



Communications Policy v4 Draft

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Parish Council's Communications Protocol, where the respondent is responding on behalf of the whole Parish Council, is to set out and give guidance on, the standard procedures for dealing with all communications to and from the Parish Council to outside persons (including correspondence, e-mails and social media).
- 1.2 It is the duty of the Clerk to keep all councillors fully informed about communications from the public, Milton Keynes Council and other authorities and agencies.

2. Communication with the Parish Council

- 2.1 The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Parish Clerk.
- 2.2 The Parish Clerk should deal with all correspondence as directed by council following a meeting.
- 2.3 No individual Councillor or member of staff should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a committee, subcommittee or working party.
- 2.4 All communications should be logged, date stamped with date of receipt when not automatic and dealt with within a specified timescale, as agreed by council.
 - 2.4.1 Communications must be acknowledged within three working days.
 - 2.4.2 A full reply must be sent within a maximum of ten working days, or a communication sent explaining why this is not possible.
 - 2.4.3 Communication for individual councillors received by the office, should be informed to them within one working day.

3. Agenda Items for Committee Meetings

- 3.1 Agenda items should be clear and concise and follow an agreed format. They should contain sufficient information for members and the public to understand what is to be discussed and/or decided.
- 3.2 Items for information should be kept to a minimum on council agendas.
- 3.3 Where members wish fellow members to receive matters for "information only", this information may be circulated via the Parish Clerk.
- 3.4 Councillors are free to exchange information, ideas and drafts of documents by email when this assists the work of the council but information significantly influencing the decision should be restated at the meeting.

4. Communications with the Press and Public

- 4.1 Press reports and comments from the council and committees should be issued by the Parish Clerk, the Chair or the Vice Chair or a member nominated by the Chair or Vice Chair, or by a reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- 4.2 Members who are asked for comment by the press or members of the public should ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.
- 4.3 If Members receive a complaint about the council, this should be presented to the Parish Clerk in written format, to be dealt with under the complaints procedure. An e-mail to a member of staff counts as written for this purpose.

5. Handling Casework

- 5.1 All casework should be logged in a correspondence file and a summary report of the types and numbers of issues raised reported to Councillors each month.

The clerk should ensure that a response, even if a holding response, goes back to the resident within 10 days as per the Communications Policy.

- 5.2 Requests for a parish service

- Refer to the clerk. At present, copy the lead Councillor for that service if there is one as per email redirection.
- That person to investigate, and discuss action with the clerk.
- If there is a problem at the residents' end, eg not providing necessary information, the lead person to engage with the resident informally to get the extra information, backed up formally by the clerk if necessary
- If there is a conflict of expectations and the service is operating as expected, then the Clerk to respond to the resident accordingly.
- If there is a problem with the carrying out of the service by staff or contractors, the Clerk to determine appropriate action and bring to Full Council or HR Committee if appropriate
- If there is an issue with the policy or specification of the service, the Clerk to discuss with the lead if there is one and the Chair whether to bring it to full Council at this stage or to keep it on the contract file for the next review point

- 5.3 Complaints about a service provided by another organisation

Parish Councillors receiving such complaints may wish to take up an individual complaint themselves, but should follow the following procedures if they wish to use Parish Council resources

- 5.3.1 Individual complaints or requests for a service provided by another organisation

- Refer to the city councillors to handle

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5.3.2 Multiple complaints from residents on the same type of non-parish-council issue or Individual complaints from residents about the representation by a city councillor

- Refer to the clerk who should request an explanation from the city councillor
- Assess the problem. Commonly:
 - o a misconception of the service that should be expected – request an explanation of what can be expected from the city councillor and/or check on the organisation website and pass it back to the resident. Direct them to the organisation concerned if they wish to contest it further.
 - o a failure of the organisation to provide the service as specified – discuss with the city councillors whether and what action from the Parish Council would be useful, and if appropriate take to Full Council
 - o a failure of the city councillor to represent the residents’ issues due to conflicting interests between residents – ask for an explanation that can be passed back to the resident and refer the resident to the city councillor if appropriate or take the issue to Full Council
 - o an unreasonable failure of a city councillor to represent the residents’ issues – refer the resident to the other city councillors for the ward. If that has already been done, then take the issue to Full Council
 - o a service gap that perhaps should be remedied – discuss realistic options and options for pressure with the city councillors and take to Full Council

Note: there is no requirement to follow the city Councillors’ advice. Just to use it to inform action.

5.4 Anonymous Casework

Casework sometimes comes in anonymously, so that no contact with the resident to check details etc. is possible. The following policy should be applied:

- if there is insufficient detail to enable the collection of evidence, then no action
- If there is sufficient detail to indicate that the problem is a misconception of reasonable expectations, then no action
- if there is sufficient detail to indicate that the problem is minor, then no action

But if there is sufficient detail to enable more investigation, and to indicate that the problem could be serious then:

- Email all councillors and the city councillors to ask if anyone already has more evidence on the problem and/or has already reported it
- If not, detail someone to check it and report back
- If it is a real, unreported, serious issue, then report it to the relevant authority with the evidence discovered, or agree with the city councillors that they will do so

6. Councillor Correspondence to Other Agencies

- 6.1 All personal correspondence from a councillor to other agencies should make it clear that the views are the expression of the personal opinions of the writer and not necessarily those of the Parish Council unless council has agreed otherwise.
- 6.2 It would be good practice if a copy of all outgoing correspondence from councillors relating to the Parish Council or one's role within it should be sent to the Parish Clerk.
- 6.3 Reports from councillors and staff attending outside bodies should be provided to the Parish Clerk to be circulated on regular basis to keep members informed of local issues.
- 6.4 Where decisions are required by councillors on outside bodies these should be put on a suitable agenda. If it is necessary to give an answer on the spot, the councillor should make it very clear that the opinion given is their personal opinion and may be contradicted by the Parish Council.

7. Communications with Parish Council Staff

- 7.1 Councillors, including the Chair must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so by council or a committee of council.
- 7.2 Telephone calls should be:
- Kept to a minimum, and
 - Appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.
- 7.3 Electronic communication and letters should be kept to a minimum, instant replies should not be expected from officers.
- 7.4 Meetings between councillors and the Parish Clerk or other officers should be relevant to the work of the Council, be clear about the matters they wish to discuss and where possible an appointment should be made but staff should acknowledge that the function of the council is to serve the public.

Change Control

Version	Nature of Update or Approval	Approved
1	In place and confirmed in May 2020	18-5-2020
2	Modified following Peninsula review in 2023	17-4-2023
3	Confirmed in May 2023	15-5-2023
4	Modified to include Casework handling	

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Review Frequency: Every 3 years **Review by:** May 2026

Other triggers: Change in the nature of our work attracting more controversy or public interest.