

West Wycombe Parish Council

Anonymous Correspondence Policy

1. Introduction

This policy outlines how West Wycombe Parish Council will act upon information contained in anonymous letters and other anonymous communications (“anonymous communications”) as defined in paragraph 4.

2. Scope

The Policy applies to all Members, whether Councillors or staff.

3. Aim

To provide a consistent approach to dealing with anonymous communications.

4. Definition of anonymous communications

This is a written or verbal communication where no name, address or identifying factors are given. This may include phone calls, 'round robins', newsletters, emails, texts, blogs, websites, social media and all forms of electronic communications.

5. Verbal anonymous communications

- a) Any Member receiving a verbal anonymous communication should respond by stating that the Parish Council will not take any action in respect of such a communication unless it is put in writing. Exceptionally, the need for immediate action or investigation may prevent the provision of a written communication at that point.
- b) A visitor or caller should be encouraged to provide their contact details, and be passed to the Clerk for recording and for deciding on further action
- c) If no written communication is provided by the visitor or caller, a note summarising what verbal communication took place should be created by the Member and passed to the Clerk

6. Steps to be taken with anonymous (including electronic) communications

Unless of a purely trivial or frivolous nature all anonymous written communications should

- a) be treated as being in strict confidence by all Members
- b) in the first instance be circulated by email to all Members with any personal and sensitive information redacted from the anonymous communication
- c) An un-redacted copy shall be made available only for Members for inspection at the Parish Council offices and shall be produced at the next Council meeting.

7. When deciding what action to take, the following should be considered:

- a) West Wycombe Parish may not consider anonymous letters or other anonymous communications unless there is corroborating evidence, and the Parish Council expressly reserves the right to take no action unless the anonymous communication alleges significant health & safety issues, a criminal offence, fraud or irregularity and where there exists supporting information which suggests the allegation can be substantiated
- b) Seriousness of the issues raised and its effect on the community
- c) Criminal and legal implications
- d) Health and Safety of Members
- e) Credibility of the concern
- f) Whether sufficient information is provided to corroborate the allegation(s) and enable an investigation to be carried out
- g) Fraud and any other irregularities detrimental to the Parish Council
- h) Anonymous communications or indeed any form of communication considered to be Vexatious or Malicious may be forwarded to the appropriate authorities, and the Parish

Council will provide full support for those authorities to carry out their investigation

8. Other Matters

- a) The log/record of anonymous communications should be periodically reviewed to identify any developing trends.
- b) Where the writer has provided contact details but has asked for anonymity their right to privacy should be respected
- c) Due caution must be exercised when reacting to anonymous communications which appear to be malicious, potentially libellous or of an extremely personal nature
- d) This policy should be reviewed periodically to check compliance with legislative changes which may occur in future.

Adopted: 9th June 2016