

## Communication Protocol

### 1. Introduction and Scope

This protocol outlines the roles and responsibilities for communication within Colney Heath Parish Council (CHPC) and provides guidelines for effective communication. The aim is to ensure that CHPC communicates clearly and effectively with its community, stakeholders, and external parties.

The purpose of this protocol is to:

- Articulate and represent the views and needs of the local community;
- Provide accurate information on important matters affecting the parish; and
- Facilitate a two-way communication process where residents and stakeholders can share feedback and the Council can make informed decisions based on that feedback.

This policy is not intended to restrict freedom of speech but to provide guidance for efficient communication between councillors, officers, staff, and external parties. These guidelines apply to Councillors, the Clerk, CHPC staff, and anyone communicating with CHPC.

### 2. Importance of Good Communication

Effective communication is essential for CHPC to:

- Understand the needs and priorities of the community;
- Increase residents' satisfaction, trust, and confidence by providing clear information on local services, issues, and opportunities;
- Act as a strong voice for the community;
- Protect and enhance the Council's reputation; and
- Address inaccuracies and misrepresentations about the Council or parish proactively.

### 3. Parish Council Correspondence

- a) **The Proper Officer**, usually the Clerk, is responsible for all official communication with the community and external bodies. All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk.
- b) The Clerk will handle correspondence following Council meetings.
- c) No individual Councillor should have exclusive control over any correspondence or information on behalf of the Council or its committees. Councillors only have access to confidential information if they can demonstrate a 'need to know.'
- d) Official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk on CHPC letterhead.

# COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

- ✉ **Postal Address:** Highfield Park Visitor Centre, Hill End Lane AL4 0RA  
☎ **Telephone:** (01727) 825 314  
💻 **Website:** <https://colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk>  
✉ **E-mail:** clerk@colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk



- e) When sending correspondence where the Clerk is copied, this must be clearly stated to the primary recipient (e.g., "Copy to Parish Clerk).
- f) CHPC letterhead is reserved for official Council business and should not be used to express personal views. The Clerk and authorised staff may use the letterhead for the daily operations of the Council.

## 4. Agenda Items for Council and Committee Meetings

- a) Agendas should be clear and concise, containing enough information for Councillors to make informed decisions and for the public to understand the topics under discussion.
- b) Items for information only should be minimal on an agenda.
- c) Matters for "information only" will be circulated by the Clerk to Councillors outside of meetings.

## 5. Communications with Press and Public

- a) The Clerk, with the approval of the Council Chairman or the relevant committee chair, will clear all press releases or media comments.
- b) Press reports will either come from the Clerk or result from a reporter's attendance at a meeting.
- c) Unless authorised by the Council to speak on a particular issue, Councillors commenting to the media must clarify that they are expressing personal views, not Council views.
- d) When speaking with the public, Councillors should make it clear whether they are expressing personal opinions or the Council's stance on issues.
- e) Any complaints from the public should be handled according to the Council's official complaints procedure.
- f) Confidential information, particularly items discussed in sessions closed to the press and public, must not be disclosed.

## 6. Councillor Correspondence with External Parties

- a) Councillors may frequently be approached by members of the public. Councillors' interactions will reflect on CHPC, and if unsure, they should seek advice from the Clerk.
- b) Councillors should avoid making promises to the public. If uncertain how to handle a query, Councillors should either:
  - Refer the matter to the Clerk;
  - Request the issue be included on a future agenda; or
  - Investigate further after consulting with the Clerk.
- c) Correspondence from Councillors should be clear that it is sent in their official capacity and has Council authorisation.
- d) Councillors must use their designated Council email addresses solely for Council business.

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- e) Councillors should send a copy of any correspondence related to Council business to the Clerk and indicate this on the communication (e.g., "cc to the Clerk").

## 7. Communication with Parish Council Staff

- a) Councillors should not give instructions to staff unless authorised by the Council or a committee with delegated authority.
- b) No individual Councillor, including the Chairman, should give instructions to staff that conflict with Council decisions or existing arrangements.
- c) Telephone calls to staff should be appropriate and relevant to Council business.
- d) Email correspondence:
- Immediate replies should not be expected from the Clerk, and reasons for urgency should be clearly stated.
  - Information for Councillors should normally be sent via the Clerk.
  - Emails from Councillors to external parties should copy the Clerk.
  - Councillors should acknowledge emails when requested.
- e) Meetings with the Clerk or staff:
- Appointments should be made in advance.
  - Meetings must be relevant to the officer's role.
  - Matters discussed should pertain to legitimate Council business, not personal or political agendas.

## 8. Data Protection

- a) Any correspondence, including emails, may be disclosed in response to a Freedom of Information Act 2000 request, a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act 1998 or the General Data Protection Regulation, or as part of legal proceedings.
- b) Refer to CHPC's Data Protection policies for further information.

## 9. Review

This Communication Protocol ensures transparency, accountability, and efficiency in Colney Heath Parish Council's communications.

This policy will next be reviewed at a Parish Council meeting during October/November 2027 or as required if until legislation changes.