



Communications Policy

Introduction

This policy sets out a protocol for effective communication of Beetham Parish Council's ("the Council") activities and pertinent information to the media and members of the public. The policy is supported by the Council's Publication Scheme (On the website).

The Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to convey its decisions and actions through various media.

All communication will be conveyed in an open and straightforward manner.

The Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Council and is responsible for all formal communication between the Council, the press and members of the public.

Role of Parish Clerk in relation to communications

The Clerk is responsible for the preparation of notices of Council meetings, agendas (in consultation with the Chairman) and minutes.

The Clerk is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Council's website so that it remains current.

The Clerk will action all correspondence addressed to the Council.

The Clerk will email to Councillors between meetings any relevant information which he/she receives.

The Clerk will make available, to members of the public, Council information in accordance with the Council's Publications Scheme (on the website).

Communication Channels

Website

In accordance with The Smaller Authorities Transparency Code and to provide parishioners with a clear picture of its activities, the Council will publish information on its website. This information will include:

- Parish council meeting agendas and minutes
- All items of expenditure above £100
- End of year accounts
- Annual governance statement
- Internal audit report
- List of councillors and committee membership
- Details of public land and assets

Notice boards

The Council notice boards will display contact details for the parish clerk and Councillors, the agenda for the next meeting, any statutory notices and other items of interest. Due to limited noticeboard space, more comprehensive information is available on the Council website.



Newsletter

From time to time, the Council may wish to generate newsletters.

Writing of this material should be by the appointed parish councillor, the content of which must be approved by the whole council.

Meetings

During every parish council meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to raise a matter of concern or to comment on an item on the agenda. After the conclusion of the public speaking section however, members of the public are not permitted to contribute to further agenda items unless permission is granted by the Chairman.

Annual meeting of the Parish Council

This meeting will be held in May each year. It is in effect a normal parish council meeting except that the first item on the agenda must be 'the election of the chairman' followed by councillor responsibilities for the year.

Annual Parish Meeting

This is a meeting of the parish and not the parish council. Electors can contribute to the agenda, and these meetings can celebrate local activities and debate current issues in the community. Seven clear days' notice of the meeting will be given, and the meeting must be held between 1 March and 1 June each year.

Written Correspondence (Letter or email)

All correspondence to the parish council should be addressed to the Clerk. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the Council for their attention at the next meeting.

If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a parish council meeting, then the Clerk will have to be notified before the publication of the agenda. The Council will determine the response, if any, to correspondence received.

All official correspondence from the Council should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Beetham Parish Council. Correspondence from individual parish councillors should be avoided; however, there may be exceptional situations when it is appropriate for a parish councillor to issue correspondence in his / her own name; such correspondence must be authorised by the Council and copied to the Clerk.

Communication with the public

Councillors will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by councillors will reflect on the council. At no time should councillors make any promises to the



public about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter.

All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the parish council. Depending on the issue raised it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- Refer the matter to the Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- Request an item on a relevant agenda
- Investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Clerk

Unless a councillor is 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 that item. No individual councillor, nor the Chairman, can make a decision or respond on behalf of the parish council.

Internal communications

- E-mails should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the Council.
- Councillors should use their designated ...@beetham-pc.gov.uk email address for all Council communication.
- Matters for information to the other councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk.
- E-mails should be replied to in a timely manner, preferably 2 working days
- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk or Chairman, reasons for urgency should be stated.
- E-mails from Councillors to external parties (on Council matters) should be copied to the Clerk.
- Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
- The Clerk and Councillors are not required to send read receipt acknowledgements of emails.
- Telephone calls should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the parish council.

Social Media

Beetham Parish Council does not currently have a Twitter or Facebook account. Councillors may of course use social media for their personal life.

Councillors and Officers must not use their title of Councillor, Clerk etc. if they use social media nor give the impression that they are representing the views of the Council unless given a specific mandate by the parish council to do so.

Councillors should not publish information on behalf of the Council on social media unless authorised by the Council at a meeting. Only the designated councillor should post on behalf of the Council

Councillors should not refer to or include Councillor or Officer email addresses in any of their personal social media communication as this would give the impression that the content is on behalf of or approved by the parish council.



The Law

Councillors should be aware that comments at Council meetings and in the press and public domain are subject to the law, particularly in the areas of slander (spoken word) and libel (written word). Please note that social media channels are deemed to be in the public domain.

Basically, a councillor cannot voice or write anything that would defame another person because they are entitled to his / her reputation and good name. Communication of a matter which is untrue and likely to disparage substantially a person's reputation is, on the face of it, defamation.

Defamation is defined as the publication to another person of an oral or written statement which:

- Exposes a person to hatred, ridicule or contempt; or
- Causes him/her to be shunned or avoided; or
- Has the effect of lowering his/her reputation in the estimation of right-thinking members of the public generally; or
- Injures him / her in their office, profession or trade.

Also defaming a company or organisation can lead to legal action as the people connected to it will be defamed in turn i.e. if comment is made suggesting a company or organisation is acting illegally, then this implies illegal actions by the people connected to it.

There are other areas of the law to bear in mind such as copyright, data protection, official secrets, children, employment, and race relations.

Please note that all written material that we produce that is relevant to parish council business is subject to the Freedom of Information legislation. This means it can be requested by a member of the public and if the request is reasonable then it will be released into the public domain. (see BPC Freedom of Information Policy)

Approved: November 2025