

## **THORVERTON PARISH COUNCIL – HANDLING AND PUBLISHING OF CORRESPONDENCE**

1. Thorverton Parish Council actively encourages open and transparent communications with parishioners. The intention of this document is to set out how it will deal with correspondence, including publication on the Council's website and/or notice board.
2. For the purposes of this document:
  - a. "Correspondence" means any letter or email from a member of the public (normally, though not exclusively, a parishioner). It does not include comments made on social media, nor does it include letters or emails between an individual or business and the Council about day to day transactional business dealings. Matters relating to planning, which fall within the remit of Mid Devon District Council, are also excluded.
  - b. "Publication" means placing on the Parish Council's website for general access. Any published correspondence should also be available to a parishioner without internet access, on request to the Clerk. Some published correspondence may also be posted on the Parish Council's notice board in School Lane.
  - c. "The Council" means Thorverton Parish Council and "the Clerk" means the Clerk to Thorverton Parish Council.

The general principles on which this policy is based is at Annex 1 and a simplified flow chart is at Annex 2.

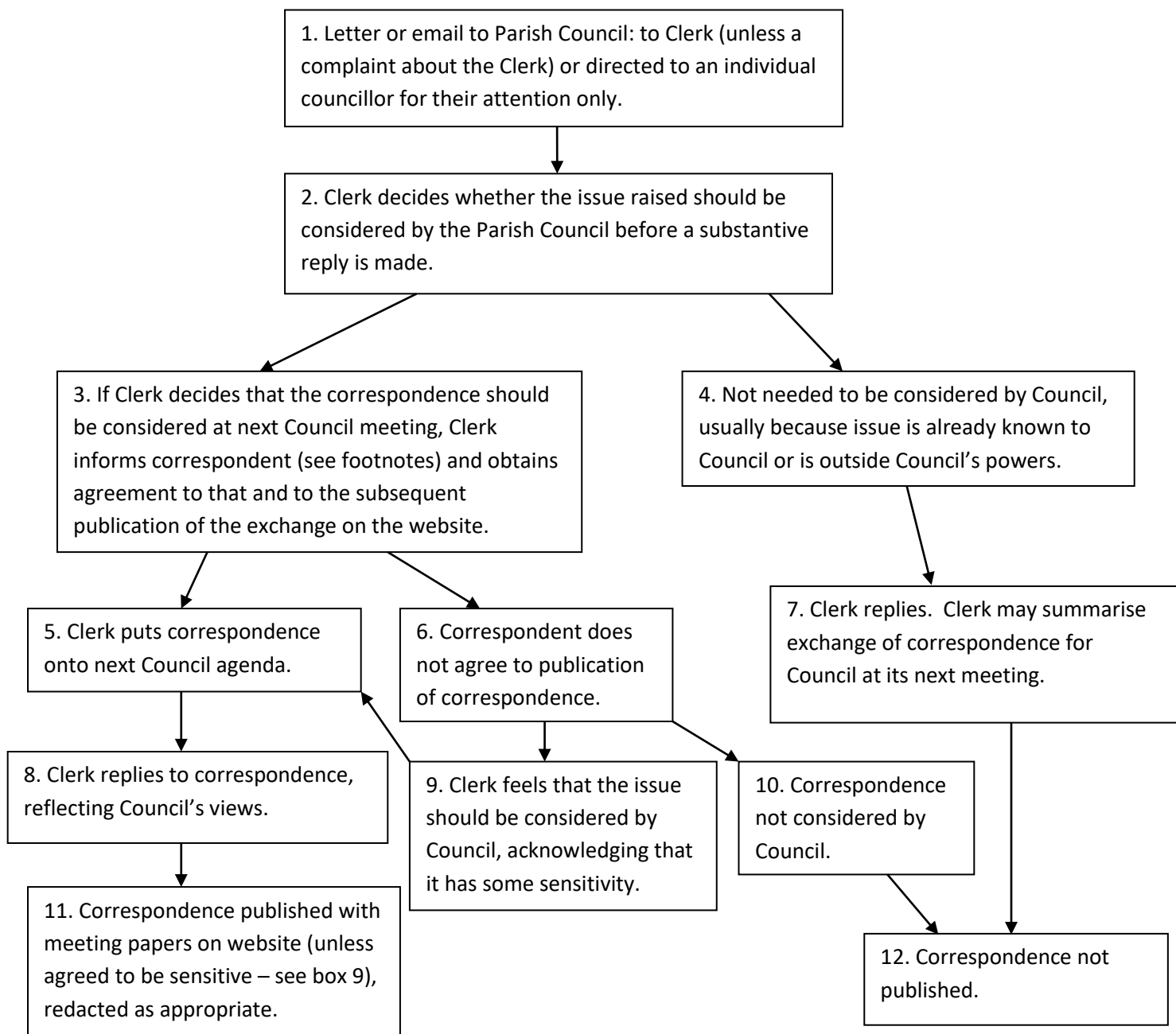
3. Correspondence to the Council should be addressed to the Clerk. If it is addressed to a councillor, they should pass the correspondence to the Clerk (unless it is clearly only intended to be read by the councillor to whom it was addressed).
4. Normally the Clerk will reply to all correspondence. In the Clerk's absence, the Chairman may reply or make some other arrangement.
5. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of any correspondence, usually within 7 calendar days. In the acknowledgement, the Clerk will ask the correspondent if they are content for the correspondence to be published. The Clerk will make clear that the Council believes that where a parishioner wants the Council to see their correspondence, then other parishioners should also be able to see that correspondence through its publication. The acknowledgement should give an indication of the likely timescale for a reply, which will normally be within 14 days unless the Clerk feels that it is appropriate to await a view from the Council at its next meeting. The acknowledgement should also give a unique reference number for the correspondence.
6. Where the correspondence is a simple request for information or where the Clerk is confident that they know the Council's view on a matter raised, the Clerk may choose to reply without consulting the Council beforehand. Provided that the correspondent has agreed to the correspondence being published it will be reviewed by the Council at its next meeting, and the Council may decide to give an additional reply, through the Clerk. The Council will not normally review correspondence where the correspondent has not agreed to its publication.

7. Where the Clerk feels that the Council should give a view as to the reply and the correspondent has agreed to publication, the correspondence will be put onto the agenda for the next Council meeting. The Clerk will then reply after the meeting, steered by the Council.
8. Unless the correspondent has indicated that they do not wish to have their correspondence published, correspondence to the Council will be regarded as in the public domain – and hence available to be freely seen. If the matter is sensitive (for example, there may be commercial sensitivity) and the correspondent requests that it is seen by the Council but not published, this will be respected and noted appropriately on the Council's meeting agenda.
9. Where the correspondent has agreed to publication, such correspondence received up to the time of publication of the agenda for a Council meeting, together with any reply from the Clerk (other than simple acknowledgments) will be made available with other meeting documents on the Council's website, with the exception of any sensitive correspondence (see paragraph 8 above) or any correspondence which the Clerk deems is not suitable to be published (see paragraph 11 below).
10. While there is a need to handle personal data sensitively, this should not mean that the views of parishioners expressed in correspondence should be anonymous. Therefore, if the correspondent is content, the Council will publish correspondence with the name of the correspondent, but with contact details and other personal information redacted. If the correspondent indicates that they do not wish their name to appear, it too will be redacted. The Council will redact the names, contact details or other personal information of any other people mentioned in the correspondence. If this is too onerous, it may be necessary not to publish the correspondence at all, unless the correspondent is able to resubmit their correspondence without any personal details of others.
11. If the Clerk considers that the correspondence is vexatious, malicious, frivolous, defamatory or discriminatory they will not publish it. In such case, the Clerk will explain, in their reply to the correspondent, why they have decided not to publish the correspondence. The Clerk may also feel that publication is inappropriate where the correspondent is criticising the Council in what the Clerk considers to be an unreasonable way which includes factual inaccuracies, or is seeking free publicity of their views; in such case the Clerk will ask the Council whether it wants to publish such correspondence.
12. Correspondence published on the website will be grouped under the meeting at which it was before the Council. Where the correspondence is replied to following consideration at a Council meeting, the reply will be published with documentation for the next Council meeting. It is the Council's intention that correspondence should be easily searchable on its website, by date or by subject matter. However, currently a suitable search facility is not in place.
13. If correspondence is received after publication of a Council meeting agenda but before the Council meeting takes place, the Clerk may nonetheless put the correspondence to the Council for its consideration at the meeting. In such case, the correspondence will normally be published with the documents for the next meeting.
14. Correspondence in response to any consultations will be grouped when published and will not normally receive individual replies, other than acknowledgment of receipt.

General principles:

- The Parish Clerk should be the primary channel for correspondence, receiving and replying as appropriate, taking the views of Council where they consider it necessary, and deciding what to bring before the Council.
- The Parish Council wants all correspondence which it considers **in full** at a Council meeting to be available to be seen by parishioners.
- There will be comments made and questions raised with the Parish Council where it is not necessary, nor appropriate for the Council to review the correspondence in full. Where the Clerk considers it appropriate, these issues will be brought to the Council's attention without the triggering correspondence being circulated with the meeting papers.
- The Parish Council wants to safeguard personal details from correspondents and so will not publish correspondence without the correspondent's consent.

A simplified flow chart:



**Notes:**

1. Correspondence from businesses or from organisations will not normally be published, in particular where there may be sensitive business-related details.
2. Correspondence about planning issues will not usually be published where the matter falls within the primary competence of the District Council.