

DATCHET PARISH COUNCIL



Communications Policy

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1. Purpose

This policy ensures that all communications by Datchet Parish Council are clear, consistent, transparent, and professional. It provides guidance on how councillors, staff, volunteers, residents, contractors, and external organisations are communicated with.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all forms of communication, including:

- Face-to-face interactions
- Written communications (letters, emails, reports)
- Digital communications (social media, website, newsletters)
- Detailed guidance on digital and media communications is provided in the Council's Social Media, Website, and Press Policy. All councillors, staff, and volunteers must adhere to that policy when using these channels.

3. Principles

All communications will be:

- Accurate – factual and up to date
- Transparent – clearly explaining Council activities and decisions
- Inclusive – accessible and understandable to all
- Professional – reflecting the Council's integrity and values
- Responsive – acknowledging and following up promptly

Complaints will be managed in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy.

Requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 will be handled in line with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance and the Council's Freedom of Information Policy.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Parish Clerk:** Oversees all official communications and ensures compliance with Council policies.
- **Councillors:** Communicate in accordance with Council decisions, avoid expressing personal opinions when representing the Council, and refer media or official enquiries to the Clerk.
- **Media Spokesperson:** Normally the Chair or the Clerk; responsible for issuing official statements.
- **Staff and Volunteers:** Must communicate professionally and in line with Council policies.



5. Day-to-Day Communications with Contractors and Service Providers

- Routine communications with contractors and service providers are managed by the Clerk and Council Staff.
- Lead Members should coordinate all communications with contractors through the Clerk and support the implementation of Council decisions.
- Any matter outside a Lead Member’s delegated authority must be referred to the Clerk or the full Council for resolution.
- As outlined in the Standing Orders – Lead Members Terms of Reference (Appendix B), Lead Members may coordinate communications within their remit, provided all correspondence complies with this policy and Standing Orders.
- Councillors must not contact contractors directly regarding Council business.
- The Clerk and office team will maintain records of all relevant communications and escalate any matters requiring Council approval or decision.

6. Communication with External Bodies (Government and Public Sector)

- All correspondence with external bodies — including local authorities, government agencies, service providers, and Members of Parliament — must be approved and authorised by the Council.
- Formal communications with MPs or government bodies must be approved by the Council and signed “on behalf of Datchet Parish Council.”
- All such correspondence must be routed through the Parish Clerk.
- Copies of communications with external bodies must be retained in Council records, and significant correspondence should be noted in Council minutes.

7. Public Communication

- Council meetings are open to the public, with agendas and minutes published on the Council website and agendas displayed on parish noticeboards.
- Residents’ queries should be acknowledged promptly and responded to courteously.
- Communications not covered by the Social Media, Website, and Press Policy should follow the principles set out in this document.
- The Clerk will aim to acknowledge letters and emails within **three working days** and to provide a full response within **Ten working days**. If these timescales cannot be met, an estimated response time will be provided.
- Complaints from the public will be handled in accordance with the Datchet Parish Council Complaints Policy.
- Requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act will be dealt with in line with ICO guidance and statutory timescales.

8. Communications with Parish Council Staff



- Councillors must not issue instructions to any member of staff unless authorised to do so — for example, when acting as part of a committee with delegated powers.
- No individual councillor, including the Chairman of the Council or of a committee, may give instructions to the Clerk or other employees that conflict with Council decisions or delegated authority.

Telephone calls should relate only to legitimate Council business.

Emails:

- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be clearly stated.
- Information for councillors should normally be distributed via the Clerk.
- Emails sent by councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk.
- Councillors should acknowledge receipt of emails when requested.

Meetings with the Clerk or Officers:

- Appointments should be arranged in advance whenever possible.
- Meetings should relate directly to the officer's area of work.
- Councillors should ensure the matter discussed is legitimate Council business, not personal or political in nature.

9. Confidentiality

- Some information — such as personnel matters, legal issues, or commercially sensitive data — may be confidential. Such information must not be shared publicly unless explicitly authorised by the Council.

10. Review

- This policy will be reviewed at least once every three years, or sooner if required by legislative changes or amendments to Council procedures.