

MONKSILVER PARISH COUNCIL

Communications Policy

Introduction

Monksilver Parish Council (MPC) articulates and represents the views and needs of the local community. It provides information on important parish matters affecting the community and encourages comment from interested individuals and groups.

The overall aim is to make Council communications a two-way process to give people the information to understand accurately what MPC does, whilst also enabling MPC to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

The principles of this Policy apply to Parish Councillors and The Clerk to MPC. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with or on behalf of the Parish Council.

MPC will undertake an annual survey to all residents to better represent the public.

MPC welcomes new residents with an informative newsletter.

The importance of good communication

Good communication will enable MPC to:

- better understand the needs of the community and to develop appropriate strategies and priorities.;
- raise residents' satisfaction, trust, and confidence by communicating about issues, services and opportunities in the parish, the Somerset Council and the South-West region;
- be an effective voice of the community;
- maintain and enhance the reputation of MPC;
- raise the profile of Monksilver;
- make the best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups;
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the image or integrity of MPC or the parish.

Who is communicating

Parish Clerk

The Parish Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing communication with members of the community and outside bodies and reporting appropriately. Devolvement of this

responsibility (communicating with parishioners) is devolved to the lead Councillor for communication.

The Parish Clerk is provided with a council email address, monksilverparishcouncil@gmail.com, which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business.

The Parish Clerk will be required to communicate both verbally and in writing on a regular basis with the community, Somerset Council and groups on a regular basis as part of their duties. It is imperative that s/he handle such communication with courtesy and professionalism at all times.

Councillors

Elected and co-opted MPC Members take a lead role on community matters such as flooding, highways and communication. This enables Councillors to build expertise and rapport with the residents, Somerset Council, and other partners. The lead roles are usually allocated at the annual meetings.

Email addresses and the telephone numbers of all Councillors are published to encourage community engagement.

Elected and co-opted MPC Members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with reflect on MPC. Enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter or email.

At no time should Councillors make any promise to the public about any matter raised with them, other than to say they will investigate the matter.

Councillors must ensure that all communication with the public on council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of MPC regardless of the councillor's individual views on any subject.

Council meetings and councillor interaction

MPC meets four times per year. The dates are published on the village noticeboard and the website and also on the MPC Routine Messages WhatsApp. The floor is open to the public for representations and questions. The agendas of the meetings are published on the village noticeboard, the Routine Messages WhatsApp and by push email, 3 days prior to the council meeting. Requests for items to be placed on the agenda must be made to The Clerk at least one week before the meeting. The draft minutes of the meeting are circulated to MPC before being posted on the village noticeboard and the website within 28 days of the meeting being held.

Councillors who have taken on responsibility for some action which involves written or verbal communications with third parties shall lodge a copy of any such communication with The Clerk.

Guidance on interaction

- MPC Councillors should always disclose their identity and affiliation to the parish council.
- All media enquiries should be directed to the Chairman or the Parish Clerk or to a lead Councillor.
- Requests for the inspection of reports and documents must be made by prior appointment.
- If appropriate, for a specific issue the Chairman may authorise another Councillor to make a statement on behalf of MPC.
- All media comment must accurately reflect MPC position on the topic, as adopted in documents e.g. minutes and policies.
- Councillors should not make 'personal comments' which could damage the reputation of MPC or negatively impact on the teamwork or creditability of the council or members of the community.
- Comments on matters which are, or are likely to be, subject to legal proceedings should be subject to advice taken from Somerset Association Local Councils' solicitor before any response is made.

Managing media effectively

Key points for the effective management of media relations:

- respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time;
- be helpful, polite and positive;
- never say 'no comment';
- ensure all statements or responses to hostile enquiries are cleared by the Parish Clerk or the Chairman.
- issue timely and relevant media releases;
- pre-empt potential stories arising from council agendas/minutes by issuing proactive PR (where possible).

Village Noticeboard

The village noticeboard is located on the wall of the accommodation block at The Notley Inn car park. The village noticeboard will be kept updated to ensure that members of the community who are less active on-line are kept aware of key information. The Parish Clerk will manage all posting of notices to the locked board.

Online presence

Council website <https://monksilver.org/> is maintained and updated by a service company at the request of the Parish Clerk. The website is the main source of information about MPC and is the main source of the MPC archives.

All communications should promote the council website.

Social media

MPC does not use social media other than WhatsApp. It has two accounts, which residents opt in:

- urgent for emergency bulletins e.g. flooding
- routine for minutes, agendas and newsletters, Somerset Council etc.

Push emails

Residents opt-in to receive push emails in line with the WhatsApp postings.

Housebound residents who are not on-line receive hand delivered minutes and newsletters so that they remain in communication.

24th February 2025

Next review February 2028.