

Pittington Parish Council Communications Policy

Aims

To establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication in relation to members of the public, other agencies, fellow members, the press and parish council staff.

Each parish councillor has a 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 parishes within the group. However, an individual councillor cannot respond to enquiries outside of Parish Council meetings other than to acknowledge such an enquiry. Neither can an individual councillor, nor the chairman, make a decision or respond on behalf of the Parish Council.

Means of Communication

Website

In the interests of transparency and to provide electors with a clear picture of its activities, the Parish Council will publish information on the parish council website. This will include parish council meeting agendas and the full minutes of parish council meetings. Hard copies are available by request to the clerk.

Newsletter

The parish council will strive to publish a regular newsletter, however, when there are a number of items of sufficient interest, newsletters are published on an ad hoc basis and distributed via strategic points within the parishes.

Notice boards

The notice boards at High Pittington village hall, Low Pittington corner and Littleton village green will display contact details for the parish clerk, the agenda for the next meeting, any statutory notices and other items of interest.

Meetings

The Parish Council meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 7pm at Pittington Village Hall (details provided on the agenda). During every parish council meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to raise a matter of concern or to comment on an item on the agenda. After the conclusion of the public speaking section however, members of the public are not permitted to contribute to further agenda items unless permission is granted by the Chairman. Further details can be found in the Parish Council Meeting Standing Orders.

Annual meeting of the Parish Council

This meeting will be held 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 is a meeting of the Parish and not the Parish Council. Electors can contribute to the agenda and these meetings can celebrate local activities and debate current issues in the community. Seven clear days' notice of the meeting will be given and the meeting will be held in May each year.

Correspondence

All correspondence to the parish council should be addressed to the Clerk. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the parish council for their attention at the next meeting.

If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is deemed appropriate by the Clerk for discussion at a parish council meeting, then the Clerk will have to be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda.

The parish council will determine the response, if any, to correspondence received. An immediate response should not be expected due to the part time hours of the Clerk. The parish council reserve 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.

All official correspondence from the parish council 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 a parish councillor to issue correspondence in his/her own name. Such correspondence must be authorised by the parish council.

Communication 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 will not be permitted to issue media releases on behalf of the parish council.

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

Press reports from the parish council, its committees or working groups shall be sent from the Clerk or via the 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.

Elected members 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 the council. 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 the parish council. 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 parish 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 parish council meeting, and a decision made on that item.

Internal Communication

E-mails should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the parish council.

Matters for information to the other councillors should be directed via the Clerk.

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.

Signed _____

Date _____