



Alvescot Parish Council

Communications Policy

Supported by the Councils Communication Procedure and
Model Publication Scheme

Adopted on

20th September 2017

Signed.....
Chairman

Aims

The Parish Council aims to establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication in relation to members of the public, other agencies, fellow members, the press and Parish Council staff.

To provide information on important matters affecting the community and to encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

Each Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community. He/she will always try to help with regard to matters relating to the parish. However, an individual Councillor cannot respond to enquiries outside of Parish Council meetings other than to acknowledge such an enquiry. Neither can an individual Councillor, nor the Chairman, make a decision or respond on behalf of the Parish Council.

Means of Communication

1. Website (www.alvescotpc.org.uk)

In the interests of transparency and to provide electors with a clear picture of its activities, the Parish Council will publish information on the Parish Council website. This will include:

- i. Meeting agendas
- ii. Full minutes of meetings
- iii. List of paid cheques for all expenses over £100
- iv. Audit information
- v. External Auditors report
- vi. Income & Expenditure figures quarterly
- vii. Precept figures/Budget
- viii. Final accounts
- ix. Asset register
- x. Adopted Parish Council policies
- xi. Risk assessment
- xii. Freedom of Information Act as applied by Alvescot Parish Council

2. Newsletter -The Forum

The parish council does not publish a regular newsletter. However, when there are a number of items of sufficient interest The Forum is published on an ad hoc basis and distributed to residents.

3. Noticeboard

The noticeboard located in Lower End will display the agenda for the next meeting, statutory notices, and other items of interest.

4. Meetings

The Parish Council meets on the third Wednesday each month, except August when there is no meeting. During every meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to raise a matter of concern or to comment on an agenda item. After the conclusion of the public speaking section members of the public are not permitted to contribute to further agenda items unless permission is granted by the Chairman. Further details are included in item 3 of the Standing Orders.

The Annual Parish Council meeting will be held in May when the Chairman will be elected.

5. Correspondence

- a. All correspondence, written or email, to the Parish Council should be addressed to the Clerk. This will ensure the matter is recorded and passed to the Parish Council for its attention at the meeting. If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a Parish Council meeting, then the Clerk must be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda. Further information on timing can be found in Item 3 of the Standing Orders.
- b. The Parish Council will determine the response, if any, to correspondence received. The Parish Council reserves the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking a disproportionate amount of the Clerk's time. Advice will be sought upon receipt of vexatious communications and acted upon accordingly.
- c. All official correspondence, written or emailed, from the Parish Council should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Parish Council. Correspondence from individual parish councillors should be avoided, however, there may be exceptional situations when it is appropriate for a parish councillor to issue correspondence in his/her own name. Such correspondence must be authorised by the Parish Council.
- d. All email correspondence should be dealt with in the same professional and diligent manner as any other form of correspondence. Any email that is sent will be identifiable as coming from the Council.
- e. All emails and letters should only be seen by the person intended. Particular care should be taken when sending confidential information

by email that it has been correctly addressed, marked 'Confidential' and not copied in to those not authorised to see the information. Sending confidential information via email without proper authorisation will be treated as misconduct. As Councillors use personal email addresses care must be taken that emails received containing Parish Council information are not read by unauthorised persons. If a Councillor has an administrative assistant they are bound by the same rules of confidentiality.

- f. Messages sent by email are to be written in accordance with the standards of any other form of written communication, and the content and language used in the message must be consistent with Council best practice. Messages should be clear and concise and directed to those individuals with a "need to know", such as members of a Working Group. However, when responding to a large group of recipients, the "reply to all" facility should be used to ensure all parties receive the same information to be imparted.
- g. Confidential information should not be sent to anyone other than Parish Councillors and the Clerk.
- h. Erroneous communications can give rise to legal action against the Council or individual Councillors. Claims for defamation, harassment, and breach of confidentiality or contract could result. It is therefore vital for email messages to be treated like any other form of correspondence and, where necessary, hard copies or copies saved to file should be retained. Messages are also disclosable in any legal action commenced or FOI request against the Council or Councillors relevant to the issues set out in the email.
- i. External emails received by a Councillor are to be forwarded to the relevant Councillor and copied to the Clerk.

6. Correspondence on planning matters

This procedure sets out how the Parish Council considers planning matters on which it is consulted by the Planning Authority. Two Councillors are designated to assess the Parish Councils decision on responding to applications. These are reported at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

It takes into account that:

- a. The consultation period for planning application is 21 days, which means that not all planning applications can be considered by the Parish Council at its scheduled meetings.
- b. The Parish Council believes that its constituents are best served by the Parish Council responding to application in a timely fashion.

- c. To ensure that consultations on planning applications are dealt with in time, the Parish Council has appointed the Clerk to facilitate the responses of the two designated Councillors on planning matters.
- d. The Parish Council has therefore resolved that any substantive actions in respect of planning matters shall be taken either by:
 - i two designated Councillors
 - ii the Parish Council as a whole for larger applications
 - ii by the Clerk acting on the outcome of an email consultation of Parish Councillors
- e. If deemed necessary, a public meeting will be held.
- f. For further information please refer to the Development Policy available on the website.

7. Communication with the press

The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Chairman. The Clerk will be the first point of contact for the media; however, where it is appropriate for a councillor to represent the parish council, the Chairman or Vice-Chairman shall be authorised as the official spokesmen for the council.

Individual councillors will not be permitted to issue media releases on behalf of the Parish Council.

Press reports from the parish council, its committees or working groups shall be sent from the Clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting. Unless a parish councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, parish councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

8. Social Media

Alvescot Parish Council does not subscribe to social media but does have access to the Plan A page on Facebook which will be used occasionally for matters of information. This will not replace existing forms of communication and will not be regularly monitored and is considered an additional option only. Online content will always be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.