E-mails to other agencies should be copied to the Clerk
- c) Members should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so

Correspondence/Information to the Parish Council

- a) 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.
- b) The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- c) 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.

Vexatious Conduct and Communication

- a) The Parish Council's adopted definition of vexatious correspondence is "...correspondence that is, by nature, manifestly unjustified, inappropriate or improper" (adapted from the ICO, dealing with vexatious requests, section 14, page 6, FOI see: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-freedom-of-information/refusing-a-request/>).
- b) It shall be for the Parish Clerk, where necessary in conjunction with the Chairman, to determine any individual correspondence as being "vexatious". The Clerk will use the indicators found in the above ICO document on pages 7 and 8 as a point of reference when considering email traffic that is potentially vexatious and consider any legal or statutory obligations placed upon the Council to respond.
- c) If an individual is determined by the Clerk to have requested information vexatiously, then the Clerk shall issue the individual with a formal refusal notice in line with the Freedom of Information Act. If an individual is entering into more general vexatious correspondence with the Parish Council, then the Clerk shall notify them that their correspondence is considered vexatious, and the Parish will not entertain any further correspondence with them on that issue
- d) If an individual continues to engage with the Council on matters where the Clerk has already indicated they are acting vexatiously or is repeatedly raising a range of issues with the Council that appear to have no serious purpose or value, then the Clerk may refer the matter to the next Parish Council meeting. The Parish Council can then determine whether any additional measures can and should be taken.

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