MONKSILVER PARISH COUNCIL

Communications Policy

MONKSILVER PARISH COUNCIL PURPOSE: Monksilver Parish Council (MPC) has five clearly stated purposes:

1. To listen to and inform the Parish community
2. To contribute to the appeal of the Parish as a safe and secure place to live with strong community values
3. To direct the limited Parish resources for the benefit of the Parish community
4. To monitor environmental risks and hold Somerset Council, The Environment Agency and 3rd parties (eg Wessex Water) accountable on behalf of the Parish
5. To adhere to principles of legality, trust, fairness, equality and courtesy

MONKSILVER PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY: Monksilver Parish Council (MPC) is committed to maintaining clear, effective, and two-way communication with all residents of the Parish. The Council aims to:

- Provide accurate and timely information about the role, decisions, and activities of MPC
- Ensure residents have the opportunity to share views, raise concerns, and contribute to local decision-making
- Use feedback from residents and partner organisations to inform and guide Council decisions
- Promote openness, transparency, and trust between MPC and the community it serves

This Policy applies to:

- All Parish Councillors
- The Clerk to Monksilver Parish Council
- Any individual or representative communicating on behalf of the Parish Council
- It is also intended as guidance for members of the public and partner organisations engaging with MPC

To ensure communication remains effective and responsive to community needs, MPC will:

- Periodically review this Policy
- Carry out community surveys or consultations when appropriate
- Adjust communication methods based on feedback to better represent and serve the Parish

MONKSILVER PARISH COUNCIL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- The Parish Council has responsibility for local issues, including setting an annual precept (local rate) to cover the Parish Council's operating costs and producing annual accounts for public scrutiny
- The Parish Council evaluates local planning application, as necessary with Exmoor National Park and Somerset Council officers
- The Parish Council liaises with the local police and neighbourhood watch groups on matters, security and traffic management
- The Parish Council lobbies Somerset Council on the maintenance, repair and improvement of highways, drainage, footpaths, public transport and street cleaning
- The Parish Council is a voice for the Parish on conservation matters (including trees and listed buildings) and environmental issues

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ENABLES MPC TO:

- Understand the needs and priorities of the community more effectively
- Increase residents' satisfaction, trust, and confidence by clearly communicating information about issues, services, and opportunities within the Parish, Somerset Council, and the wider South-West region
- Represent the interests of the community effectively
- Maintain and enhance the reputation of MPC
- Raise the profile of Monksilver as a cohesive and active community
- Engage with all residents and ensure inclusivity in communication
- Challenge and correct misinformation or inaccuracies that could undermine the Parish or MPC

WHO IS COMMUNICATING?

Parish Clerk

- The Parish Clerk has overall responsibility for communication with residents, partner organisations, and external bodies, and for reporting relevant matters to MPC
- The Clerk will consult the lead Councillor for Communication on whether information received should be shared with residents and the most appropriate communication method
- The Clerk must use the dedicated Council email address clerk@monksilver.org for all Council business
- Communication undertaken by the Clerk, whether written or verbal, must always be polite, professional, and impartial

Councillors

- Elected and co-opted Councillors take lead roles in specific areas of parish business (e.g. flooding, highways, communication) which are normally agreed at the Annual Meeting
- Councillors' names, email addresses (formatted firstname.surname@monksilver.org) and telephone numbers are publicly available to encourage engagement
- Councillors may be approached by residents and must respond respectfully and appropriately
- Councillors must not make commitments or promises on behalf of MPC. They may only advise that the matter will be investigated
- All communication on Council matters must reflect the agreed decisions and policies of MPC, regardless of personal opinions

COUNCIL MEETINGS AND PUBLIC INTERACTION

- MPC meets four times per year. Meeting dates are published on the village noticeboard and the MPC website
- Agendas are published on the noticeboard and website at least three clear days before each meeting
- Residents may request items to be included on the agenda by contacting the Clerk at least one week prior to the meeting
- Members of the public may speak during the designated Public Participation period.
- Draft minutes are circulated to Councillors and published on the noticeboard and website within 28 days
- Councillors undertaking actions that involve communication with third parties must provide a copy to the Clerk for Council records
- MPC may issue newsletters when additional or time-sensitive local information needs to be shared

GUIDANCE ON INTERACTION

- Councillors must always clearly identify themselves and their role when acting on behalf of MPC
- Media enquiries should be referred to the Chairman, the Clerk, or the lead Councillor for Communication
- The Chairman may authorise another Councillor to comment publicly on a specific matter if appropriate
- Statements to media or external bodies must reflect the agreed position of MPC as recorded in minutes, resolutions, or policies
- Councillors must not make personal comments which could:
    - damage the reputation of MPC,
    - undermine teamwork, or
    - negatively affect relationships within the community

- Where legal issues may be involved, advice must be sought from the Somerset Association of Local Councils before any response is issued

MANAGING MEDIA EFFECTIVELY: To support constructive media engagement, MPC will:

- Respond to media enquiries fully and within a reasonable timeframe
- Communicate in a helpful, polite, and professional manner
- Avoid using the phrase "no comment"—instead provide a brief factual holding statement when required
- Ensure responses to contentious enquiries are cleared by the Clerk or Chairman.
- Issue timely and relevant public information releases
- Anticipate potential issues arising from Council business and communicate proactively when appropriate

VILLAGE NOTICEBOARD

- The noticeboard is located on the wall of the accommodation block at The Notley Inn car park.
- It will be maintained and kept up to date to ensure residents who are not online have access to key information.
- The Clerk is responsible for posting notices to the locked board.

ONLINE PRESENCE

The MPC website: https://monksilver.org/ is the primary source of official Council information and archives. It is maintained on behalf of MPC at the request of the Clerk. All Council communications should direct residents to the website where appropriate.

Social Media and Messaging: MPC does not operate general social media accounts.

There are two optional WhatsApp groups are available to residents. These are administered by the lead Councillor for Communication and cover subjects including:

- Urgent Alerts (e.g. flooding, emergencies)
- Routine Updates (e.g. notice of website updates, meeting information)

Email: Residents may opt-in to receive email updates. These mirror the WhatsApp notifications and are managed by the lead Councillor for Communication.

Residents Without Internet Access: housebound or offline residents receive hand-delivered minutes and newsletters to ensure equal access to information.

Policy Date: September 2025 **Next Review: February 2028**