

MARDEN PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATION POLICY

Adopted on 12 August 2019

1. Introduction

Marden Parish Council (MPC) articulates and represents the views and needs of the local community. It provides information on important parish matters affecting the community and encourages comment from interested individuals and groups.

The overall aim is to make Council communications a two-way process: to give people the information to understand accurately what MPC does, whilst also enabling MPC to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

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

2. The Importance of Good Communication

Good communications will enable MPC to:

- a. better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities
- b. raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about issues, services and opportunities in the parish, the county and region.
- c. be an effective voice of the community
- d. maintain and enhance the reputation of MPC
- e. make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people
- f. proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of MPC or the parish.

3. Who Is Communicating

A. Parish Clerk

- a. The Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all formal communication with members of the community and outside bodies.
- b. The Clerk is provided with a council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business.

- c. The Clerk will be required to communicate both verbally and in writing on a regular basis with the community as part of his/her duties. It is imperative that such communications are courteous and professional at all times.

B. Councillors

- a. Elected members may be approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Councillors will reflect on MPC. Enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter or email.
- b. At no time should Councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to say they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to MPC. Depending on the issue, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:
 - i. refer the matter to the Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
 - ii. request an item on a relevant agenda
- c. Councillors must ensure that all communication with the public on Council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of MPC regardless of the Councillor's individual views on any subject.

C. Council Meetings and Councillor Interaction

- a. MPC usually meets on the second Monday of every month. Meetings start at 7:30pm. Meetings are open to the public for representations and questions during the allotted agenda item and at the discretion of the Chair. Agendas for meetings are published on the parish website and notice boards.
- b. MPC has a number of working groups whose activities are reported back to the council as appropriate in the monthly meetings.
- c. An initial draft of the minutes shall be produced by the Clerk and issued to all Councillors within 10 days by email for review. Amendments to the draft will be discussed at the following planned meeting and endorsed amendments made. The Minutes of the meetings are published on the council website following adoption at a council meeting.
- d. Councillors who have taken on responsibility for some action which involves written or verbal communications will lodge a copy of any such communications with the Clerk at least five working days prior to the Council meeting.
- e. The parish notice boards will be kept updated to ensure that members of the community who do not have internet access are kept aware of key information.
- f. The Clerk will manage all posting of Council notices on parish notice boards.

- g. Once a decision is made in Council the matter cannot be revisited for six months unless 4 Councillors put in a written request – in conformity with Standing Order 7. Council decisions are corporate and not always unanimous but they are decisions.
- h. Communication between meetings with other Councillors about forthcoming Council decisions or issues, in such a way that it could be construed as influencing another Councillor’s decisions such that the Councillor has a closed mind, should not occur. It may be considered as pre-determination (Localism Act 2011), for which the Council could be criticised or even have its decisions legally challenged. The Council chamber is the place to contribute to discussions.

D. Parish Council Correspondence

- a. The first point of contact for MPC is the Clerk and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed.
- b. The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- c. No individual Parish Councillor should communicate directly about parish council business (either verbally, by phone or by email/writing) with companies/individuals with which the Parish Council has a contractual relationship. All enquiries should be through the Clerk.
- d. No individual Parish Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council (or its working groups). In particular, Parish Councillors do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a “need to know”.
- e. All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Parish Council, using Council letter-headed paper or email.
- f. Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person.
- g. Correspondence sent on behalf of the Parish Council to Herefordshire Council or its Highways contractor, if relevant, shall also be copied to the Ward Councillor.
- h. The Clerk sends out the Council’s correspondence to other bodies/individuals and correspondence from individual Parish Councillors should be avoided (Marden Parish Council Email Policy September 2018). At the request of the Clerk and with the agreement of the Chair/Vice Chair, in exceptional situations it may be appropriate for a Parish Councillor to issue correspondence in his/her own name. Such correspondence must make it clear that it has been written in an official capacity and has been authorised.

E. Use of Email

- a. Emails are the primary method to promote effective communication on matters relating to Council business, and therefore should be used for that purpose only. If necessary, consider speaking to the recipient(s) first by telephone or in person, then follow up with an email.

- b. Emails should not be used for spreading gossip, or for personal gain, or in breach of any of the Council's Codes of Conduct relating to bullying, intimidation, sexual or racial harassment.
- c. All email correspondence should be dealt with in the same professional and diligent manner as any other form of correspondence.
- d. It is not appropriate for individual councillors to email all other Councillors about Council business. If a Councillor wishes an email to be sent to all Councillors, he/she must request the Clerk to forward it.
- e. Correspondence that, for example, creates obligations or gives instructions on behalf of the Council should never be sent out by a Councillor.
- f. Correspondence sent to Councillors from the Clerk should not be forwarded elsewhere by individual Councillors.
- g. It follows that emailing to some or to all Councillors should be very limited and guided by the Clerk.
- h. Requests for clarification should be addressed to the Clerk.
- i. Confidential information should not be sent externally without the approval of the Chair or Clerk.
- j. MPC Councillor emails should be considered to be in the public domain, whether a Parish Council email or a personal email used for Parish Council business.
- k. External emails associated with Council business received by a Councillor are to be forwarded to the Clerk – and the Chair/Vice Chair if appropriate – who will in turn forward to other Councillors if relevant and suitable. To comply with GDPR, all emails associated with Council business received by Councillors from parishioners or other individuals to a personal email account must be deleted from the Councillor's personal email system and computer/tablet/phone once the email has been forwarded to the Clerk.
- l. A .gov email address will be held and maintained by the Clerk.
- m. An up-to-date distribution list of Councillor email addresses will be maintained by the Clerk.
- n. Communication from the Clerk will be by blind copy to Councillors.

F. Use of website, parish magazine and notice boards

- a. The Clerk is responsible for uploading Council documents, news posts and communications to the website.
- b. Parish council communications or documents have primary use of the parish notice boards. Notices about other parish events etc will also be accommodated on the boards. Notices from other sources will be accommodated if space allows.
- c. Some documents and information are uploaded on the website by specific people on behalf of the church and parish magazine, News & Views. These organisations are responsible for ensuring compliance to the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, with respect to personal data.

- d. As News & Views is published in hard copy and distributed to houses within and outside the parish, the editors are responsible for ensuring compliance to the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, with respect to personal data.

Review date: by September 2020

Signed:

David Bennett, Chair Marden Parish Council

Date: