

Burnham Market Parish Council – Communications Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Burnham Market Parish Council manages communications to ensure they are lawful, accurate, consistent, and in line with Council decisions.

It applies to all Councillors, staff, and anyone acting on behalf of the Council.

2. Legal Framework

This policy operates in accordance with:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI – access to recorded information held by the Council)
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (personal data handling and privacy)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Local Government Act 1972 (including Schedule 12A – exempt information)
- Council Standing Orders
- Members' Code of Conduct
- ICO guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office

3. General Principles

The Council will ensure that:

- communications reflect formally agreed Council decisions
- information provided is accurate, clear, and not misleading
- personal opinions are not presented as Council policy
- decisions are made at properly convened Council meetings unless lawfully delegated
- transparency is maintained while respecting lawful confidentiality

Information held by the Council may be subject to disclosure under the FOI Act, subject to statutory exemptions.

4. Lawful Decision-Making and Meetings

Council decisions must be made:

- at properly convened Council meetings, or
- by authorised delegation under Standing Orders

Where matters are considered confidential, they may be discussed in closed session under **Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972**.

Adopted May 2026
Review annually

GDPR does not determine whether meetings are open or closed; it governs how personal data is handled if disclosed.

5. Official Communications

- Only Council-approved decisions may be communicated as Council policy
- The Clerk is the principal officer responsible for official communications
- The Chair (or Vice-Chair if delegated) may also act as spokesperson
- Individuals must not represent personal views as Council decisions

When acting officially, communications must clearly state authority (e.g. “on behalf of the Council”).

6. Councillor and Staff Conduct in Communication

Councillors and staff must:

- ensure communications do not misrepresent Council decisions
- avoid using Council titles to imply authority in personal communications
- clearly distinguish between personal views and Council positions

Councillors remain free to express personal views, provided they do not misrepresent Council policy.

7. Internal Communications

Internal communications are used for administration and coordination only.

Key principles:

- internal discussion does not replace formal decision-making
- decisions must be made in Council meetings unless delegated
- working group discussions must be reported back to Council where relevant

Information recorded in internal communications may be disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 if held by or on behalf of the Council.

FOI applies to recorded information only; it does not regulate informal discussion in real time.

8. Communications with the Public

The Council will:

- respond to public enquiries in a timely and professional manner
- provide factual information based on Council decisions
- avoid speculation or personal opinion in official responses

Adopted May 2026
Review annually

Councillors engaging informally with the public must not:

- commit the Council to action
- misrepresent Council decisions
- make statements outside their delegated authority

The Council may choose not to respond to anonymous correspondence unless:

- there is a safeguarding concern
- it relates to a statutory request (e.g. FOI under the Freedom of Information Act 2000)
- or the Council determines it is appropriate to respond

9. Communications with the Media

- The Clerk is the primary media contact for the Council
- The Chair (or Vice-Chair if delegated) may also act as spokesperson
- All media statements must reflect Council-approved positions

Councillors or staff speaking in a personal capacity must:

- make clear they are not representing the Council
- not use their Council title in a way that implies authority

10. Written Communications (Email and Correspondence)

- Council business should normally be conducted using official Council email accounts
- Communications relating to Council business may be subject to disclosure under the FOI Act
- Personal email accounts should not normally be used for Council business
- All communications must comply with the Members' Code of Conduct
- Personal data must be handled in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018

11. Other Communication Channels

Telephone, messaging apps, and online platforms may be used for operational matters.

However:

- recorded communications may be disclosable under FOI if held by the Council
- substantive decisions must not be made outside formal meetings unless delegated
- informal channels must not be used to circumvent decision-making procedures

12. Social Media and Online Communication

- The Clerk (or authorised officer) manages official Council online accounts
- Posts will be factual and relate to Council business
- Inappropriate or defamatory content may be moderated or removed

Adopted May 2026
Review annually

Councillors:

- may maintain personal accounts
- must not imply they are speaking for the Council unless authorised
- must avoid using Council titles in a misleading way online

13. Persistent or Vexatious Communications

The Council may apply proportionate measures where communication becomes:

- abusive
- excessive
- or unreasonable in nature

Before any restriction is applied, the Council will:

- assess the communication history
- attempt informal resolution where appropriate
- ensure decisions are evidence-based and proportionate

Where restrictions are applied:

- the individual will be informed in writing
- reasons will be provided
- a review mechanism will be offered

14. Promotions, Advertising and Signage

The Council may permit promotion of local events at its discretion.

- Permission is required for advertising on Council land
- Approval is normally limited to local community events
- Signage may be displayed up to 5 days before an event
- All signage must be removed within 24 hours after the event
- Unauthorised signage may be removed by the Council

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure compliance with:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- UK General Data Protection Regulation
- Local Government Act 1972
- ICO guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office