



COMMUNICATION & MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

Each Parish Councillor has a duty to represent without bias the interests of the whole community.

They will always try and do their best and are available to help parishioners with regard to matters relating to the Civil Parish of Western Valley.

Parish Councillors may be contacted via the Clerk or using their Parish Council email addresses.

If it is felt by the villager that the matter is important, then a letter or email to the Parish Clerk will ensure that it is dealt with in a timely and professional manner (also see the Correspondence section below).

It is the Parish Council's intention to meet the timescales detailed below but there could be occasions when this is not possible. When this happens the Parish Council will review their procedures and where necessary make changes to the policy or procedures.

2. Aims

To establish clear, easy to use channels of communication between the Parish Council and Parishioners, and the media, and vice versa.

To provide information on important matters in a timely manner to facilitate and encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

3. Parish Council Meetings

The Parish Council normally meets 6 times per year, starting at the May meeting, generally meeting every other month. Additional meetings may be scheduled as necessary.

The Parish Council will normally meet in a room at The District Centre, in the Civil Parish of Western Valley from 7.45pm.

Public participation will generally start at 7:45pm to enable discussion on agenda items, 10 minutes is reserved for this, with the meeting starting immediately after.

Members of the public wishing to address the Council during the formal meeting or wishing to record the meeting must make the Chair aware of their wish before the meeting starts.

The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available. The Press may record meetings in accordance with the Openness of Local



Government Regulations 2014. This is set out in more detail in Standing Orders (section 3. L, m and n), and the Recording of Meetings Policy.

The Council's Committees are also open to the public. See the parish website for details of Committees, meeting locations and meeting times.

4. Notice Boards

The following items will be displayed on the Parish Council noticeboard(s):

- Contact details for the Clerk
- The Parish Council's meeting agenda - which will be posted at least 3 clear days in advance of each meeting.
- Agenda of other committee meetings of the Parish Council - which will be posted at least 3 clear days in advance of each meeting.
- Statutorily required notices such as Electors Rights, Notices of/for Elections etc.

Where possible, any other parish council notice boards around the village will also be kept up to date, however the board outside the District Centre the official noticeboard to meet statutory requirements.

5. Correspondence

All correspondence relating to the Parish should be addressed to the Parish Clerk in the first instance either via email at Clerk@WesternValleyParish.gov.uk or via post to Western Valley Parish Council, PO Box 4311 READING, RG8 1DD. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the relevant person or organisation as soon as practically possible. However, all Parish Councillors have their own Council email addresses which have the format firstname.lastname@WesternValleyParish.gov.uk.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on anything relevant to Councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and, if otherwise, will always be copied to the Clerk. All new email requiring data to be passed on may be followed up with a data consent request before action is taken with that correspondence. Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with villagers in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, with a copy to the Clerk.

It is important to note that any emails sent to Parish Council email addresses will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act requirements.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.



It is imperative that all correspondents never forward personal information on to other people or groups outside the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

All correspondence to the Parish Clerk will be acknowledged within one week of receipt if possible. If email is used, then an acknowledgment will be sent via email.

Councillors will be notified of correspondence, but the addressee will not be named on minutes of meetings. Anonymous correspondence in any form will be recorded as received but not responded to.

Email should be thought of in the same way as a letter. A subject line, the sender's name and the content should be in the main body of the email, not as an attachment. Attachments will not be opened unless the Clerk has prior knowledge of the subject. The Council regrets that, for reasons of computer security and virus protection, anonymous emails, and those with no subject in the title will not be opened or actioned.

A parishioner may raise any issue directly with the Parish Clerk or any Councillor. If a satisfactory answer cannot be given immediately in line with the known policies of the council, the issue may be placed on the agenda for the attention of the full Council.

The Clerk will acknowledge all Freedom of Information requests within seven working days and will reply fully within 20 working days of receipt of the request. If this is not possible, a further holding letter/email will be sent with an expected completion date.

6. Website

The Parish Clerk will arrange for the agenda and associated papers to be posted on the Parish Council website (WesternValleyParish.gov.uk) at least three clear days before the meeting and for the draft Minutes to be posted as soon as possible, and no later than one month, after the meeting. The final Minutes will be posted as soon as possible after being confirmed by Council or the relevant committee.

In order to comply with the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities, the Clerk will arrange for the annual publication of the following documents no later than 1 July each year:

- a) all items of expenditure above £100
- b) end of year accounts
- c) annual governance statement
- d) internal audit report
- e) list of councillor or member responsibilities
- f) the details of public land and building assets
- g) Minutes, agendas, and meeting papers of formal meetings.



The Parish Clerk is the Webmaster and Domain Administrator for the Parish Council website. The Parish Clerk will ensure that the Parish Council email address is publicised.

7. Social Media

The use of social media by the Clerk Team, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, does not replace existing forms of communication but is used to enhance interaction with a wider range of the population.

8. Annual Parish Meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting is convened by the Chair of the Parish Council and is generally held in April each year to provide parishioners with a summary of the activities of the Parish Council over the previous year and the opportunity to debate local issues and celebrate local events and activities.

9. Related Policies and Procedures

Councillor Code of Conduct

Complaints Policy

Retention Policy

Policy on Requests for Information

Recording of Meetings Policy

10. Contact With the Media

The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media. Data Protection is of the highest priority. There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details may be in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

Confidential documents, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action taken. When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's Solicitor before any response is made.



All formal requests for comment regarding policies on any matter should be directed to the Clerk in the first instance. If unavailable, the Chair should be contacted. When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk or Chair are authorised to interact with the media.

All written responses to the Press should be drafted by the Clerk with the assistance of the Chair, or other appointed Councillor for accuracy and lawfulness.

If a member is contacted directly by the Press, Councillors are at liberty to communicate with the Press in their own right but must ensure that they always make it clear that they speak as individuals and not on behalf of the Parish Council. As stated above only the Clerk, can speak formally on behalf of the Council.

Members should not initiate contact with the media on Council related matters unless approved by the Council.

There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example, to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.

11. Press Releases

The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial. The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release, however it must be issued by the Clerk or approved by the full Council for issue. This is to ensure that the principles outlined above are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

12. Review

This document was approved for use at the meeting of the Parish Council on 08th May 2025 it shall be reviewed periodically, at least once per council term or if legislation dictates.

Signed:

Dated: 08th May 2025

Cllr _____, Chair of the Council