



Bratton Parish Council Communications Policy

Aims

To establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication for Bratton Parish Council in relation to members of the public, other agencies, fellow members, the press and parish council staff.

The parish council aims to provide information on important matters affecting the community and to encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

Each parish councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community. He/she will always try to help with regard to matters relating to the parishes within the group. However, an individual councillor cannot respond to enquiries outside of Parish Council meetings other than to acknowledge such an enquiry. Neither can an individual councillor, nor the chairman, make a decision or respond on behalf of the Parish Council.

Means of Communication

Website

In the interests of transparency and to provide electors with a clear picture of its activities, the Parish Council will publish parish news and general information on the parish council website. This will include parish council meeting agendas and the full minutes of parish council. The website will also be used to publish information from committees and groups supported by and connected to Bratton Parish Council.

Bratton Parish News

The parish council will nominate a councillor to send a monthly update of news and information from the council to the Bratton Parish News for publication. If relevant, the council will offer longer articles to the BPN to inform and update residents about council activities.

Notice boards

The Jubilee Hall noticeboard will display contact details for the parish clerk, the agenda for the next meeting, any statutory notices and other items of interest.

Social Media

The parish council will aim to publish regular news and information updates on local Facebook and other social media groups, linking back to the Bratton Parish Council website.

Social media (or any other method of communication) must not be used to make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves. Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.

If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.

Meetings

The Parish Council meeting dates are published in the BPN and on the noticeboard. During every parish council meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to raise a matter of concern or to comment on an item on the agenda. After the conclusion of the public speaking section however, members of the public are not permitted to contribute to further agenda items unless permission is granted by the Chair.

Annual meeting of the Parish Council

This meeting is held in May. It is a normal parish council meeting except that item one on the agenda is 'The election of the Chair'.

Annual Parish Meeting

Also held in May. This is a meeting of the Parish and not the Parish Council. Electors can contribute to the agenda and these meetings can celebrate local activities and debate current issues in the community. Seven clear days' notice of the meeting will be given.

Communication with the Press and Public

Dealing with the media

The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Chair. The Clerk will be the first point of contact for the media; however, where it is appropriate for a councillor to represent the parish council, the Chair or Vice-Chair shall be authorised as the official spokesmen for the council.

Unless a parish councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, parish councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

Press releases

Individual councillors will not be permitted to issue media releases on behalf of the parish council. Press reports from the parish council, its committees or working groups shall be sent from the Clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

Speaking to the public

Elected 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 by councillors will reflect on the council. At no time

should councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the parish council. Depending on the issue raised it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- refer the matter to the Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- request an item on a relevant agenda
- investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Clerk

Unless a parish councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view. The only clear way of being aware of the council's view is if the matter has been discussed at a parish council meeting, and a decision made on that item.

Pre-election media

In the restricted period before an election, commonly known as "purdah" media releases will not include quotes from councillors who are due for re-election

Recording Public Meetings

Bratton Parish Council supports the legal right of members of the public and press to film, photograph, audio record and report on council and committee meetings which are open to the public.

Anybody filming, photographing or audio recording public meetings is required to give due consideration at all times to ensure that there is no disruption to normal proceedings. In this regard, flash photography or additional lighting will not be permitted without the prior permission of the Chairperson.

In line with national legislation, the reporting, filming, photographing and audio recording must only relate to the public meeting itself and must not extend to anybody seated in the public section who does not form part of the proceedings. Filming, photographing or audio recording a member of the public without their prior express permission is not permitted.

Anybody wishing to film, photograph or audio record the proceedings must avoid including children or vulnerable adults. Anybody intending to film, photograph or audio record any such individuals seated in the public section is required to first obtain the express permission of their parent or relevant responsible adult to that filming, photographing or audio recording taking place.

Halting recordings

If the Chair of a relevant meeting considers that any filming, photographing, audio recording or social media reporting activity is causing a disruption to the meeting, the person causing the disruption will be requested to comply with rules as stated above.

Should the disruption continue, which makes orderly business impossible, the Chair will have the discretion to take whatever action he/she thinks appropriate in accordance with the Parish Council's Standing Orders (e.g. adjourn the meeting).

The termination or suspension of filming, photographing, audio recording and social media reporting will occur when:

- there is any public disturbance of the meeting;
- moving around the public section whilst filming;
- the Chair considers that a defamatory statement has been made;
- requests are received from members of the public to cease recording when they speak;
- people are asked to repeat statements for the purposes of recording;
- the meeting formally agrees to exclude the press and public from the meeting due to the exempt nature of the business being discussed; or
- it is considered that continued recording/filming/photographing could infringe the rights of any individual (e.g. an individual in the public section has made a specific request to the Chair of the meeting that they do not wish to be filmed, photographed or audio recorded).