

AUDLEM PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Aims

To establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication between Audlem Parish Council and members of the local community.

The Parish Council aims to provide information on important matters affecting the community and to encourage 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 Parish of Audlem. However, an individual councillor cannot respond to enquiries outside of Parish Council meetings other than to acknowledge such an enquiry. Nor can an individual councillor, including the chairman, make a decision or respond on behalf of the Parish Council. Correct procedures for dealing with enquiries are given below.

A contact list of Parish Council members is available on the Parish webpages of www.audlem.org and on the Parish Council noticeboard, along with the Parish Clerk's contact details.

Parish Council Meetings

Parish Council meetings are held monthly (except for August) starting at 7.30pm. Meetings are normally held on the first Monday of any month but this may vary. The dates of the meetings are posted on the village website and on the Parish Council Noticeboard. The venue for Parish Council Meetings is usually the Meeting Rooms adjoining Audlem Methodist Church on Shropshire Street. The agenda for the next meeting is posted a minimum of three working days before the meeting on the Parish Council webpages, together with any pertinent reports.

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 during the Public Forum before the meeting commences. Once the meeting proper has commenced members of the public are not permitted to contribute to further agenda items unless invited to do so by the Chair in exceptional circumstances, for example to draw on their expert knowledge to facilitate a discussion.

Minutes of Parish Council meetings are published on the Parish Council webpages and the Parish Noticeboard.

Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

This meeting will be held in May, in an Election year it will be held on the fourth day after the election or within 14 days. It is in effect a normal Parish Council meeting except that item one on the agenda has to be 'The election of the Chairman'.

Annual Parish Meeting/Annual Village Meeting

This is a meeting of the Parish and not the Parish Council. The focus and format of the meeting will be decided in advance and the event promoted around the village to encourage all members of the community to attend. The meeting will be held between 1 March and 1 June and will not commence earlier than 6.00 pm.

Correspondence

All correspondence relating to the Parish should be addressed to the Parish Clerk. This will ensure



that the matter is recorded and passed to the Parish Council for their attention at the next meeting. Communication ideally should be in written form, either by email or letter.

All correspondence to the Parish Clerk will be acknowledged within seven days of receipt, unless the clerk is on annual leave. If email is used then an acknowledgment will be sent by email.

If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a Parish Council meeting, then the Parish Clerk will have to be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda.

All correspondence and communication/documents must be received by the Parish Clerk a minimum of 24 hours prior to a meeting. Exceptions to this rule are planning and other documents which require a response prior to the next meeting of the Parish Council and representations or presentations from the public & outside speakers regarding a planning issue.

The Parish Council will determine the response, if any, to correspondence received. The Parish Council reserves the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Parish Clerk's time.

If Councillors engage in correspondence as Portfolio holder or representative of the Parish Council, they must copy the Clerk into that correspondence.

External Meetings

Parish Councillors should provide notes or the formal minutes of any meetings that they attend on behalf of the Parish Council to the Clerk as soon as practicable so that they may be distributed to all Councillors.

Social Media

Parish Councillors will not engage in public communication via websites/twitter etc on behalf of the Parish Council or in connection with Parish Council business.

The Parish Council will not respond to enquiries or comments made via social media (including Audlem Online's Chatbox). If residents wish to raise an issue with the Parish Council, they should communicate directly through the Parish Clerk as outlined under Correspondence above.

Publications (both print and electronic – eg newspapers, magazines, websites)

All articles will be issued through the Parish Clerk or the Communications Portfolio holder, unless there is a resolution to the contrary.

Articles will be checked with at least one member of the Parish Council other than the author (usually the Chair or Communications Portfolio holder) before publication. Articles are not normally published without having been agreed to in a Parish Council meeting. Exceptions to these guidelines are:

- a) public information dissemination – eg roadworks information, meeting notification
- b) there is a tight time constraint under which circumstances the Clerk will seek majority agreement of Parish Councillors via email (this exception is only made for matters of significant public interest of a time sensitive nature (usually planning issues)).

The Audlem Parish Newsletter "**Around Audlem**" is a quarterly publication that is wholly funded by the Parish Council and distributed to all households within the Parish. No advertising is included in the publication nor payment-led editorial. Its aim is to provide unbiased information to residents on matters of local interest and on services/businesses based in the Parish. It is also used by local



community groups, clubs and societies as a means by which to communicate with the whole community, including those who may not have access to the internet. The editor of the newsletter is an unpaid role and may held by the Communications Portfolio Holder or an appointed member of the public.

Dealing with Enquiries – a guide for Councillors

When an enquiry is received from a member of the public/press, Councillors must remember that they do not have the authority to speak on behalf of the Parish Council. They may give their own personal opinion but must expressly state that it is not the opinion of the Parish Council, this includes enquiries made on social media. Parish Councillors should either pass enquiries to the Clerk themselves or give the contact details of the Clerk to the enquirer. In the absence of the Clerk, these enquiries should be passed to the Chair.

However, Parish Councillors may give a response to an enquiry if it is merely passing on information which is already in the public domain, for example:

- *Yes the Parish Council is developing a Neighbourhood Plan in conjunction with the community, the process is on-going. Further information is available on the Audlem website.*
- *Yes the Parish Council is responsible for the Public Conveniences, if you have any issues with them please get in touch with the Clerk, whose contact details are on the Noticeboard and the Audlem website.*

Any response made must be copied to the Clerk for record purposes.

Any enquiries that Parish Councillors receive and pass to the Clerk, will be shared with the whole council and the matter will be dealt with at a Parish Council meeting and/or, if appropriate, a statement response given via the Clerk.

Communications Portfolio Holder

This role is held by a serving Parish Councillor. They work with the Clerk and the Chair to ensure that public communications are unambiguous and effective. They will sense check and information check articles with the Clerk and the Chair as well as write articles.

They are responsible for liaising with and supporting the editor of the Newsletter "Around Audlem" if they are not carrying out the role themselves.

The Communications Portfolio Holder has no more right to speak on behalf of the Parish Council than any other Councillor however they may be called on to do this by the Parish Council at a meeting (or otherwise in exceptional circumstances, see publications).

The Chair and the Clerk will work with the Communications Portfolio Holder to ensure that their work has been suitably checked as is the case with articles written by the Clerk or any Councillor.

Exceptional Situations

Due to the evolving nature of modern communications, Audlem Parish Council will annually review this policy and where situations arise that are not covered by the current policy, the Clerk will use the Social Media Policy of Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) as a reference for suitable response recommendations for the Parish Council.

ADOPTED: _____ Chair of Audlem Parish Council

DATE: _____

