



# Barrowby Parish Council

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## Communications Protocol

### Document control

- **Owner:** Full Council
- **Responsible officer:** Clerk / Proper Officer
- **Adopted:** 13<sup>th</sup> April 2026 (Minute ref: [25/183] 10 b) b.)
- **Version:** 2026.1
- **Review:** Annually or earlier if legislation/guidance changes
- **Next review due:** January-March 2027 at Full Council for formal adoption at Parish Council May 2027

### 1. Purpose

This protocol sets out how Barrowby Parish Council communicates with residents, partner organisations, the media and other bodies, and how councillors and officers communicate on Council business.

Its purpose is to:

- support clear, lawful and efficient communication;
- ensure proper records are kept;
- protect the roles of councillors and officers;
- reduce duplication and delay;
- ensure that communications made on behalf of the Council are properly authorised.

### 2. Scope

This protocol applies to:

- all councillors;
- the Clerk and any other employees or officers of the Council;
- all Council, committee, sub-committee and working group business;
- all communication channels, including email, letters, telephone calls, meetings, social media, websites and messaging platforms where used for Council business.

### **3. General Principles**

3.1 The Clerk is the Council's principal administrative contact and Proper Officer.

3.2 The Clerk is the normal channel for formal Council correspondence, legal notices, contracts, formal complaints, consultation responses, Freedom of Information requests, subject access requests, and communications requiring a corporate response from the Council.

3.3 Councillors may communicate directly with external bodies, residents and partner organisations on Council business where it is appropriate to do so, provided that:

- a) they act within any authority given by the Council, a committee, a working group remit, or an agreed councillor role;
- b) the Clerk is copied into the communication or otherwise promptly provided with a copy;
- c) the communication does not purport to bind the Council unless authority has been given;
- d) the communication is professional, accurate and consistent with Council decisions, adopted policy and the Councillor Code of Conduct.

3.4 No councillor or officer should be the sole custodian of Council correspondence or information relating to Council business.

3.5 Communications should be respectful, factual, proportionate and appropriate to the recipient and subject matter.

### **4. Official Council Correspondence**

4.1 The following should normally be issued by the Clerk, or by another officer expressly authorised to do so:

- formal correspondence in the name of the Council;
- correspondence giving effect to Council resolutions;
- statutory, legal or contractual communications;
- formal responses to consultations, complaints, enforcement matters or disputes;
- correspondence involving staffing matters;
- correspondence involving data protection, information rights or confidential matters;
- media statements made on behalf of the Council unless another spokesperson has been authorised.

4.2 Official correspondence issued in the name of the Council should make clear that it is sent in an official capacity.

4.3 Where a councillor drafts correspondence intended to be sent as the formal position of the Council, it should be sent by the Clerk unless the Council has expressly authorised another arrangement.

## **5. Councillor Communications on Council Business**

5.1 Councillors may send communications themselves on Council business where the purpose is one or more of the following:

- routine liaison with partner bodies, residents, contractors, community groups or stakeholders;
- factual follow-up on matters already agreed by the Council;
- gathering information or evidence for Council business;
- working group, committee or lead-member communications within an agreed remit;
- acknowledging queries and directing matters into the Council's processes.

5.2 In such cases, the Clerk must be copied into the communication, or where that is not possible a copy must be provided to the Clerk as soon as reasonably practicable.

5.3 Where a councillor writes on Council business, the councillor should make clear which of the following applies:

- they are writing on behalf of the Council pursuant to an agreed resolution or delegated authority; or
- they are writing in their role as a councillor/lead councillor/working group member to progress Council business; or
- they are expressing a personal view and not the formal position of the Council.

5.4 Councillors must not:

- state or imply that they are communicating the formal decision or position of the Council unless authorised to do so;
- make commitments on behalf of the Council which have not been approved;
- issue instructions to contractors, staff or volunteers unless authorised through the Council's decision-making or management arrangements;
- send communications on staffing, legal, contractual, confidential or data protection matters unless specifically authorised.

5.5 Copying the Clerk into councillor communications is required for governance reasons, including continuity, record-keeping, transparency, and ensuring that the Council's corporate memory does not sit with one individual alone.

5.6 Working arrangement: Councillors do not need the Clerk to physically send every communication. However, where a councillor sends correspondence on Council business, the Clerk must be copied into that communication or otherwise provided with

a copy as soon as reasonably practicable, so that proper records are maintained and the Council's position remains consistent.

**5.7** Copying the Clerk into correspondence, or providing the Clerk with a copy, is a governance, continuity and record-keeping requirement. It does not replace the need for proper authority and does not, by itself, authorise a councillor to speak or act on behalf of the Council where no such authority has been given.

### **5.8 Communications with principal authorities and statutory bodies**

Councillors may communicate directly with principal authorities, statutory bodies and partner organisations for the purposes of routine liaison, factual enquiries, evidence gathering, ward/community representation, or work within an agreed committee, working group or lead-member remit. Such communication must comply with this Protocol, the Code of Conduct and any relevant Council resolution. The Clerk must be copied into substantive correspondence, or otherwise provided with a copy as soon as reasonably practicable, for governance and record-keeping purposes.

Formal Council decisions, formal consultation responses, legal correspondence, complaints, contractual matters, staffing matters and correspondence intended to bind the Council shall normally be issued by the Clerk or another authorised officer, unless the Council has expressly authorised another arrangement.

## **6. Communications with Residents and the Public**

6.1 Councillors may respond directly to residents on Council-related matters, but should:

- be courteous and factual;
- avoid giving commitments beyond Council decisions or delegated authority;
- distinguish clearly between personal views and Council positions;
- copy the Clerk into substantive correspondence concerning Council business.

6.2 Where a matter is a complaint, request for service, formal objection, legal matter, or issue requiring Council action, the resident should normally be directed to the Clerk so it can be logged and handled correctly.

6.3 Communications should not be used to circumvent the Council's formal decision-making processes.

## **7. Communications with the Press and Media**

7.1 Media statements issued on behalf of the Council should normally be agreed through the Clerk and the Chair, or the Chair of the relevant committee where appropriate.

7.2 A councillor who speaks to the media without specific authority to speak for the Council must make clear that the comments are personal and not necessarily the view of the Council.

7.3 Nothing in this protocol prevents the Chair, committee chair or another councillor authorised by the Council from acting as spokesperson on a particular matter.

## **8. Social Media and Digital Communications**

8.1 Council-managed social media accounts and website content shall be administered in accordance with the Council's adopted policies and management arrangements.

8.2 Councillors using personal accounts must not present personal or party-political views as those of the Council.

8.3 Where councillors use email or messaging for Council business, they must ensure that important communications are copied or forwarded to the Clerk so that proper records can be retained.

## **9. Agendas and Information Circulation**

9.1 Agenda items should be clear, concise and contain enough information for councillors to make informed decisions and for the public to understand what is being considered.

9.2 Requests for agenda items should normally be submitted to the Clerk.

9.3 Information for circulation to councillors in connection with Council business should normally be shared via the Clerk, unless urgency or practicality makes direct circulation necessary, in which case the Clerk must be copied in.

## **10. Communications with Officers and Staff**

10.1 Councillors must not give instructions to staff unless this is authorised by the Council, a properly delegated committee, or an established line-management arrangement.

10.2 No individual councillor, including the Chair, may direct the Clerk or any other employee in a way which conflicts with Council decisions, adopted policy, or delegated authority.

10.3 Routine operational communication with the Clerk should be reasonable, relevant and proportionate. Immediate replies should not be expected unless the matter is genuinely urgent.

10.4 Councillors should respect officers' working hours, privacy and workload, particularly where officers work part-time or from home.

## **11. Confidentiality, Data Protection and Records**

11.1 Councillors and officers must comply with data protection law, confidentiality requirements and the Council's relevant policies when handling communications and information.

11.2 Sensitive personal data, exempt information, staffing matters, legal advice and confidential documents must only be shared where there is a clear lawful basis and a genuine need to know.

11.3 Council-related correspondence should be retained in accordance with the Council's records management arrangements. Copying the Clerk into relevant communications forms part of that record-keeping process.

## **12. Member Conduct**

12.1 All communications relating to Council business must comply with the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Council's civility and respect expectations.

12.2 Councillors should not use communications in a way that could amount to bullying, harassment, intimidation, predetermination, misuse of position or bringing the Council into disrepute.

## **13. Breaches of this Protocol**

13.1 Concerns about non-compliance with this protocol should normally be raised with the Clerk and Chair in the first instance, unless the concern relates to the Clerk, in which case it should be raised with the Chair.

13.2 Serious or repeated breaches may be dealt with under the Council's standards, complaints, disciplinary or other relevant procedures, depending on the nature of the issue.

## **14. Relationship with the Media, Publicity and Communications Policy**

This Protocol governs day-to-day operational and governance arrangements for communications on Council business. Media relations, Council publicity, public reporting of meetings, political neutrality, contentious issues, and the use of Council land, property or communication channels for campaign or advocacy materials are governed additionally by the Council's Media, Publicity and Communications Policy.

## **15. Review**

This protocol will be reviewed regularly by the Council and updated as required to reflect current legislation, guidance and operational needs.