

Colaton Raleigh Parish Council

Communications Policy

Adopted 8th March 2021

POLICY STATEMENT

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council regarding communications.

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.

The Clerk should deal with the correspondence and will ensure that information or direct enquiry is passed to Councillors as appropriate.

All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using letter headed paper making it clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the parish council.

No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a Committee, sub-Committee or Working Group. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have the right to obtain confidential information or documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.

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.

Where after discussion with the Clerk, Members wish to pursue an initiative on an unofficial/individual basis they are welcome to do so but should be mindful;

- a) The need to take care not to give the impression that the initiative has the support of or represents official Council Policy;
- b) The dangers of public or other partners or external bodies expectations;
- c) Publicity or media coverage which may reflect on the Parish Council.

Accordingly, Members should make it clear that they are acting in an unofficial/personal capacity.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Clerk will discuss press reports, or comments to the media with appropriate Councillors or the Chairman. If the Chairman is absent the report or comments will be discussed with the Vice Chairman.

Press reports from the Council, its Committees or Working Groups should be from the Clerk or an Officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

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 any views they express are personal and not necessarily those of the Council and ask that it be reported as such.

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. (The only clear way of being aware of the Council's view is if the matter has been discussed at a Parish Council meeting, and a decision made on their item.)

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.

Confidential matters, including items discussed at meetings where the press and public have been excluded, must not be divulged.

Members and the Clerk should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

EMAIL PROTOCOL

All Councillors are to be provided with a council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business.

Councillors emails and other communications should be considered as being in the public domain.

Emails from Councillors to external parties regarding Council business should be copied to the Clerk.

Emails received by the Clerk, or Members may be disclosed following a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or following a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998, under the General Data Protection Regulation or in the course of legal proceedings.

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE AND PROTOCOL

Aspects of the Members Code of Conduct apply as much to on-line activity as they do to other written or oral communication. On-line content should be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate.

The key to whether on-line activity is subject to the Code of Conduct is whether the Councillor is giving the impression that he/she is acting as a Councillor. It is the perception which counts. If the perception is that he/she is acting as a Councillor, the provisions of the Code of Conduct apply.

When responding to Social Media comments/statements 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 and not necessarily the view of the Council.

RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

These include but are not limited to:

Councillor Code of Conduct

Data Protection/Privacy

Freedom of Information

