



## **HADDENHAM PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

Resolved by Council February 2016

Reviewed August 2018

Reviewed: January 2021 & May 2021

Review date: May 2022

### **The aims of this policy**

Haddenham Parish Council recognises its overarching role at the heart of the community and values its unique position to be able to provide community leadership. An effective and professional communications strategy will be laid out in this document with the aims of setting a standard for engagement both within the Council and with its community. The Council recognises that the services it provides must reflect the needs of residents and the locality. As a Council, it wants to ensure that communication is two-way – telling people about the Council, and listening to what people say about the services they would like to see. It will set the framework by which Councillors communicate with each other as well as with the community. The Council is committed to providing open and transparent information about its business.

### **Legal requirements and restrictions**

This policy is subject to the Council's obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, The Local Government Act 1986, The Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and other legislation which may apply to the Council's Standing Orders and Finance Regulations. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council can not disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council's publication scheme.

## **The main principles for all forms of Communication**

The Parish Council will ensure that it communicates with residents in a timely and effective manner, and to inform and consult them about matters which affect the Parish.

All methods of communication should:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant
- be concise
- not disclose information which is confidential
- reflect the views of the Parish Council not the individual
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- not promote political parties
- not publicise personal information

## **Methods of communication that may be used by the Parish Council**

Parish Council meetings

The Parish Council Office

Noticeboard

Email including an update list for interested residents

Post

Telephone

Website

Newsletter

Social Media / Parish Council Blog

Public Meetings

## **Parish Council Meetings**

All Parish Council meetings are open to the press and public and under the council's standing orders time will be set aside at each meeting for public comment. Residents, local organisations, District Councillors, the local press and police will be encouraged to attend Parish Council meetings and bring to the Council any proposals or comments they may have. It is expected that all participants in the meeting will abide by the code of conduct. Where residents bring to the Parish Council significant issues or projects that require input from the Parish Council a working group may be established consisting of interested residents and Councillors which will report back to the relevant Committee.

On occasion the Council or a Committee may wish to exclude the public if the confidential nature of the business to be discussed means their presence at the meeting may be prejudicial to the public interest. Should this be necessary, a resolution will be taken at the Council Meeting prior to excluding the public stating the confidential nature of the business which will be recorded in the minutes.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings. The council will provide reasonable facilities to allow filming.

Intrusive lighting, use of flash photography and asking people to repeat clear statements for the purpose of recording is not permitted.

Oral reporting or oral commentary on a meeting while it is taking place is not permitted as this would disrupt the meeting.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible has given them permission.

Any persons present should have agreed to be filmed and any members of the public present who do not wish to be filmed should be offered seating out of range of the camera.

### **Parish Council Office – The role of the Clerk**

The Clerk forms a pivotal role as a communications link between the Parish Council and its stakeholders. It is therefore essential that all forms of correspondence must go via the Clerk with the minimum requirement of a copy to the Clerk. This will ensure that the Parish Council records are properly kept. The Clerk will provide a list of correspondence to each Committee or to the Parish Council as appropriate at the Parish Council meetings. The Clerk will respond where required to all correspondence within 5 working days, either with a full response or with details of when one of the Parish Council Committees will consider its response (the exception to this will be during periods of absence).

The Parish Council Office will be open two mornings a week for residents to call in and speak directly to the Clerk. At other times and if there is a matter requiring a longer discussion an appointment can be made to meet with the Clerk.

## **Notice board**

The Clerk will maintain an up to date noticeboard located on the Village Hall near to the Parish Council Office. Contact details for the Clerk and Parish Councillors, agendas for its meetings and other information relating to Parish Council business will be displayed.

## **Email**

The Parish Council email account is monitored by the Clerk during office hours. It is recognised that email is a fast and effective form of communication, especially when contacting several people with a single message. It avoids the costs of postage so should be used wherever possible to reduce these costs. However, it should not be considered a suitable replacement for face to face meetings or phone calls where issues may be dealt with in a much more effective manner.

In order to manage the proliferation of emails the following guidelines will be followed:

- The Clerk will decide on the appropriateness of forwarding emails sent to the Parish Council, this is most likely to be to the Chairs of the Committees in the first instance.
- Some emails which are of general information to the community will be forwarded to the writer of the Haddenham column in the Bucks Herald and to Haddenham.net in addition to the Councillors
- When responding to an external email the Clerk will include a copy to appropriate Councillors if it is relating to a matter in which they are involved. The Councillor would not be expected to respond to this other than directly to the Clerk.
- Councillors should not use the 'Reply All' option without forethought and should think about what is being said and if it is really is relevant to everyone on the distribution list.
- When forwarding emails caution should be exercised particularly if there is a long email chain involved. What information is being forwarded and to whom?
- It is not appropriate for draft documents circulated by email to be forwarded outside the Parish Council unless it is to an individual directly involved with the project.

## **Post**

All post is received by the Clerk who will ensure that it is opened promptly and dealt with in an appropriate manner.

## **Telephone**

The Parish Council office telephone will be answered during office hours by the Clerk who will be expected to deal in a professional manner with all incoming calls. An answer

machine is installed to receive messages when the Clerk is not available or the office is closed. The Clerk will check for messages each day and return calls promptly where a number has been left.

### **Website**

The Parish Council will maintain an up to date website which will include the following information:

- Details of Parish Council Meetings – Schedule, Agendas and Minutes
- Details of each Committee and its responsibilities
- Contact details for the Councillors and the Clerk.
- Finance Reports
- Details of any significant ongoing projects with up to date reports

The Council will nominate one of the Councillors to work with the Clerk to be responsible for maintaining the content of the website.

### **Newsletter**

The Parish Council will publish a quarterly newsletter the content of which will be determined by the Communications Committee and will include articles written by the Councillors and other local organisations. This will be part funded by the inclusion of advertising by local businesses.

### **Social Media**

The Parish Council may consider using social media sites on occasion where it feels this will benefit the public. The Clerk or a nominated Councillor will be responsible for posting anything relating to Parish Council business on social media sites once the content has been agreed with the relevant Committee. This forum will only be used for the dissemination of information and the Parish Council will not engage in online 'chat'. All correspondence with the Parish Council will be directed to the Clerk via email, phone or letter.

Any Parish Councillor who has their own social media accounts whilst free to express their views should use them with caution and always make it clear that their opinions are their own and not those of the Parish Council when commenting on issues relating to Haddenham or Parish Council business.

Social media may be used to

- Raise awareness of Parish Council decisions

- Advertise events and activities in which the Parish Council is involved
- Publicise important meetings such as public consultations
- Raise awareness of important local issues
- Advertise vacancies

The Clerk will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libellous nature.

Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook, Twitter)

### **Press**

The press are invited to attend all meetings of the Parish Council and will be provided with an agenda and minutes of previous meetings. The Clerk will be the main point of contact for the press and may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information or make a statement relating to its business. The Clerk will consult with the Chair, Vice-Chair or Chair of the relevant Committee regarding the content of any press release. It is important that all information shared with the press is accurate and represents to policies and views of the Parish Council. If a Councillor is interviewed the views expressed should be those of the Parish Council and the Council's code of conduct followed. Information of a confidential or slanderous nature must never be disclosed.

### **What Haddenham Parish Council asks its residents to do**

To actively review the notice boards and/or the parish council website and/or the local newspaper and/or the parish newsletter for information about meetings and events on a regular basis.

To recognise engagement opportunities and utilise them by responding to surveys, letters, questionnaires etc.

To address comments, suggestions or complaints in writing by letter; or by email; or by telephone, using contact information available on the Parish Council website and displayed on the village notice boards. Alternatively, to attend the monthly Parish Council meeting and make use of the public forum.