

Correspondence Policy and Implementation

Thurston Parish Council

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Next Review: Policy & Resources Committee February 2027

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1. INTRODUCTION
   - This Policy covers correspondence between the Parish Council and members of the public or external bodies.
   - This Policy is in addition to the IT and Electronic Communication Policy and covers correspondence in general.
   - This Policy does not specifically cover correspondence with the media (for which, the Council's Media Policy applies).

2. PARISH COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE
   - The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk, it is to the Clerk that all correspondence to the Parish Council should be addressed.
   - The Clerk should deal with the correspondence and will ensure that information or direct enquiry is passed to Councillors as appropriate.
   - No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council or a Committee.
   - In particular Councillors and Officers do not have the right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a "need to know".
   - All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using letter headed paper.
   - Where correspondence to a Councillor is copied to another person the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person.
   - Councillors should forward any Council-related correspondence they receive to the Clerk with an acknowledgement to the sender saying that the Clerk will respond on behalf of the Council
   - Should background information be pertinent to the correspondence received by Councillors, it too should be forwarded to the Clerk.

3. AIMS OF THE POLICY
   - to ensure no correspondence goes unanswered
   - to ensure that responses accurately reflect the policies and decisions of the Council
   - to ensure that responses are sent in a timely fashion
   - to maintain confidentiality when appropriate
   - to retain a 'paper trail'

4. AGENDA ITEMS FOR COUNCIL, COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS
   - Should an item of correspondence require further input from Council, it will be brought forward as an agenda item.
   - The Clerk is responsible for ensuring that it is brought to the attention of the Council for consideration and decision.
   - Agendas should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision and for Councillors and the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
   - Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information is to be circulated via the Clerk.

5. DELEGATED RESPONSBILITY TO THE CLERK
   - to be the person to whom all correspondence is addressed
   - to issue correspondence according to the remit, policies and other decisions of the Council

- to issue correspondence as a result of the deliberations of the Council
- to acknowledge all correspondence and to respond within 7 working days unless a relevant Council policy/procedure states otherwise or the matter needs to be discussed at a meeting of the Council or of a decision-making committee
- to maintain confidentiality if appropriate
- to file all correspondence for future reference

In the absence of the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk is the most appropriate person to deal with correspondence e.g. to send emails/sign letters stating a council policy/decision or to send a 'holding' reply pending consideration of a matter by the Council.

6. DAY TO DAY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

Types of correspondence – *this list is not exhaustive*

1. General correspondence - this by its very nature will be the most varied correspondence and potentially the most important to members of the public
   - on occasions the response to the issue raised may be relatively straightforward
   - if the issue has been covered by a Council resolution within the last year or so, then the response should include reference to the relevant minutes and/or policy
   - other issues - these may need to be the subject of a proposal at the next Council meeting in which case all correspondence will be circulated to all councillors. If the proposal is to be put to the next Council meeting, the Clerk will make reference to the information on the agenda as having been circulated along with any further useful information on the matter.
2. Matters not within the Council's remit (for example, queries relating to the statutory duties of another public body) – the Clerk will respond giving the relevant contact details where possible
3. Freedom of Information (FoI) requests – the Council's FoI Policy will be followed
4. Complaints – the Council's Complaints Procedure will be followed
5. Correspondence covered by Council policy – details will be given on how to access the relevant policy

7. TIMESCALES FOR RESPONSES

Acknowledgement

All correspondence will be acknowledged within 3 working days with a statement indicating when a response will be received.

Response time

All correspondence will be responded to within 7 working days unless (a) the matter is being put to the Council or a decision-making committee for consideration – in which case the correspondent will be so informed as to when and where that will happen or (b) a different response time is given in a relevant policy/procedure.