

REPTON PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

This Communications Policy applies to all Members and Staff of Repton Parish Council (The Council). Its purpose is to

- provide clear guidance on managing communications to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of our Council.
- ensure accuracy and professionalism in all communications.

It outlines the standards we require the Council to observe when communicating internally, with the media, the public, and each other, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor communications and the action the Council will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. All should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it.

This policy supplements our Dignity at Work and Community Engagement Policies and also our Disciplinary Procedure.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all communications. This includes and is not limited to communication internally, with the media and with the public, via channels including written and verbal communications, press and social media.

PRINCIPLES

The Council values open communication with members of the public and aspires to enable effective two-way communication with everyone. The Council is committed to being open and transparent about its processes and its decision-making.

All communication should be clear, lawful, objective, accurate, timely and professional. All communication should be courteous, respectful and professional. Defamatory or offensive language must not be used. Appendix A gives general guidance on communications.

Confidential information must not be disclosed and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements must always be followed.

Internal communications should be for logistical and information-sharing purposes. Communications requiring decisions should be carried out at Council meetings or, in the case of delegated sub-committees or working groups, reported to Council meetings, unless otherwise prohibited by GDPR. Any decision made in a closed meeting due to GDPR will have the outcome minuted and reported publicly while keeping in accordance with GDPR and data privacy.

All written communications are subject to Freedom of Information (FOI). Where possible personal email accounts should not be used for Council business and may be subject to legal scrutiny.

Anonymous correspondence will not be acknowledged or responded to except in exceptional circumstances approved by the Clerk. The Council may limit responses to repeated, vexatious or abusive correspondence, particularly if it places undue strain on resources. Decisions to limit correspondence must be formally resolved by the Council, with individuals informed of the decision and provided with a right to appeal.

THE ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

- Individual Councillors must not represent themselves as speaking for the Council unless authorised.

- If a Councillor receives correspondence, they should forward it to the Clerk.
- Correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor should not be shared with third parties without consent except (i) as required by law or legal process, (ii) to the extent that such information becomes generally available to the public other than as a result of a breach, (iii) information which was or is independently acquired on a non-confidential basis from a third party source who was not understood to be bound by a requirement for confidentiality and/or (iv) as may be expressly and specifically agreed to in writing by both parties
- Councillors and staff may use other practical means of communication to carry out Council business (e.g., sharing logistical information) for the purposes of expediency but should be aware that all channels used will be subject to FOI and this policy.
- Personal views on decisions or actions of the Council should not be expressed publicly in a way that misrepresents or conflicts with the Council's stance.

THE ROLE OF THE CLERK

- The Clerk is the main point of contact for the Parish Council.
- All formal correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk.
- The Clerk is responsible for issuing official correspondence using Council letterhead.

COMMUNICATION

The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our Council and community. It also recognises the importance of the Council joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.

Only the Clerk is permitted to post material in the Council's name and on our behalf. The Clerk, and any request to the Clerk for a post, must adhere to the following general rules:

- Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If unsure whether the information falls within one of these categories, this should be discussed with the clerk.
- Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless that third party's consent has been obtained.
- Before including a link to a third-party website, any terms and conditions of that website need to be checked.
- In discussions, posts need to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- Avoid publishing contact details where they can be accessed.
- Never give out personal details such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that any personal or sensitive information used is in line with the Data Protection Act and GDPR.
- Where appropriate, the Clerk will turn off comments on social media posts

Personal communication by Councillors in relation to Council business

Individual Councillors and staff are responsible for what they post in a personal capacity.

They must:

- Ensure that any personal or sensitive information is used in line with the Data Protection Act and GDPR.
- The post must comply with all other Council policies.
- Before any communication on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council you must have read and understood this policy, the Disciplinary and Dignity at Work policies.

- Anyone from the Council who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website, should inform the Clerk.

They must not:

- Bring the Council into disrepute through communication in a personal capacity or cause embarrassment to the Council.
- Present personal opinion as that of the Council. Council e-mail address or other Council identification must not be used. Make it clear that what is said is representative of your personal views only. Where appropriate, you should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions".
- Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated and resolved by the Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.
- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.

PRESS AND MEDIA

The Clerk is the primary contact for all media enquiries, including interviews, statements, or articles. If the Clerk is unavailable, the media should contact the Chair or Vice-Chair.

Only the Clerk is authorised to formally communicate on behalf of the Council unless another individual has been expressly authorised by a Council resolution. For time sensitive matters the Chair or Vice Chair can approve then seek retrospective agreement.

All formal communications with the media must reflect the views and positions of the Council and statements should be approved by the Council before release. If a communication is time sensitive it may be authorised by the Chair or Vice-Chair.

Councillors or staff speaking in a private capacity must not use Council titles (e.g., "Councillor" or "Clerk") and must clarify they are not representing the Council.

BREACHES OF THIS POLICY

Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk or in the case of the Clerk, reported to the Chairman or Vice-chairman.

Breach of this policy may be dealt with under the Code of Conduct as specified in the Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

Misuse of communications can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the user and potentially the Council.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THIS POLICY.

The Clerk is responsible for ensuring the monitoring and reviewing of this policy.

The Clerk is responsible for the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Council, ensure that it meets legal requirements, and reflects best practice.

Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

This policy was adopted by Repton Parish Council as the May 2026 meeting.

APPENDIX A

GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNICATION IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY

You should:

- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
- Do not escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory, e.g., politics and religion.
- Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them and never publish anyone else's contact details.

You must not:

- Give out personal details of others
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so.
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission.
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.
- Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief.
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
- Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.
- Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.
- Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.
- Publishing obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.