

Lowca Parish Council Communications Policy

1 INTRODUCTION

This policy sets out a protocol for effective communication of the Parish Council's activities and pertinent information to the media and members of the public. The policy is supported by the Councils' Publication Scheme.

- The Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to convey its decisions and actions through various media.
- All communication will be conveyed in an open and straightforward manner.
- The Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Council and is responsible for all formal communication between the Council, the press and members of the public.

2 METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

The Council will use the following media to communicate its activities:

ACTIVITY	METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Approved minutes	Website	Parish Clerk
Draft minutes	Website	Parish Clerk
Agendas	Website / Noticeboard	Parish Clerk
Council policies/procedures	Website	Parish Clerk
Annual audit	Website	Parish Clerk
Adopted Annual Accounts	Website	Parish Clerk
Councillor vacancies	Website / Noticeboards / Local Newspapers	Parish Clerk
Financial information	Website	Parish Clerk

Other information will be provided in accordance with the Council's adopted Publication Scheme.

3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Council will facilitate community engagement with the electorate by:

1. Publishing its meeting dates, times and venues
2. Providing an allocated period of time for Public Participation in meetings - refer Standing Order 3.
3. Consulting with the electorate to gauge public opinion
4. Maintaining an up to date website.

4 ROLE OF PARISH CLERK IN RELATION TO COMMUNICATIONS

5. The Clerk is responsible for the preparation of notices of Council meetings, agendas (in consultation with the Chairman) and minutes.
6. The Clerk is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Council's website so that it remains current.
7. The Clerk will action all correspondence addressed to the Council.
8. The Clerk will email to Members between meetings any relevant information which he/she receives.
9. The Clerk will make available, to members of the public, Council information in accordance with the Council's Publications Scheme.

5 REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

10. In accordance with Standing Order nos: 20(a) and 20(b) requests for information held by the Council shall be handled in accordance with the Council's policies under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018.

11. Correspondence from, and notices served by, the Information Commissioner shall be referred by the Proper Officer to the Council.
12. The Council shall have the power to do anything to facilitate compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
13. In accordance with Standing Order no: 11 neither the Parish Clerk, nor Members, will disclose confidential information that is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act.
14. The agenda and its supporting papers, and the minutes from a meeting where confidential or sensitive information is discussed, shall not disclose or otherwise undermine such information which, for special reasons, is not in the public interest to disclose.

6 AGENDA - GENERAL

15. The agenda will be clear and concise.
16. It will contain sufficient information for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
17. Items for information will be kept to a minimum on the agenda. They may contain supporting information such as letters, minutes from other bodies etc.
18. Items for decisions or recommendations will have supporting information such as reports, applications, and letters. These will be published and circulated with the Agenda.
19. All this documentation will be made available to the public, on the website, if not a Part II paper (exempt).
20. The agenda for meetings of the Council will be circulated and made available to the public in accordance with Standing Order 3b.
21. Agenda items will be numbered consecutively for ease of reference.

7 AGENDA - PROCEDURAL ITEMS

The agenda for meetings can be divided between procedural items and business items.

22. Procedural items are: Apologies for absence
23. Minutes – An item to enable the Chair to authorise the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record. This item is purely for recording corrections and amendments for accuracy purposes, not for raising matters arising from the minutes. See section on Minutes below.
24. Declarations of interests and requests for dispensations - The agenda will include standard items in accordance with the latest regulations or guidance concerning Councillor's interests.

8 AGENDA - BUSINESS ITEMS

Business items:

25. Information that needs to be considered by the Council will be placed on the first agenda after its receipt.
26. An Item recurring from a previous meeting will be referenced to the previous minute.
27. Each matter will be given a clear heading as to what the agenda item is about and a brief indication of what the meeting is going to consider.
28. More complicated items may require a written report. If there are reports or supporting information they will be clearly identified on the Agenda so that Councillors and the public know to refer to them. The agenda item will refer to the report by its title and other documentation by some suitable reference.
29. The Chairman has responsibility for the proper conduct of the meeting and needs to be involved in planning it.
30. Agenda items for which there is likely to be public interest and attendance will appear early in the agenda. Items where the press and public are likely to be excluded will be put at the end.

9 MINUTES - CONTENT

31. The minutes of a Council meeting are a public record of the decisions of the Council. They confirm the resolutions made, and form part of the Council archives.
32. Minutes will be:
 - as brief as is consistent with accuracy;
 - self-contained (that is: complete in themselves and understandable without reference to other documents);
 - decisive (so that there is no doubt about the decision made).
33. Minutes will not:
 - be a verbatim record of the meeting;
 - document opinions or views that were expressed at the meeting;
34. Minutes will include the time the meeting starts and ends and any adjournments.
35. Minutes will start with a list of the Councillors present at the meeting.
36. Minutes will be numbered consecutively for ease of reference.
37. Each minute will contain a heading clearly indicating what the minute is about, a narrative or text, as appropriate - that briefly summarises what took place, and the decision. For many routine items, for example, commenting on planning applications, a narrative will not be necessary. A minute will reference any relevant written reports submitted.
38. A minute will not refer to individual speakers by name unless this is significant.
39. It may be appropriate to record the fact that an applicant or an objector addressed the Council on a planning application or that the Clerk, other Officer or an Officer of the district or county Council reported on a matter.
40. Abbreviations will be avoided and acronyms only used after having written the title in full at the first mention.
41. Any decision will be separately highlighted for ease of identification and words used to show that it is a decision
42. The wording of the decision will be included in full. The name of the member moving and seconding a motion in the minutes or the fact that a vote was taken will not be recorded unless a recorded vote is requested.
43. The order of the minutes will follow the order of the agenda.
44. Declarations of interest will be recorded in the minutes, naming the Councillor and clearly indicating which item the interest referred to, whether the interest is a pecuniary or other interest, giving the nature of the interest and whether the member left the meeting during the discussion and decision on the item.
45. Where there is submission by notice of formal written motions to a Council meeting, the names of the Councillors proposing and seconding the motion will be recorded in the minutes.
46. When a Councillor asks for votes to be recorded in the minutes, the minutes will record the names of Councillors voting for and against the matter.
47. Decisions to exclude the press and public will be fully recorded in the minutes, making it absolutely clear to which matter or part of it the exclusion applied.
48. Resolutions that are confidential or, for some other special reason, are not in the public interest to disclose will be recorded in the minutes but without undermining or disclosing the confidential or other sensitive information.

10 MINUTES - PROCESS

49. Draft minutes, clearly identified as such, will be written up within five days of the meeting.
50. The draft minutes will then be circulated, within ten clear working days after the meeting, for information only to all Councillors. This gives Councillors the chance to comment upon minor accuracy issues (spelling and so on) before formal publication of the draft minutes.

51. The draft minutes will be published (on the website and notice boards), as per the Council's Publication Scheme and when the summons to Councillors is issued to attend the next relevant meeting.
52. The draft minutes will be considered at the next meeting for acceptance and signed by the Chair as a true record. If changes are made to the minutes by the Council before acceptance and signing, the wording changes will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting that agreed the changes and the original minutes will be amended to reflect the changes. The copy signed by the Chair will contain the alterations, recorded in longhand, with the changes signed and dated.
53. After the draft minutes are approved, the contemporaneous notes or the recording of the meeting will be destroyed, along with all copies of the draft minutes.
54. The signed minutes will be retained in the Council's archives. A separate set of signed minutes will be kept for public inspection.
55. The resolutions made at a meeting have immediate effect. They are not subject to the preparation of draft minutes or the approval of minutes of that meeting at a later meeting.

11 MINUTES - FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

56. Draft minutes are a qualified exemption under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, as they are classed as 'information intended for future publication'. Therefore, the Council may refuse to provide the information.
57. However, there is a duty to consider whether disclosure of the information requested is in the Public Interest.
58. If the information requested carries an absolute exemption in the 2000 Act, then there is no duty to consider the public interest

12 PRESS RELEASES

59. The Clerk will clear all press reports or comments to the media with the Chairman of the Council.
60. Press reports of the Council will be from the Clerk or through the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
61. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, if asked for comment by the press, they should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.
62. The press and public are invited to all Council meetings and can access an agenda through the website and public noticeboards.
63. Unless a 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.
64. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure.

13 THE COUNCIL NOTICE BOARD

65. The noticeboard will be updated regularly and will display:
 - The full title of the Council;
 - The name, address, telephone number and email address of the clerk;
 - The Council's website address;
 - Venues, dates and times of meetings for the year;
 - Agenda for forthcoming meetings;
 - Where the minutes, the code of conduct and other public documents may be inspected.

14 WEBSITE

66. All Council agendas, reports, minutes and the Council's Publication Scheme will be placed on a dedicated website with appropriate archive facilities. This will be kept up to date on a regular basis.

15 PARISH COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE

67. All official correspondence will be from the Clerk in the name of the Council.

68. Responses to correspondence received will be given within ten working days of receipt, where possible. If this is not possible, an acknowledgement will be sent, and the letter will be discussed at the next Council meeting.

69. Where correspondence is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person.

16 COUNCILLORS' CORRESPONDENCE WITH EXTERNAL PARTIES

70. Written correspondence (letters or e-mails) from Councillors to other parties on Council matters will be sent through the Clerk, unless agreed otherwise. The Clerk will make clear that it is written in their official capacity and the Council has authorised it.

71. All outgoing correspondence relating to the Council, or a Councillor's role within it, will be copied to the Clerk in a manner that makes it clear to the recipient that the Clerk has been advised.

72. Councillors must use their judgement when communicating with others in a personal capacity as to how the correspondence will be received. If there is any risk of the recipient considering that the Councillor is speaking on behalf of the Council, then it is the Councillor's responsibility to make it clear that they are not.

17 COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN COUNCILLORS AND THE CLERK

73. E-mails:

- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;
- Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;
- E-mails from Councillors to external parties (on Council matters) should be copied to the Clerk;
- Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so;
- The Clerk and Councillors are not required to send read receipt acknowledgements of emails.

Approved:

Review: