

## Communications Policy

Bierton Parish Council aims to deal with all communications promptly, efficiently and positively. The council are very keen to hear parishioners' comments and are committed to ensuring that comments, views and information received contribute to continuous service improvement.

Important information about areas of improvement can be obtained both from a single communication and from a pattern. This information will be fed into the council's decision-making process wherever possible.

### **Electronic Communication**

The Parish Clerk is responsible for all communications from the Parish Council.

Depending on their nature, enquiries will either be answered by the Clerk or a holding email will be sent and the email will be forwarded to the relevant staff member or Councillor. The Councillor will send their response with a copy to the Clerk.

If the Clerk believes that the matter should be referred to the full Council, the correspondent will be advised that this needs to be discussed at the next Parish Council meeting and placed on the agenda.

### **Written Communications**

Written communications should normally be received through the office. All responses to such communications should be made via the office. If the Clerk believes that the matter should be referred to full Council, they will put it on the next full Council meeting agenda for discussion.

When individual Councillors receive direct communications from parishioners on any matter, which are within the remit of the Parish Council, they should forward a copy to the Clerk or, in the case of verbal communications that require a response, ensure that the Clerk is informed.

In responding to any communications from parishioners, Councillors should make it clear that they are giving their personal views unless it is a matter on which the Council already has an agreed policy.

No Councillor may commit the council to any course of action which has not been discussed, agreed and minuted by a meeting of the Council.

# Bierton Parish Council

## **Council Communications with Members**

Most communications to and from members should be via their official Council email address using an agreed email signature. Personal email addresses are not to be used.

Where there is an immediate need to speak to someone, from officer to member or member to officer, a phone call may be more appropriate.

## **Correspondence with External Parties**

Except where the Council has asked the Chair or other Councillor to send a letter, the Parish Clerk is responsible for sending all correspondence from the Council to other bodies. Correspondence is generally requested or authorised by the Parish Council. The Parish Clerk and/or the Chair will also send correspondence on operational or other matters. Individual members should not communicate with another body, statutory, voluntary or commercial organisation, other than in a personal capacity unless otherwise agreed.

## **Reports for the Council/Agenda Items**

In the case that an individual Councillor wishes to send out a report prior to a meeting this should be sent via the Clerk. Agenda items should be sent 7 working days before the meeting.

This will ensure that all information is correct and placed on the agenda. (Legal requirement is for three clear days' public notice for Council meetings and five clear days for Annual Council & Parish meetings. Good practice gives one week's notice if possible for all meetings). Reports are not required for all agenda items, i.e. normal updates.

## **Working with the Press**

The Parish Council may from time to time produce a press release based on the Council's agreed policy or action. Any such press release must be agreed by the relevant Councillor, the Chair, the Clerk, and where relevant the Council's legal advisor.

Press releases will give details of who is to be contacted for further information; this will normally be the Clerk plus one or more Councillors.

Any other approach from the media must be referred to the Clerk. Ask the journalist or person calling their name and number and pass it on to the Clerk. Give the journalist the Clerk's contact details. The Clerk may then contact the relevant Councillor(s) for assistance in framing a response.

All agreed press releases will be circulated to Councillors for information before being submitted to the media.

Councillors are free to express personal views via letters to the press, but in all cases should make it clear that they are expressing a personal view and not the policy of the Council.

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## **Social Media**

Councillors are personally responsible for the content they publish on social media. It is recommended that Councillors comply with the code of conduct, in particular, the Nolan Principles and remain mindful of the impact that an individual Councillor's conduct can have both a positive and negative effect, on the Council.

A parish Councillor who has their own social media accounts, whilst free to express their views, should use them with caution. It must be made clear that Councillors' opinions are their own and not those of the Parish Council.

Councillors should note that under a Freedom of Information request all correspondence including mobile phone messages, WhatsApp and any personal email would need to be disclosed which would involve an enormous amount of work and intrusion into Councillors' private accounts.