

BLUNDESTON & FLIXTON PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Blundeston & Flixton Parish Council (hereinafter referred to as “the Council”) regarding communications between the Council and members of the public or external bodies.

This policy is in addition to the Information Technology policy and covers correspondence in general. This policy does not specifically cover correspondence with the media, for which the Council’s Filming, Photographing and Media policy applies.

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

The importance of good communication

Good communications will enable the Council 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
- be an effective voice of the community
- maintain and enhance the reputation of the Council
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the image or integrity of the Council or the parish

Who communicates on behalf of the Council

Parish Clerk

The Parish Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies. All correspondence to the Council should be addressed to the Parish Clerk in the first instance - contact details are on the Council's website.

The Parish Clerk will be required to communicate both verbally and in writing on a regular basis with the community as part of their duties. Such communication should be handled with courtesy and professionalism at all times.

The Parish Clerk will endeavour to respond to correspondence within 7 working days but there may be times when this is not possible, for example if the matter has to be put to the Council for consideration, in which case the Parish Clerk will advise an appropriate timescale for a full response.

All official correspondence sent by the Parish Clerk in the name of the Council should make it clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorized by the Parish Council.

Councillors

Elected members may be approached directly 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. Enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter or email.

When in doubt about how to respond to an enquiry relating to the business of the Council, the guidance of the Parish Clerk must be sought.

At no time should Councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to say they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the Council. Depending on the issue, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- refer the matter to the Parish Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- request an item be placed on the agenda for the next Council meeting
- investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Parish Clerk
- advise as to the correct person to whom an enquiry should be made, eg East Suffolk Council, Suffolk County Council, police

Councillors must ensure that any communication with the public on council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of the Council regardless of the Councillor's individual views on any subject.

Council meetings and councillor interaction

The Council generally meets on the third Monday of every month, with a break in August and December when there will be no meetings subject to change for Bank Holidays and Christmas, and the exact dates are published on the Council's website at the start of each year. All meetings are held in the Village Hall and commence at 7.30pm.

The use of mobile phones is prohibited during meetings, for the avoidance of distraction and to ensure focus on the issues being discussed.

The Annual Meeting of the Council will be the May meeting when Councillors will elect the Chair and Vice-Chair for the forthcoming year. Reports will also be available from various local organisations at this meeting.

Agendas for each meeting will be published on the Council's website and placed on the village noticeboards. There is a 15-minute slot available for parishioner input. Parishioners are not allowed to comment outside of this period without the express approval of the Chairman.

Agendas should be clear and concise, and should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at the meeting.

Councillors must ensure they have read and understood any documents for discussion prior to the meeting in order that they can make an informed decision or identify any additional information that is required for them to do so.

Communications between councillors regarding agenda items should have regard to the potential issue of pre-determination. While it is perfectly acceptable to exchange thoughts, ideas and information, councillors should ensure they retain an open mind and avoid comments that might give the perception of having reached a conclusion. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on the agenda.

An initial draft of the minutes of all meetings shall be produced by the Clerk and issued to all Councillors within 15 working days by email for review for accuracy. The agendas of the meetings are published on the Council website and followed by the minutes after approval at a council meeting.

Councillors who have taken on responsibility for some action which involves written or verbal communications with third parties shall lodge a copy of any such

communications with the Clerk.

Guidance on interaction

- Councillors should always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council
- Councillors should not make 'personal comments' which could damage the reputation of the Council or negatively impact on teamwork or credibility of the Council or members of the community
- Comment on matters which are, or are likely to be, subject to legal proceedings should be subject to advice taken from the Council's Solicitor before any response is made

Who the Council communicates with

The Council's audience is wide and varied but will typically include:

- Contractors employed by the Council
- Residents of the parish and surrounding areas
- Councillors and staff at East Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council
- The media
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- The business community
- Local MP
- Other public sector organisations (eg police, health, fire)

How the Council communicates

Different forms of communication will appeal to different ages, social groups and demographics so it is important to ensure that, within reason, the best form of communication is chosen for the intended recipient, in order to communicate effectively with everyone.

Currently Council communication is achieved mainly through Council meetings and Councillor interaction, managed by the Parish Clerk. The following items are delegated to the Clerk to manage, research and gather information on, in collaboration with appointed Councillors and volunteers:

- Press releases
- Notices on village notice boards
- Online messages via the village Facebook pages
- Contributions to the monthly Hexagon magazine
- Certain issue-specific consultation and communication as approved by the Council

Village Noticeboards

The village noticeboards will be kept updated to ensure that any members of the community who are less active online are kept aware of key information.

All posting of Council notices will be managed by the Parish Clerk.

Council Website

Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What is written on the web is permanent. The Council's website is overseen by the Parish Clerk and is regularly updated.

Email

clerk@blundestonflixtonparish.gov.uk is the email address for the Council and is managed by the Parish Clerk.

All Councillors can also be contacted individually by email via the Council's website. Councillor emails should be considered to be in the public domain.

Communication - Good Practice

It is imperative that:

- all communication from the Council is courteous, timely, professional, appropriate and reflects the decisions and policies of the Council
- all individuals communicating on behalf of the Council are aware that every piece of communication reflects on the reputation of the Council in the community

Any communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, defamatory, obscene, profane, or contrary to the Council's Equality and Diversity or Anti-Harassment and Bullying policies;
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Council does not own the copyright or does not have permission to use;
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- if official business, in any case of doubt, communications will be referred to the Chair or the Clerk to the Council prior to release;
- social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Equally, it is expected that any communications to the Council would meet similar criteria, including any information or comments posted on the village Facebook

pages.

This policy was adopted by the council at its meeting held on 20th July 2026
Date of next review – July 2027