

Anonymous and Unverifiable Correspondence Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Honeybourne Parish Council ("the Council") will handle correspondence received where the sender's identity cannot be established or verified, so that a consistent, sound approach is applied and does not need to be re-considered each time such correspondence arises.

2. Scope

This policy applies to correspondence received by the Council, the Chairman, or any Councillor or Officer acting in their Council capacity, where:

- The sender does not provide their full name, signing instead with a generic description (e.g. "Concerned Resident"); or
- The sender provides only an email address or other contact method that cannot be verified as belonging to a genuine, identifiable individual; or
- There is no correspondence address beyond an email address, and the Council has no independent means of confirming the sender's identity.

3. Policy Statement

- The Council is under no obligation to respond, in any form, to correspondence falling within the scope of this policy.
- Where correspondence appears to request recorded information, the Clerk will assess it against section 8(1)(b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which requires a valid request to state the applicant's name and an address for correspondence. Correspondence that does not meet this requirement – in particular, correspondence that does not state the sender's name – will not be treated as a valid request under the Act, and this policy does not affect any request that does meet the Act's requirements.
- Correspondence asking the Council to give its opinion, take a position, or offer support on a matter is a request for the Council's view, not a request for recorded information. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 only covers requests for recorded information, so it does not apply to this kind of correspondence, whether or not the sender is identified.
- The Council retains discretion to acknowledge or respond to such correspondence where it considers this appropriate, but is not required to do so.
- All correspondence within the scope of this policy will be logged by the Clerk. Where the subject matter is sensitive, contested, or part of an ongoing pattern, the Clerk will use their discretion to bring it to the Chairman and, where appropriate, to Council in confidential session, for information and direction.

4. Reasoning

- The Council recognises the importance of remaining approachable to residents. This policy does not restrict the Council's willingness to engage with identifiable residents on legitimate concerns. It exists to protect the Council from being drawn into responding, on the record, to correspondence whose origin cannot be established – particularly on sensitive or contested matters – where a substantive response could be misattributed, selectively quoted, or used to imply a Council position that has not in fact been taken.

5. Review

This policy will be renewed by Council every three years, or sooner if legislation or published guidance changes.