

Communication Protocol

GREAT SHELFORD PARISH COUNCIL

ADOPTED: 21ST JULY 2021

Communication Protocol 2021

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1. Introduction and Scope

The purpose of this protocol is to define the roles and responsibilities within Great Shelford Parish Council (GSPC) regarding communication and provide guidelines.

GSPC 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 GSPC does, whilst also enabling GSPC to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to ensure efficient and effective communications between council members and with third parties. A separate policy on Social Media & Electronic Communication exists and should be considered in conjunction with this policy.

The principles of these guidelines apply to Parish Councillors, the Clerk to GSPC and all other staff. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.

2. Importance of Good Communication

Good communication will enable GSPC to:

- Better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities;
- Raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about issues, services and opportunities in the parish, the district and the region;
- Be an effective voice for the community;
- Maintain and enhance the reputation of GSPC; and
- Proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity GSPC or the parish.

3. Parish Council Correspondence

- a The Proper Officer, in this instance the Clerk, has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies. 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 or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the parish council, a committee or working group. In particular, Councillors and officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'

- d Most official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using council letterhead. For any correspondence not sent by the Clerk, they must be provided with a copy.
- e 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 (e.g. copy to []).
- f Council letterhead must only be used to convey information that has been authorised by GSPC and must not be used to convey personal views. Council letterhead is used by the Clerk and authorised staff in the day to day running of the parish council and its interests.

4. Agenda Items for Council, Committee and Working Group Meetings

- a Agendas will be clear and concise. They will contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for members of the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
- b Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.
- c Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for 'information only', this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

5. Communications with Press and Public

- a The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chairman of the Council or the Chairman of the relevant committee.
- b Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- c Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked to comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.
- d Unless a Councillor is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing their personal view.
- e If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure.
- f Confidential matters, including items discussed at meetings where the press and public have been excluded, must not be divulged.

6. Councillor Correspondence to External Parties

- a Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Councillors will reflect on GSPC and these enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter or email. If in doubt how to responde, seek guidance from the Clerk.
- b Councillors should not make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other to say they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to GSPC. Depending on the issue it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:
 - Refer the matter to the Clerk who will deal with it as appropriate
 - Request an item on a relevant agenda; or
 - Investigate the matter personally, having sought guidance from the Clerk.
- c As the Clerk should be sending out most of the Council's correspondence from a Council to other bodies, it needs to be made clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Parish Council.
- d Councillors have been provided with Council email addresses which must be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business.
- e A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Clerk, and it should be noted on the correspondence, e.g. 'copy to the Clerk' so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

7. Communications with Parish Council Staff

- a Councillors must not give any instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a Committee with delegated powers from the Council).
- b No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Council, the Chairman of a Committee or other meeting, may give instructions to the Clerk or another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- c Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work fo the parish council.
- d Emails:
 - Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;
 - Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;
 - Emails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk;
 - Councillors should acknowledge their emails when requested to do so.

- e Meetings with the Clerk or other Officers:
 - Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
 - Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;
 - Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

8. Data Protection

- a Correspondence including emails, received by the Proper Officer, staff or Councillors may be disclosed following a request under Freedom of Information Act 2000 or following Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act 1998, under the General Data Protection Regulation or in the course of legal proceedings.
- b Please see GSPC's relevant Data Protection policies for further information.

Document History

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