



WEASENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Communication Strategy and Policy

Adopted December 2023
Due for review December 2025

1. Introduction

This strategy is based on the guiding principles that communication must be effective and that protocols should be followed to ensure clarity and professionalism. The strategy covers both internal and external communications. The Council aims to be transparent in its dealings and for communications to be timely and effective.

2. Objectives

The Council aims to reach everyone who has an interest in the Parish, be it that they live, work or visit the village. It is important that we can effectively communicate with anyone who is interested and may want to become involved in influencing the future of the Parish.

3. The Role of Councillors, Chairman and Clerk

Councillors represent the community in which they live and are governed by a Code of Conduct which encourages open, informed, timely and courteous communication at all times. Our aim is to keep all with whom we come into contact informed of our actions and to encourage stakeholders to actively participate in influencing the future of the Parish.

The Clerk is the executive of the Council. As such, the Clerk should receive all communications which ought to be formally brought to the attention of the Council and should issue all formal communications made by the Council.

If complaints or concerns are received from residents relating to the conduct of Councillors or the Council as a body corporate, they should be directed to the Clerk immediately.

Councillors should make it clear in all interactions with residents, the press or third parties, that they have no authority to represent the Council's view unless the matter has been agreed at a Council meeting or they have been given specific mandate to do so at a Council meeting.

It is important not to raise the expectations of the residents before a matter has been debated and agreed at a Council meeting.

Unless otherwise specified the Chairman should comply with this protocol in the same way as other councillors.

4. General Rules of Communication

It is important that all Council communications are effective and in so doing must be:

- Short and to the point
- Courteous
- In plain English
- Based on facts and information
- In a consistent format and style
- Clear about the action required or taken
- Informative

5. Correspondence (Internal and External)

All correspondence from Councillors to the Clerk must be made through the Chairman. This is to prevent multiple lines of communication with the Clerk. It also ensures that the Chairman is kept fully apprised of all issues.

Councillors shall not directly enter into correspondence with any member of the public, organisation, or other party. All correspondence shall be sent to the Chairman who shall communicate it, together with his views, (which shall be communicated to the rest of the Council) to the Clerk. The Clerk will be responsible for making a formal reply. If this is not practicable, the Chairman may make the formal response or delegate the task to another Councillor with the full knowledge of content of the other Councillors. As this is a formal reply on behalf of the Council, any Councillors who disagree with any formal response should be recorded as in disagreement, as part of that response.

All written communication received by the Clerk, whether letter or email, shall be acknowledged at the earliest possible opportunity, ideally within five working days¹. If the communication requires a fuller response, the author of the communication shall be informed, at the time of the acknowledgement, that they will receive a response within 14 working days.

If the communication is a complaint about the Council's procedures or administration, it shall be dealt in accordance with the Council's Complaints Procedure Policy.

If the communication is a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, it shall be dealt in accordance with the Council's Information Guide relating to the FOIA 2000.

Any correspondence relevant to the Council received by a Councillor, should be passed without delay to the Chairman.

6. Methods of Communication

The Council will use a variety of methods of communication based on what reaches its intended audience most effectively and efficiently. Much of the population now uses electronic methods of communication, so this is the Council's preferred and primary method of communication.

However, we recognise that not all people are able to or wish to use electronic methods of communication, so we will continue to utilise different media and approaches to reach our audiences.

The Council's main means of communication are:

Council website	The website must be kept up to date. (www.weasenhamparishcouncil.org)
Village Facebook page	This medium reaches out to more people than the Council's website, but care must be taken with all content posted on the page. Civility, respect, and confidentiality are essential at all times. Councillors should refrain from

¹ Working days are Monday to Friday and do not include Public Holidays

	entering into open debate on Facebook, especially when a discussion could become contentious. Instead they should request all enquiries, comments, etc. be redirected to one of the PC email addresses or at the very least answer an urgent matter by private message and not open to public view.
Council Noticeboards	The noticeboards must be kept up to date with the Council's activities and events.
Council Meetings	All Council meetings are publicised and are open to the public to attend. There is a short period at the start and near the end of each Council meeting where the Council are able hear issues raised by members of the public. This is a very important part of our communication strategy.
Council Agenda and Minutes	Agendas of Council meetings are available to all on the website and on the council noticeboards. Minutes will be posted on the website and noticeboards ² . They should be considered draft minutes until they are signed by the Chairman at the next available meeting of the Council.
Annual Parish Meeting	The Annual Parish Meeting is held in May every year and is a public meeting. It provides an opportunity for the public to speak freely and discuss Council activities over the past year and objectives for the following year.
External Correspondence	We will reply to external correspondence as per Paragraph 5 above. It will be courteous and compliant with the General Rules of Communication (See Paragraph 4 above).
Internal Correspondence	Internal communication is to be simple, courteous and kept to a minimum, in accordance with the General Rules of Communication (See Paragraph 4 above). Matters should not be debated by email but debated at Council meetings to uphold democratic values. Councillors must remember that Council decisions can only be made by way of debate whilst in session at a Parish Council Meeting and must ensure Council decisions are not made during internal correspondence. It is recognised however that all organisations need to communicate effectively including discussions relating to strategic planning and normal operational issues with safeguarding that decisions are not made or predetermined.

² Where the length of the minutes makes this impractical, publication will be via the website only.

6. Responsibilities

- (a) The Clerk has overall responsibility for all issues in this strategy unless specified otherwise.
- (b) In the event of any media enquiry, the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman, is responsible for issuing a response from the Council. Individual members of the Council must make clear, if they are approached for comment directly, whether they are giving their opinion as a Councillor or individual member of the public, or if they intend to refer the matter to the Council for a formal response. In the former case, Councillors should be mindful of the policies and decisions of the Council and respect the integrity of fellow Councillors and the Clerk. In any event, the Clerk and the Chairman must be notified of any contact with the media as soon as possible.
- (c) The Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, shall issue a press release on behalf of the Council where it is considered necessary to publicise an activity of the Council.
- (d) The content of the Council's website is mainly managed by the Clerk. However, it is the responsibility of all Councillors to check it regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and inform the Clerk, via the Chairman, if issues arise. In the absence of a permanent Clerk it may be necessary for a designated and suitably trained member of the Council to attend to website maintenance.
- (e) The Clerk is responsible for receiving correspondence and documents on behalf of the Council and dealing with them, bringing such items to the attention of the Council as required. The Clerk issues correspondence on the Council's behalf as instructed by the Council or in accordance with known policy. A Councillor corresponding with a third party does so as an individual and the rules relevant to media contact (see above) apply.
- (f) Any advice relevant to Council business given to a Councillor by third parties and which affects their opinion on any such matter should be declared at Council meetings.