Postwick with Witton Parish Council Communications Policy

Version: Draft V 03

Last Updated: 05 June 2026

Adopted under the Council's Standing Orders, Code of Conduct and relevant legislation

1. Introduction

Postwick with Witton Parish Council ("the Council") is committed to open, transparent, lawful, and effective communication with residents, partners, and stakeholders. This Protocol sets out how Councillors, the Clerk, and volunteers communicate on behalf of the Council, ensuring compliance with:

- Local Government Act 1972
- The Council's Standing Orders
- Members' Code of Conduct
- Data protection and freedom of information legislation
- Nolan Principles of Public Life

This document consolidates the Council's Communications Policy with the SLCC Model Communications Protocol (MD-55).

2. Purpose

The aims of this Protocol are to:

- Ensure communication is accurate, timely, factual, and accessible
- Support good governance and community engagement
- Clarify who may speak on behalf of the Council
- Maintain professionalism and uphold the Code of Conduct
- Ensure compliance with Standing Orders relating to publicity, meetings, and conduct
- Provide clear expectations for Councillors, the Clerk, and staff

3. Core Principles of Communication

All Council communication must be:

- Factual, non-political, and professional
- Respectful and courteous, avoiding personal criticism or inflammatory language
- Clear, concise, and accessible to all residents
- Consistent with Council decisions and not contradict resolutions
- Transparent, unless restricted by confidentiality or legislation
- Compliant with the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, and data protection law

Councillors must not bring the Council into disrepute through any form of communication, including online activity.

4. Parish Council Correspondence

- The Clerk is the official point of contact for the Council.
- All correspondence for the Council must be addressed to the Clerk.
- The Clerk manages all official correspondence following meetings.
- No individual Councillor or Officer may be the sole custodian of Council information or correspondence.
- Councillors and Officers may only access confidential information where they can demonstrate a legitimate need to know.
- Most official correspondence must be issued by the Clerk, on Council letterhead or email with the appropriate email signature.
- Where correspondence is sent by a Councillor, they must also 'cc' (carbon copy) in the Clerk.
- Where the Parish Council WhatsApp Group is used for urgent matters including use of polls to gain agreement etc. then the matter and all decisions made by this route MUST be ratified at the next parish council meeting.

5. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, and Working Groups

- Agendas must be clear, concise, and informative, enabling Councillors and the public to understand the matters being considered.
- Motions must contain sufficient information for informed decision-making.
- Items "for information only" should be kept to a minimum.
- Information intended for Councillors should be circulated via the Clerk.

6. Communications with the Press and Public

- All press enquiries must be directed to the Clerk or Chair or councillor appointed to handle press enquiries.
- Press releases or media comments must be cleared by the Clerk with the Chair.
- Councillors must not speak to the media on behalf of the Council unless formally authorised.
- If approached by the press, Councillors must make clear when expressing a personal view, and request that it is reported as such.
- Councillors must make clear to members of the public when they are expressing personal views rather than Council policy.
- Complaints from the public must be directed to the Clerk in the first instance.

7. Councillor Correspondence to External Parties

- Correspondence from Councillors to external bodies must clearly state when it is written in an official capacity and must only occur where authorised by the Council.
- The Clerk must be cc'd (carbon copied) in on all such correspondence.
- Councillors must not commit the Council to any action or position without a formal resolution.

8. Communications with Parish Council Staff

- Councillors must not give instructions to staff unless authorised (e.g., through a committee with delegated powers).
- No individual Councillor, including the Chair, may issue instructions that conflict with Council decisions or delegated arrangements.
- Telephone calls and communications must be appropriate, respectful, and related to legitimate Council business.
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9. Email Protocol

- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk. An out of office automatic email response should be set which includes normal working hours and who to contact if the matter is urgent; reasons for urgency should be stated.
- Information for Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk.
- Emails from Councillors to external parties relating to Council business must be copied to the Clerk.
- Councillors should acknowledge emails when requested.
- Council business must not be conducted by email in a way that circumvents Standing Orders on meetings and decision making.

10. Meetings with the Clerk or Officers

- Appointments should be made wherever possible.
- Meetings must relate to legitimate Council business.
- Councillors must ensure discussions are not driven by personal or political agendas.

11. Communication Channels

11.1 Website

The Council website is the primary source of official information and will publish:

- Agendas and minutes
- Policies and governance documents
- Financial information required by the Transparency Code
- Newsletters and public notices

11.2 Social Media

Information the Council share via any social media accounts must adhere to the following:

- Only factual updates and notices can be shared
- Signpost residents to official information
- Avoid political content, personal commentary, or debate
- Not discuss individual councillors, staff, or residents
- Remove defamatory or abusive comments in line with the Social Media Protocol

11.3 Noticeboards

Used for statutory notices, meeting information, and key community updates i.e. parish council newsletter.

11.4 Email

Emails sent on behalf of the Council must:

- Use the official Council email address
- Be factual, professional, and consistent with Council decisions

11.5 Press & Media

Handled by the Clerk or Chair, unless otherwise authorised.

12. Public Engagement

12.1 Responding to Enquiries

The Council will:

- Acknowledge enquiries within a reasonable timeframe which in normal circumstances should be within 7 days
- Provide factual, non-political responses
- Signpost to other authorities where appropriate

12.2 Consultation

The Council will consult residents on:

- Major projects
- Community priorities

Consultation outcomes will inform Council decision-making.

13. Confidentiality and Data Protection

The Council will comply with:

- Data protection legislation
- Freedom of Information Act

- The Council's Privacy Notice
- Standing Orders relating to confidential business

Confidential matters (e.g., staffing, tenders, legal issues) must not be shared publicly or discussed online.

14. Conduct and Civility

All communication must:

- Uphold the Nolan Principles (as should all Council work and activities)
- Respect the roles of Councillors, staff, and residents
- Avoid personal criticism or inflammatory language
- Comply with the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders

15. Election Period (Purdah)

During the pre-election period, the Council will:

- Avoid publicity that could influence support for a political party or candidate
- Continue essential business only
- Follow guidance from the Monitoring Officer

16. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required by legislation or changes in Council practice.