

Communication Policy

Adopted 8th June 2023

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.

Mailchimp – to distribute information via email to those who have subscribed to the service.

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

Facebook page - The Council Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the Parish and promote the community positively.

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@northleighparishcouncil.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.

Parish Council Facebook page

The Parish Council will not enter into any lengthy discussions or dialogue regarding issues raised via posts on the Facebook page but will advise the sender to contact the Council regarding their concern via the Parish Council website or the Clerk.

Any items posted on the Facebook page should follow the guidelines below:

- Not to be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.
- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abusive language will not be tolerated.
- Not contain personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff.
- Official Council posts may be freely shared with others but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Not use the Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, the Council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities.

Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council 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 emailing.

The Council retains the right to remove any comment or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
 - Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material

Any material in violation of any laws, including copyright

- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam

- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate.

This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page.

The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law, the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

North Leigh Community Facebook page

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

If a Councillor or the Clerk is on the Community Facebook pages 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 social media and 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.