

TUDDENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

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The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council regarding electronic communications and to provide guidelines

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to ensure efficient and effective communications between council members and with third parties. This policy forms part of a suite of policies for all methods of communications and should be viewed in conjunction with those policies.

Council policies are available to download and view on our website:

<https://tuddenham.suffolk.cloud/tuddenham-parish-council/governance/>

The principles of these guidelines apply to Parish Councillors and the Clerk. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.

Electronic communication is primarily considered to be 'email'.

Sending a message/post via Facebook or another platform will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by email.

Official Council business should not be discussed by members of the council through text, 'what's app', messenger or other web platforms.

This is to ensure transparency at all times and to ensure Freedom of Information Act requests and Data Subject Access requests can be fully processed in the prescribed time limits.

Members and the Clerk may use SMS (texting) as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Parish email

The Clerk to the council has their own council email address. The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should 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. All new emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own **personal** views and, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. Councillors should note that 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.

Under no circumstances must personal information be forwarded on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

Periods of absence

During a period of annual leave or other absence, an out of office notice will be placed on the email account.

If it is an emergency matter that cannot wait until the Clerks return, the correspondents will be directed to contact a nominated councillor during the period of absence via the Councillors official Parish Council email address.

Councillors

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 more information become available at the press of a button, 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).

Members 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.

Complaints

The Council has a complaints policy that will be followed in the event that an individual is not satisfied with the way in which correspondence has been dealt with.

The Council has a vexatious complaints policy that will be initiated in appropriate circumstances.