

Communication Policy

Adopted 13th May 2024

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

The Parish Council uses a number of communication methods to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Council currently uses the following primary methods of communication:

Email – within the Council and externally.

Shout out – to distribute information via email to those who have opted into the mailing list.

Website – The Council website provides information regarding Council policies, meetings, activities, news and general information about the parish and its facilities.

Post

The council may also use as secondary communication methods:

SMS texting

Video conferencing

All of the above methods of communication are subject to this policy.

The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may alter the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve the services it delivers. When these changes occur this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

Councillors, Chairman and Clerk

Councillors are members of the corporate body of the Parish Council and as such represent the Parish Council in 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.

The Clerk is the proper officer 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.

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.

General Rules of Communication

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant.
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive.
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Council does not own the copyright.
- Not contain any personal information.

Parish Council email

The Clerk to the council has their own council email address (parishclerk@appleton-eaton-pc.gov.uk).

The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and the Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon it is able but will reply to all messages within one week.

An 'out of office' message will be used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

NB any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Councillors will not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

Parish Council Website

The Parish Council website is the primary source of information regarding Council activities and the provision of news affecting the parish.

Where necessary, the Council may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or their question may be forwarded to one of the Councillors for consideration and response

Responses may be delayed if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

The Council reserves the right to not respond to any communication deemed to be offensive or threatening.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for providing current content.

The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the website if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website.

The information provided on the website may change from time to time as decided by the Council.

Appleton Community Facebook page

Councillors and the Clerk will not respond to messages regarding Parish Council business on the Appleton Community Facebook page.

If a Councillor or the Clerk is on the Community Facebook page and sees an issue arise, they can raise this separately with the Council.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council.

As the amount of information available at the press of a button increases, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely.

Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone.

Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

In order to reduce the amount of email traffic Councillors should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails, i.e., to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option, if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

This policy was adopted 13th May 2024 and will be reviewed annually at the Annual Parish Council Meeting.