**Hale Parish Council**

**Communications policy and procedure**

1. **Policy**

This communications policy applies to all communication activity relating to Hale Parish Council. The purpose of this policy is to offer clear guidance on how to deal with communication.  The policy will be published on the website so that those writing to the Council know how their correspondence will be dealt with.

1. **General**
   1. 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.
   2. All correspondence following a meeting of the Council will be sent by the Clerk unless otherwise agreed.
   3. It is the Clerk’s responsibility to forward all relevant correspondence to members. The Clerk will make a professional decision not to circulate some items of correspondence such as marketing items, irrelevant information or emails which require re-direction to other bodies.
   4. Correspondence addressed to the Parish Council will be considered to be ‘in the public domain’ and will not be considered confidential unless clearly marked so or of a personal nature. The Clerk will have discretion on how to deal with correspondence labelled confidential. Anonymous communication will be disregarded but a copy will be kept and may be referred to the police if malicious. It will be discussed with the Chairman but will remain confidential and not disclosable.
2. **Procedure for consideration of correspondence at meetings**
   1. Correspondence received prior to the agenda deadline (ten days prior to the Parish Council Meeting) will be catalogued and presented to the Council with the Agenda and paperwork for the meeting if it requires a response by the Council. Any correspondence received after that date, unless of an urgent nature or planning, licensing or tree works, cannot be included on the agenda and will be considered the following month.
3. **Written and oral communication protocol**
   1. The Chairman will be the public representative of the Council with the role of communicating with the public and other bodies and promoting the role and work of the Council and its policies.
   2. The Chairman will respond to external events and media enquiries where the policy of the Council is clear.  Any activity will be copied to the Clerk and will be recorded as media activities on the Clerk’s report.
   3. The Clerk has sole responsibility for all communication of a legal or financial nature. All questions regarding legal or financial matters must be directed to the Clerk in the first instance.
   4. Only if another member of the Council has been authorised may they communicate on behalf of the Parish Council, copied to the Clerk. They must make it clear that they are acting on behalf of the Parish Council and may sign off the communication “on behalf of Hale Parish Council”.
   5. Councillors are not permitted to misrepresent the position and views of the Parish Council. 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.  As all Councillors have been appointed on a non-party political basis the title of “Councillor” should not be used by any member to support publicly a particular political party.
   6. Councillors must copy the Clerk into any correspondence relating to Council business and relevant items will be included on the Clerk’s report. Should correspondence relate to a working group the whole group should be copied in to avoid duplication.
   7. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should immediately be referred to the Clerk.
4. **Electronic communication** 
   1. Councillors should be mindful of the fact that all communications on council matters are subject to 'right of access' within the Freedom of Information Act (2000).
   2. Councillors must use their Parish Council email account when acting in their capacity as a Councillor and all email communication must be copied to the Clerk. Any communication must follow the principles set out in the Code of Conduct in particular to show respect to others. When using email or other electronic communication systems councillors will refrain from using intimidating practice (such as use of capitals).
   3. If Councillors complete online forms when acting in their capacity as a Councillor, the Parish Council email account must be used and the Clerk advised that the form has been completed.
   4. Electronic mail sent from personal email addresses may still require disclosure.
   5. Councillors will not forward Council emails to third parties without authority or legitimate reason, endorsed by the council.
   6. Councillors and the Clerk must take care to ensure that confidential information is not disclosed so as to place the Council at risk of breach of confidentiality.
   7. Confidential information includes email addresses, therefore group emails to the public should be blind copied unless permission has been given.
   8. Councillors may discuss Council business via email and must be mindful that communications are in the public domain. Councillors are free to obtain information and exchange views on a particular issue, provided that they do not use improper influence to affect the outcome of a decision. Pre-meeting communication is not a substitute for considering a matter at a formal meeting.
   9. The Clerk and the Standards Committee will oversee compliance, enquire into any alleged breaches and make recommendations to the full council.
5. **Additional information**

For further information, please contact Amanda Johnson, Clerk and Proper Officer.

1. **Next review date**

January 2023

1. **Amendment record**

Version 1: Initial Issue

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