

Draft Communications Policy Long Itchington Parish Council

Introduction

The purpose of a communications policy is to ensure that the Council fulfils its duty to communicate effectively and impartially with the community and provide appropriate systems for the community to communicate with the Council. Long Itchington Parish Council (LIPC) is committed to making communications a two-way process, giving residents accurate information whilst at the same time enabling the Council to make informed decisions using information from residents, partners and third parties.

Who we communicate with

- Parishioners – residents within the Parish of Long Itchington and Bascote
- Businesses within the Parish – pubs, restaurants, manufacturing etc.
- Other statutory / voluntary sector service providers within the Parish and nearby – schools, nurseries etc
- Stratford District Council councillors and staff
- Warwickshire County Council councillors and staff
- MPs
- Voluntary / interest groups within the Parish
- Other public sector organisations – police, health, fire etc
- Visitors to the Parish
- Prospective residents to the Parish
- Prospective businesses to the Parish, notably developers
- The media – radio, press, TV
- The outside world via social media

How we communicate with one another

In light of the pandemic a need for virtual meetings and remote communications has emerged. (See Virtual Meetings Protocol). The following principles should be aimed for:

- Every councillor should ensure that they have the necessary equipment and technology to attend and take a full part in virtual meetings – if this is not available LIPC **will seek to provide** (on a loan basis) the appropriate means.
- Email/Text communications – each councillor is expected to monitor email and text communications regularly and respond in a timely and appropriate fashion.

General Principles

- 1) Information for the community should be easily accessible, relevant and timely.
- 2) Different forms of communication should be used where possible so as to reach different ages, social groups and demographics.
- 3) The Council's communications should be open and honest.

- 4) Lines of communication should be transparent and understandable to all who communicate with LIPC.
- 5) Councillors should be constantly aware of their role and of the principle of collective responsibility in all their dealings with others.
- 6) Where an individual councillor has a dual role in relation to an issue this must be discussed with the Clerk to ensure there is no conflict of interest. When appropriate, a councillor should be prepared to “stand down” from involvement in a particular issue and not be involved in any communications.
- 7) Written communications should be simple and straightforward – written in plain English. Jargon should be avoided. Over-use of acronyms is not recommended unless they are explained.
- 8) For the purpose of business continuity, emergencies and transparency Clerks, Chair and Vice chair should have access to PC emails and ansaphone.

How we communicate with our residents

All information should be made available to the community in the easiest and quickest way possible and with relevance to them. For those without electronic forms of communication paper copies should be available to the public in the Parish Office,

Other forms of communication should be utilised to reach people quickly and with relevance to them – flyers, public meetings, noticeboards, bi-monthly diary, website, email, surgeries. LIPC uses social media via its own Facebook page and by selective posts on community Facebook pages. LIPC also has a YouTube Channel. No councillor should reference their role as a parish councillor or comment on parish council matters on their other social media platforms.

Minutes or working notes of all meetings should be kept, reflecting decisions made. Detailed accounts of discussions are not recommended.

The role of the Communications Group

The Comms Group is responsible for the style and wording of communications to the community – Diary, Information Sheet, Facebook, Website and Emails. Such communications should be decided by two or more councillors.

The role of the Clerk

The main point of contact for LIPC is the Clerk and the community and partners are encouraged to direct their questions, enquiries and comments to the Parish Office in the first instance. At times when clerks are not “on duty” and the communication is urgent, these will be dealt with by members of the Comms Group. In situations where a task or responsibility has been delegated to an individual councillor, or a working group of councillors this should be made clear to all concerned and communications should **always be copied to the Clerk**.

Enquiries from community and others

Questions, enquiries and comments from the community and others should be dealt with in a timely fashion and replies should either be sent through the clerk or the relevant Councillor, but **always copied to the Clerk**. Where a reply from the Clerk is not possible or appropriate, the councillor dealing with the issue should make clear that their response is “on behalf of the Council”

All official communications should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Parish Council, using Council headed paper or using a PC sign off if communicating by email.

Responsibilities of councillors

In public or on social media Councillors should refer to all LIPC decisions and policies and if they hold a different view they must make clear that this is a personal view.

No individual Parish Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council (or its committees)

Attendance at meetings: LIPC policy is to ensure that all meetings attended by councillors (apart from training) will be done in pairs or more to ensure no one councillor is compromised. Clarity of role at meetings is paramount. If in doubt it must be made clear by the attendee that they are there in a personal capacity, not as a representative of LIPC.

When talking to outside bodies, such as developers, councillors should be very careful not to claim knowledge of what the community thinks unless this is based in sound fact; nor should negotiations of any kind be entertained or hinted at informally. All negotiations and communications with developers and land-owners or their agents must be carried out with complete transparency.

When responding to approaches from members of the public (by telephone or face to face) councillors should be careful not to make promises about any matter raised other than to promise to refer to PC.

In all instances the matter should be dealt with promptly and efficiently with notes taken and replies made as quickly as possible.

Electronic communications

When using the “email communications system” responsibilities of individual councillors should be clarified so that a clear response or communication is drafted which reflects the collective view.

Communicating with the media

When dealing with the media – unless a Parish Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Parish Councillors who are asked for comment should refer to enquiry to the Parish Council.

In most instances it should be either the Clerk or the Chair (vice-chair) who communicates with the media. However, LIPC adopts the practice of agreeing a stance before engagement is made with the media. If “put on the spot” LIPC policy is to postpone a response until an agreed stance is formulated.