POLICY ON ANONYMOUS COMMUNICATION

Adopted at the Council Meeting 4th May 2021 Ref 21/173

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   This policy outlines how West Hill Parish Council ("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**

   Anonymous Communications are written or verbal communications where no name, address or identifying factors are given sufficient to identify the source or author. This may include notes, letters, telephone calls, 'round robins', newsletters, emails, texts, blogs, website contents, social media contents and all other forms of electronic communications.

5. **VERBAL ANONYMOUS COMMUNICATIONS**
   5.1. It is the policy of the Council not to take any action in respect of verbal anonymous communication unless

       i) it is subsequently put in writing or
       ii) the communication warrants an exception, for example in matters of urgency or
       iii) the matter requires referral to another agency, e.g. EDDC or DCC, or Crimestoppers if the caller wishes to be anonymous;

   5.2.   Exceptionally, the need for immediate action or investigation may prevent the provision of a written communication at that point;

   5.3. Any Member receiving verbal Anonymous Communications should respond by stating the Council's policy. The source should be encouraged to provide their contact details, and the Anonymous Communications should be passed to the Council's Clerk for recording and for deciding on further action;

   5.3.   If no written communication is provided by the source, a note summarising what verbal communication took place should be created by the Member and passed to the Council's Clerk.

6. **STEPS TO BE TAKEN WITH ANONYMOUS COMMUNICATIONS**
   Unless of a purely trivial or frivolous nature all anonymous written communications should:

   6.1. be treated as being in strict confidence by all Members and accorded a suitable reference number;

   6.2.   in the first instance be circulated by email to all Members with any personal and sensitive information redacted from the Anonymous Communications;

6.3. An un-redacted copy shall be made available for inspection by Members at the offices of the Council and shall be produced at the next meeting of the Council or, if earlier, at the next meeting of an appropriate Committee of the Council.

7. CONSIDERATIONS

7.1. The Council may decide not to consider anonymous letters or other Anonymous Communications unless there is corroborating evidence.

7.2. The Council expressly reserves the right to take no action.

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

7.3.1. Seriousness of the issues raised and its effect on the community;

7.3.2. Criminal and legal implications;

7.3.3. Health and Safety of Members;

7.3.4. Credibility of the concern;

7.3.5. Whether sufficient information is provided to corroborate any allegation(s) and to enable an investigation to be carried out;

7.3.6. Fraud and any other irregularities detrimental to the Council.

7.4. Anonymous Communications or indeed any form of communication considered to be Vexatious or Malicious may be forwarded to the appropriate authorities, and the Council will provide full support for those authorities to carry out their investigation.

8. OTHER MATTERS

8.1. The log/record of Anonymous Communications should be periodically reviewed to identify any developing trends;

8.2. Where the writer has provided contact details but has asked for anonymity their right to privacy should be respected;

8.3. Due caution must be exercised when reacting to Anonymous Communications which appear to be malicious, potentially libellous or of an extremely personal nature;

8.4. This policy should be reviewed periodically to check compliance with legislative changes which may occur in future.

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