Loxwood Parish Council

Correspondence Policy

This Policy covers correspondence between Loxwood Parish Council and members of the public or external bodies.

The responsibilities of the Clerk and of councillors outlined in the Policy are based on the Governance Toolkit for Parish & Town Councils, 2023.

This Policy does not specifically cover correspondence with the media (for which, see the Council's Media Policy adopted February 2024 and readopted March 2025and March 2026).

The guidance notes are an aid to the Clerk and to councillors in the implementation of the Policy.

Aims of the Policy

- to ensure no correspondence goes unanswered
- to ensure that responses accurately reflect the policies and other decisions of the Council
- to ensure that responses are sent in a timely fashion
- to maintain confidentiality when appropriate
- to retain a 'paper trail'
- to maintain a complete archive of correspondence, including for Freedom of Information purposes
- to help councillors avoid being data controllers, as defined in the General Data Protection Regulation, and thus being personally liable should they be the cause of a data breach.

To achieve these objectives, in normal circumstances the Clerk will receive all correspondence on behalf of the Council and be responsible for dealing with it and, as appropriate, for bringing it to the attention of the Council for consideration and decision. All correspondence from the Council should be written and signed by the Clerk or be sent from the Clerk's official email address (clerk@loxwood-pc.gov.uk). The responsibilities of the Clerk are therefore:

- 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
- to be the Council's data controller and to avoid data breaches.

The responsibilities of councillors are to recognise that:

- correspondence received by councillors about Council business should be forwarded to the Clerk if not already copied in

• it is the job of the Clerk to deal with correspondence as outlined above; councillors must not assume this role unless requested to do so by the Council, in which case the response and any further correspondence normally must be copied to the Clerk

• no individual councillor or officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence/information in the name of the Council, one of its committees, sub-committees or working parties

• councillors and officers do not have a right to obtain confidential correspondence/information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'

• the Chairman is the most appropriate person to deal with correspondence in the absence of the Clerk 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.

Day-to-day implementation of the Policy

Councillors

• forward any Council-related correspondence you receive to the Clerk with an acknowledgement to the sender saying that the Clerk will respond on behalf of the Council

• encourage anyone who raises an issue with you verbally to write/email the Clerk, but at minimum to leave a message on the Council's phone number (this will help to avoid verbal communication 'falling through a crack in the floorboards' or from potentially being misunderstood or misinterpreted at second hand); do suggest that the person leaves his/her name, phone number and postal/email address if phoning the Clerk

• if you think some background information would be useful, email it to the Clerk, but be careful not to inadvertently attempt to influence the Council's response.

Clerk

Possible types of correspondence

1. Not in the Council's remit (for example, queries relating to the statutory duties of another public body) – respond giving the relevant contact details where possible

2. Freedom of Information (FoI) requests – follow the Council's FoI Policy

3. Complaints – follow the Council's Complaints Procedure

4. Council procedural issues – respond having consulted, as appropriate, the Council's Standing Orders, Code of Conduct, Financial Regulations or Committee Terms of Reference.

5. Correspondence covered by other Council policy – give details on how to access the relevant policy.

6. Correspondence relating to Staff Matters should be referred to the HR Committee for a response.

7. Other correspondence

• this will be the most varied correspondence and potentially the most important to members of the public.

– a response to some issues may be relatively straightforward

– if the issue has been covered by an Council resolution within the last year or so, your response should include reference to the relevant minutes

– 'other issues': these may need to be the subject of a proposal at the next Council meeting

▪ circulate the correspondence to all councillors, so they are aware of it if contacted by the sender and can consider whether to put a proposal to the next Council meeting

▪ as Clerk, you have the option to put a proposal to the next Council meeting; if you decide to do so, let all councillors know immediately rather than waiting for the agenda to appear in case anyone can provide you with useful information

Timescales for responses

Acknowledgement

• when correspondence is received, acknowledge it within 3 working days

• in your acknowledgement say when you will respond in full.

Response Time

You should respond within 7 working days unless

(a) the matter is being put to the Council or a decision-making committee for consideration – in which case let the correspondent know when and where that will happen or

(b) a different response time is given in a relevant policy/procedure (for example FoI and Complaints)