



April 2023

Communication Strategy and Policy



WATERINGBURY PARISH COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

For a Parish Council to be effective they must communicate well and engage effectively with the community they serve. The reputation and effectiveness of local councils depends upon public awareness. This strategy is based on the principle that all communication should have a clear purpose and should achieve that purpose to be effective. Wateringbury Parish Council aims to ensure that its communications follow this principle.

The strategy covers both internal and external communications.

2. Objectives

The Parish Council aims to reach everyone who has an interest in the parish: -

- Village residents
- Community groups and organisations
- Kent County Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
- Borough and County Councillors
- Local MP
- Other agencies who cover the village (e.g., Police)
- Local Primary school
- Local businesses & landowners
- Voluntary groups
- Visitors

3. The Role of Councillors, Chair and Clerk

Parish Councillors who serve on a voluntary basis, are the elected or co-opted representatives of the community in which they live. They are governed by a Code of Conduct which encourages open, informed, timely, unbiased, transparent, and courteous communication at all times. Councillors, in conjunction with the Parish Clerk, have a responsibility to keep interested parties within the village informed of decisions and actions taken at Council meetings, particularly where it may affect them. The Parish Clerk should keep the Chair and Councillors informed of issues and concerns brought to his/her attention, adding these to meeting agendas as appropriate to ensure that a fair and

democratic approach is taken to the decision-making process. The Chair and Councillors should similarly request that issues brought to them, should be put onto the monthly meeting agenda for discussion.

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

Complaints or concerns on the conduct of any Councillor should be put in writing to the Clerk.

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.

Note: 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, to the point and have a logical conclusion
- Courteous, clear and comprehensive – written in plain English
- Timely
- Based on facts and information
- Written in a consistent format and style
- Clear about the action required or taken
- Informative

Note: It is important to allow feedback to confirm that communication has been effective.

5. Methods of Communication

The Council will use a variety of methods of communication based on what reaches its intended audience most effectively and efficiently. Over 86% of the adult population connect and communicate using the internet (Office for National Statistics), so this is the Council's preferred and primary method of communication. However, as not everyone is able to or wishes to use electronic methods of communication, traditional methods will still be used. (e.g., Rostrum)

The table below shows our main means of communication.

Parish Clerk	The Parish Clerk is the main channel of communication for all internal Parish Council business and external queries and exchanges of information. The Parish Clerk's contact details are published in Rostrum, the village magazine, are on the website and are on the village notice board.
Parish Council Website	The Parish Council website is where meeting agendas and minutes can be viewed, where general information about the village, and information about upcoming events and activities is available. It has an email link for enquiries that goes to the Parish Clerk and has links to other websites offering relevant and useful information e.g., TMBC and KCC. Contact details for the Parish Clerk are on the website. https://wateringburypc.org.uk/
Noticeboard (Outside the village hall)	Notices of Parish Council meetings and any other important notices are put on to the notice board.
Monthly Parish Council meetings	All Council meetings are publicised and are open to the public to attend. There is a short period at the beginning and end of each Council meeting where members of the public can raise issues or concerns. Minutes of meetings are available on the website.
Social media	The Parish Council has a Facebook page. However, it is for information purposes only and is not a discussion forum.
Rostrum	Summary of Parish Council meetings and other important information is printed in the monthly village magazine.

External Correspondence

We will reply to external correspondence in a timely manner which is both courteous and compliant with the General Rules of Communication (see above).

Internal Correspondence

Internal communication is to be simple, courteous and kept to a minimum, in accordance with the General Rules of Communication (see above). Councillors should not use personal email addresses for any matters that are related to their position as a Parish Councillor. Matters should not be debated by email but debated at public meetings in order to uphold the principles of transparency and democracy.

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 Chair, 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 an individual or personal opinion, or referring 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. It must be made clear that the response is from the individual concerned and NOT from the Council. In any event, the Clerk and the Chair must be notified of any contact with the media as soon as possible.
- c) The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair, 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 if issues arise.
- 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. 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.

End of document.