

WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

The aim of this policy is to establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication, both traditional and electronic, in relation to members of the public, other agencies, Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council (WoSPC) councillors, WoSPC staff, contractors, and the press.

WoSPC aims to provide information on important matters affecting the community and to encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

WoSPC councillors and staff accept their duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community. He/she will always try to help with regard to matters relating to the parish, but individual councillors and employees cannot accept responsibility to respond to enquiries outside of WoSPC meetings other than to acknowledge such an enquiry. Neither can an individual councillor, the Chairman, the Clerk, or any other employee, make a decision to respond on behalf of the council without the agreement of the council, or via a delegated power vested in them by the council. *(The use of the word Chairman is gender generic and is not inferring a male only person in possession of the role.)*

MEANS OF COMMUNICATIONS

Website

In the interests of transparency and to provide electors with a clear picture of its activities, WoSPC will publish information on its website (www.westburyonsevern.org.uk). This will include parish council meeting agendas, the full minutes of parish council meetings, and other information deemed relevant by it. The Clerk will also make paper copies available on request.

Newsletter

WoSPC currently does not publish a regular newsletter, however, it does encourage the publication of reports on its meetings in the Westbury-on-Severn publication, the WOSP, and makes information available for publication in the Westbury-on-Severn ecclesiastical benefice parish magazine.

Parish Council Notice boards

WoSPC has notice boards in Westbury-on-Severn village, Northwood Green, Broadoak and Flaxley. They are used to display hardcopy versions of WoSPC next meeting agendas, contact details for the Clerk to the Parish Council, and any statutory notices and other items of interest. Due to limited space, more comprehensive information is available on the parish council website.

Parish Council Meetings

It is the right of parishioners to be able to attend parish council meetings. To aid communication within the parish, during every WoSPC meeting there is an agenda item allowing members of the public present to raise a matter of concern, or to comment on an item on the agenda. At the conclusion of the public speaking section, members of the public will not be permitted to intervene or contribute further, unless permission is granted by the Chairman.

Annual meeting of the Parish Council

This meeting is held annually in May. It is in effect a normal parish council meeting except that item one on the agenda has to be 'The election of the Chairman'.

Annual Parish Meeting

This meeting is held annually in May and is a meeting of the Parish, and not the Parish Council. Electors can contribute to the agenda and the meeting can debate current issues in the community and/or celebrate achievements. A minimum of seven clear days notice of the meeting will be given and the meeting will be published.

Correspondence

All correspondence (whether on paper or electronic) to WoSPC should be addressed to the clerk. This is to ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the parish council by the clerk for attention at WoSPC's next meeting.

If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a WoSPC meeting, to ensure this can occur, the clerk must be notified at least seven days before the publication of the agenda.

The parish council will determine the response, if any, to both paper and electronic (*e.g.* e-mail) correspondence received. WoSPC reserves the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Clerk's time. Advice will be sought upon receipt of vexatious communications and acted upon accordingly in accordance with WoSPC's written policy.

All official correspondence to others from WoSPC should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the parish council. Correspondence from individual parish councillors should be avoided; however, there may be exceptional situations when it is appropriate for the Chairman or a parish councillor to issue correspondence in his/her own name. Such correspondence must be authorised by the parish council. It is also accepted that there is a need for the Clerk to, as need be, interchange communications (both paper and electronic) with the Chairman/Vice Chairman between WoSPC meetings.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Chairman. The Clerk will be the first point of contact for the media; however, where it is appropriate for a councillor to represent the parish council, the Chairman or Vice-Chairman shall be authorised as the official spokesmen for the council.

Individual councillors are not permitted to issue media releases on behalf of WoSPC.

In the restricted period before an election, commonly known as "purdah" media releases will not include quotes from councillors who are due for re-election

Media reports from WoSPC, its committees or working groups shall be sent from the Clerk or via the media reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

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 by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

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 WoSPC. 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 WoSPC (*e.g.* the may a District Council of County Council matter). 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 WoSPC councillor is absolutely 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 WoSPC meeting, and a decision made on that item.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

It is accepted that there will be occasions when it is necessary for electronic, normally in the form of email and electronic document exchanges between councillors and the Clerk, or the Clerk and contractors/goods purchasers. These should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of WoSPC and the specific matter under consideration.

Matters for information to the other councillors should be directed via the Clerk, but it may be appropriate to "cc" other councillors.

All electronic transfers of information must be via password protected routes (*e.g.* e-mails, document files and SMS/MMS messages must be sent via an ISP using unique usernames and password accessed protocols), and adhere to WoSPC's privacy policies.

At all times WoSPC's other policies aimed at compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations must be adhered to.

Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk.

Telephone calls should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The parish council will continue to investigate the use of social media, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, in order to promote WoSPC activities. If it is agreed that these are accepted methods of promotion of the council's activities then this policy will be amended accordingly to incorporate this.