

COPYTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING - FEBRUARY 8TH 2022

ITEM 12 – TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE A REVISED DOCUMENTS PROTOCOL FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS

BACKGROUND

At the December 11th 2018 Council meeting the “Document Protocol” attached as Appendix 1 was approved (Item 9). Whilst titled “Document Protocol” it describes how/when reports can be presented to Council and supports a “document Flowchart” that was agreed at the same time.

At the April 13th 2021 Council meeting a report (Item 16) was presented which referenced the “Document Protocol” mentioned above and sought approval for amendments to the content of Chairman’s and Councillors reports. It was agreed that the report be withdrawn and that the Clerk, via the Personnel & Governance Advisory Committee bring a fresh report to a future Council meeting.

CURRENT POSITION

The Clerk has reviewed the existing protocol and flowchart and made a few suggested changes. These include updating the flowchart to reflect that paper copies of documents are no longer provided to members. The revised documents are attached as Appendix 2.

This proposed policy (with amendments in red text) was presented to the Personnel & Governance Advisory Committee who agreed at it’s meeting on January 21st 2022 that it should be presented to Council for adoption.

RECOMMENDATION

The Personnel & Governance Advisory Committee recommends to Council that the attached revised Documents Protocol for Council Meetings be adopted.

David Rigby, Clerk
January 24th 2022

APPENDIX 1 – EXISTING “DOCUMENT PROTOCOL” AND ASSOCIATED FLOWCHART

COPYTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL

Document Protocol

Adopted by the Council on 11th December 2018

The Clerk to the Council is the Proper Officer and employee of the Council and as such is under a statutory duty to carry out all the functions of a local authority's Proper Officer, and in particular to serve or issue all the notices required by law of the Proper Officer of the Council. This is essential to comply with Transparency Requirements.

In order to ensure that these duties are carried out effectively and in accordance with statutory requirements it is essential to have a clear approach to the production and publication of documents. The attached Flo Chart sets out a proposed Document Management Protocol so that all parties involved are clear about process and timing of document production and distribution for discussion at Council.

One key requirement is that Agenda and supporting documents for meetings of the Parish Council and its committees should be circulated and made available to the public a minimum of 3 clear days before the day of the meeting. (A clear day does not include the day of the notice or the day of the meeting and excludes weekends and bank holidays). Working back from this deadline there are a number of key steps involved in reaching the point where a final agenda and supporting documents are ready to be distributed.

It is important for the Clerk to be aware of all proposed reports so that there is no omission or duplication no surprises; transparency; no hidden financial or regulatory risks but 'good management'. The Clerk needs time to check, format and make adjustments to reports and agendas and therefore reports must be submitted in open editable format in MS Word to facilitate that.

All documents - reports, briefing notes and information should only be circulated to Councillors via the Clerk to ensure an accurate audit trail of communications. The only exceptions are where there is a prior agreement for an individual Councillor to deal with it - e.g. drafts of the Parish Council Newsletter.

There shall be no 'tabled reports'. The only exceptions are urgent items under three headings: -

- a) where there is an urgent financial matter to address which if not addressed would cause an issue for the Parish Council;
- b) where there is an urgent regulatory matter to address which if not addressed would cause an issue for the Parish Council, and
- c) where not to address an item as a matter of urgency, could bring the Parish Council into disrepute.

Decision as to urgency rests with the Clerk RFO.

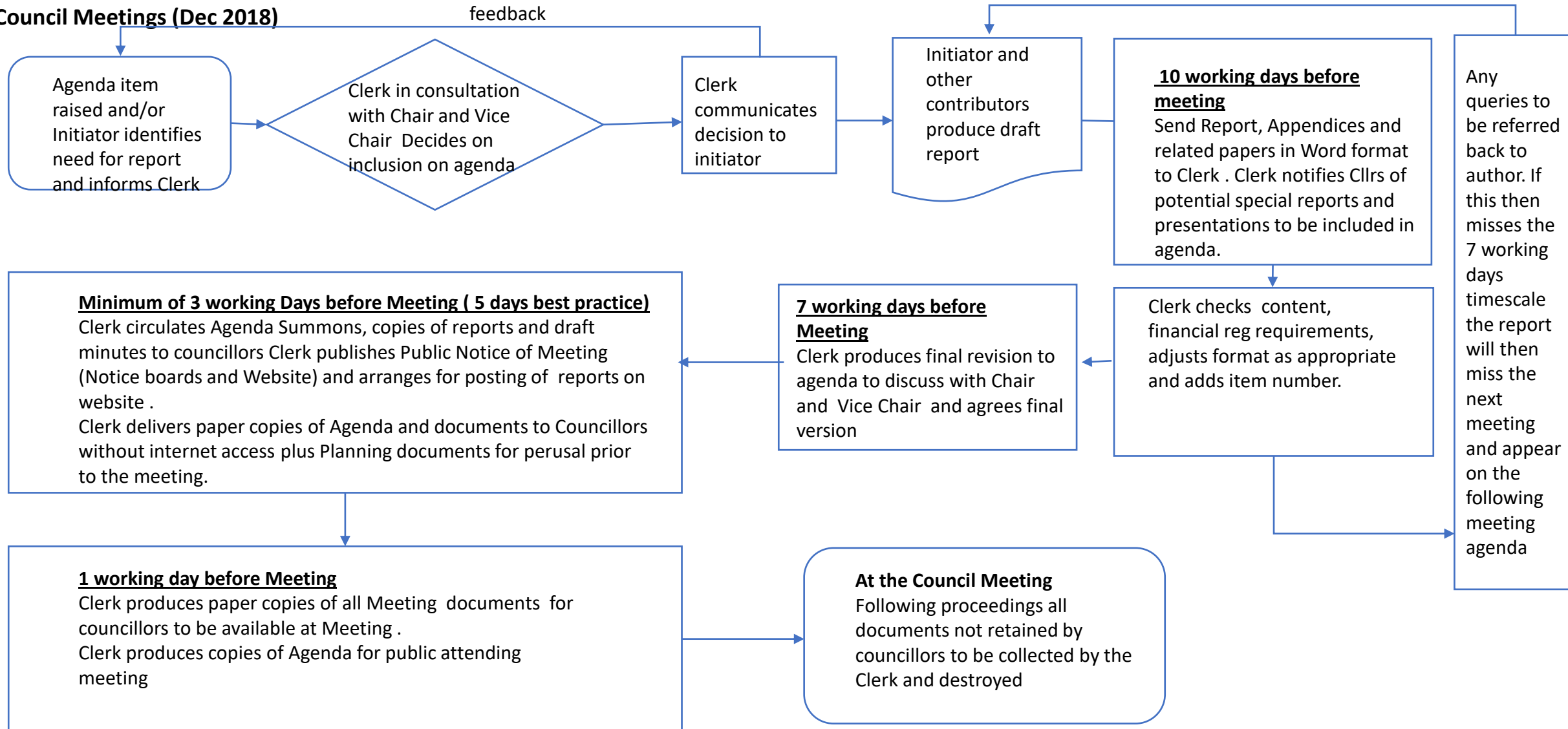
When sources of further information are identified during discussion of the report then this can be added to a follow on report which will be published in the normal way with meeting agendas, for the sake of transparency.

The Clerk needs sufficient time to consult with the Chair, who has responsibility for the proper conduct of the meeting and needs to be involved in planning the meeting. This consultation requires agendas and reports to be prepared well in advance of the publication date and for Councillors to have sufficient time to read and digest the contents of any report.

- END -

Protocol for Document Management for Council Meetings (Dec 2018)

feedback



APPENDIX 2 – PROPOSED “DOCUMENT PROTOCOL” AND ASSOCIATED FLOWCHART

COPYTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL

Document Protocol

The Clerk to the Council is the Proper Officer and employee of the Council and as such is under a statutory duty to carry out all the functions of a local authority's Proper Officer, and in particular to serve or issue all the notices required by law of the Proper Officer of the Council. This is essential to comply with Transparency Requirements.

In order to ensure that these duties are carried out effectively and in accordance with statutory requirements it is essential to have a clear approach to the production and publication of documents. The attached Flowchart sets out a proposed Document Management Protocol so that all parties involved are clear about process and timing of document production and distribution for discussion at Council.

One key **legal** requirement is that the Agenda ~~and supporting documents~~ for meetings of the Parish Council and its committees should be circulated and made available to the public a minimum of 3 clear days before the day of the meeting. (A clear day does not include the day of the notice or the day of the meeting and excludes weekends and bank holidays). **Best practice recommends a minimum of 5 clear days for publication of both the agenda and supporting papers.** Working back from this deadline there are a number of key steps involved in reaching the point where a final agenda and supporting documents are ready to be distributed.

It is important for the Clerk to be aware of all proposed reports so that there is no omission or duplication no surprises; transparency; no hidden financial or regulatory risks but 'good management'. The Clerk needs time to check, format and make adjustments to reports and agendas and therefore reports must be submitted in open editable format in MS Word to facilitate that.

All documents - reports, briefing notes and information should only be circulated to Councillors via the Clerk to ensure an accurate audit trail of communications. The only exceptions are where there is a prior agreement for an individual Councillor to deal with it - e.g. drafts of the Parish Council Newsletter.

The published agenda for a Council meeting must include all items upon which the Council is expected to make a decision. In addition, the reverse applies in that no decision can be taken on an item that is not on the agenda (i.e there shall be no “tabled reports”). The only exceptions are urgent items under three headings: -

- a) where there is an urgent financial matter to address which if not addressed would cause an issue for the Parish Council;
- b) where there is an urgent regulatory matter to address which if not addressed would cause an issue for the Parish Council, and
- c) where not to address an item as a matter of urgency, could bring the Parish Council into disrepute.

Decision as to urgency rests with the Clerk **as the Council's proper officer**

When sources of further information are identified during discussion of the report then this can be added to a follow on report which will be published in the normal way with meeting agendas, for the sake of transparency.

The Clerk needs sufficient time to consult with the Chair, who has responsibility for the proper conduct of the meeting and needs to be involved in planning the meeting. This consultation requires agendas and reports to be prepared well in advance of the publication date and for Councillors to have sufficient time to read and digest the contents of any report.

Agenda items such as Clerk's; Chairman's; and Councillors Reports are for matters such as the sharing of information; reporting on meetings attended; recording particular events that have taken place in the Parish.

Councillors should continue to raise issues regarding local matters such as the need for reports to Hampshire Highways for roadway problems or items requiring the attention of the County or District Councils on an ongoing basis. Councillors can contact the Clerk with the relevant information between meetings for him to investigate and / or advise appropriate action. The results are then, if relevant, summarised in the Clerks Report at the next meeting.

Items not on the agenda for a Council meeting that Councillors wish to debate can either be raised during the agenda item calling for "Suggested items for the next meeting" or as outlined in the flowchart previously mentioned in this protocol.

- END -

Draft Protocol for Document Management for Council Meetings

