COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

This Policy is designed to assist Village Councillors and staff to effectively communicate with the general public.

Objective

To provide a helpful response to telephone, or written enquiries in an efficient and polite manner.

Personal Contact

This can be in person or by telephone.

If it relates to a Village Council service, then the caller will be dealt with by the appropriate member of staff. If that member of staff is unavailable, contact details will be taken to ensure the caller can be contacted at the earliest suitable opportunity.

If it relates to a County Council or District Council service the caller will be advised to contact the County Council or District Council by providing them with the appropriate number / e-mail.

Village Councillors and Staff are advised against acting as an intermediary with the County Council and District Council Contact Centres; this is not being unhelpful, but to aid the trained staff of the County and District Council and /or their trained call centre staff to direct enquiries to the appropriate department or other public service. No direct dial numbers are to be given for any officer(s) at either the County or District Council.

Written Enquiries

These could be by letter or, more frequently, by email. Wherever possible a detailed reply should be given within 5 working days. If that is not possible, a holding response should be sent within 5 days.

There is no need to respond to unsolicited invitations or spam emails, indeed there are very good reasons for not so doing.

Inevitably, the Village Council may receive repeated communications from individual members of the public on the same subject(s). It is permissible for staff to merely acknowledge such emails/letters without having to respond to each and every point. In any such case, the Council Clerk should be consulted.

Adopted 27th June 2024
Review Date: June 2025

It should always be remembered that it is possible to recover any electronic correspondence.

Correspondence Issued By The Council

All correspondence representing he view of the Council should only be issued by the Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee. If individual Councillors choose to send letters to express their own opinion on Council policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Clerk.It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or of an individual Councillor.

Village Councillor's Details

If requested, the staff will provide a member of the public with the names and email addresses of Village Councillors. Telephone numbers or their private address will not be released without the express permission of the Councillor.

Media Statements

In accordance with the Council's adopted Social Media Policy, the Clerk to the Council is the Council's nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases. No other member of staff (other than the Chair or Vice Chair deputising for the Council Clerk) has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council.

Any press release from the Village Council is to be approved by the Council Clerk and where requested, copied to all Village Councillors.

Press releases from the Village Council need not be formally worded in stilted language but must not be partisan.

Councillors can communicate to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council e.g. 'A.N. Other is a Great Coates Village Councillor but the views expressed here are his/her own and not necessarily those of the Great Coates Village Council'.

For the avoidance of doubt, an individual Village Councillor or political party may issue their own statements to the media but those must not give the impression of being a release from the Village Council.

Publicity touching on issues that are controversial or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although Councils should not oversimplfy facts, issues or arguments.

In particular, Officers and Councillors should always have due regard for the longterm reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

Purdah

Purdah is the period prior to an election, once a notice of poll has been officially given by the Returning Officer. It applies to Village and County Council elections as well as other national elections (e.g. a General Election).

It also applies if there is a local by-election.

During such a period, special care is needed to avoid any impression that the Village Council, as a body, supports any aspirant for elected office or a particular party.

More specific advice will be issued by the NALC and / or the Returning Officer at the County Council. A separate policy statement in respect of the 'purdah' period is available from the Council Clerk.

Obscene & Abusive Language

Staff and Councillors are not obliged to listen to abusive and obscene tirades or address members of the public in this way. In such a case the caller should politely be asked to desist and advised that if they continue to use such language the call will be terminated. If the abuse or obscenity continues then the call can be terminated.

Care however should be taken as some 'vivid descriptions' are used in the ordinary course of speech by certain sections of the community. A judgement should be made from the tone if that is the position. In such cases a councillor or member of staff can ask for moderation but may choose to continue the contact.