

## Gaydon Parish Council

### COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

#### **Introduction and Scope**

The purpose of this policy is to define roles and responsibilities within GPC regarding communications and provide guidelines. This policy will set out guidance to ensure efficient and effective communications between GPC members and with third parties via various media.

This policy is subject to the Council's obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, other legislation which may apply and the Council's standing orders and financial regulations. The Council's financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council's website.

The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council's website.

#### **The Importance of Good Communication**

Good communications will enable GPC to:-

- Better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities.
- Raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about issues, services and opportunities in the parish, and the wider district.
- Be an effective voice of the community
- Maintain and enhance the reputation of GPC
- Proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of GPC.

#### **Members and Staff Correspondence**

All councillors and members of GPC will be provided with a council email address which will be made available to the public so stakeholders can contact Parish Councillors directly. **All correspondence from residents or stakeholders should be copied to the Parish Clerk for information and to ensure continuity.** Email is the preferred method of communication with councillors therefore the Parish Clerk will distribute all documents, including minutes and agenda via the GPC email addresses.

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GPC is subject to the Freedom of Information Act therefore the content of communications of GPC can be subject to public scrutiny (with certain conditions.)

- All correspondence should be polite and respectful.
- Do not write anything in communications that might be construed as offensive or discriminatory.
- Do not make negative comments about an individual, members of the public, staff members or councillors.
- Use a Parish Council signature so that it is clear what capacity you are writing in.
- Copy in (cc or bcc) any appropriate officer or councillor.

Councillors may be approached by members of the public with concerns, complaints, observations, ideas or questions. **Councillors must avoid making any promises to any individual or group about matters raised with them** but are encouraged to disseminate information which has been agreed at a minuted meeting of GPC. If a Councillor is unsure of a subject or query, they shouldn't speculate but instead contact the Clerk for advice or invite the member of the public to contact the Clerk directly either by telephone or email.

#### **Parish Clerk**

The main point of contact for all council business is the Parish Clerk. It is the responsibility of the Parish Clerk to oversee all communications with members of the community and outside agencies, however the day-to-day social media or website content shall be the remit of the Communication Portfolio holder. These communications will be courteous and professional and in line the Community Engagement Strategy. Both the Parish Clerk and the Communications Portfolio holder will be provided with council email address, which should only be used for council business.

#### **Meetings**

Gaydon Parish Council's ordinary meetings take place in Gaydon village Hall at 7.30pm on the first Tuesday of every month. Each meeting shall have within it an opportunity for members of the public to comment on items on the agenda or to raise new topics for consideration at future meetings.

The agendas for these meetings are prepared by the clerk and displayed at least three working days in advance of the meeting date. Councillors must ensure that they have read and understand any supporting documentation which is circulated to them by the Parish Clerk along with the agenda, so they are able to make informed decisions.

An initial draft of the meeting minutes shall be produced by the Clerk and issued to all councillors by email for review. Any amendments shall be made and a subsequent draft issued for approval at the next meeting. The agenda and minutes are published on the website which is kept up to date by the Communications Portfolio holder.

Councillors who have taken responsibility for some action which involves written or verbal communications with third parties shall ensure that it is undertaken in a timely fashion and the Parish Clerk is kept informed.

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#### **Guidance on Interaction:**

- GPC Councillors should always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Parish Council.
- All comments must accurately reflect GPC position on the topic, as adopted in documents e.g. minutes and policies.
- All decisions of GPC made in an open meeting can be quoted and made available to the media.
- Councillors or staff should not make personal comments which could damage the reputation of GPC or negatively impact on teamwork or credibility of the council or members of the community.
- No comment should be made by any member on matters which are related to HR or legal.

#### **Press**

Members of the press are welcome at any public meeting of the Parish Council and are by law entitled to film the meeting or take notes. The Clerk is the point of contact for the media, he/she will ensure that the visiting reporter has space within the hall with good visibility and good acoustics.

Where a meeting of the Council and its committees include an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's standing orders.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings or (iii) paragraphs below apply.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.

Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted.

Outside of a meeting, the first point of contact for the media is the Parish Clerk. However any statements released must be approved by the Parish Clerk in conjunction with the Chairman. The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public consultation or to explain the council's position on a particular issue.

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Individual councillors are not permitted to issue media releases on behalf of GPC or be interviewed by the press regarding Parish Council business unless expressly given permission to do so at a minuted meeting. Councillors wishing to make a personal statement to the media must clearly inform the media:

- That their comments are made as an individual and are not necessarily the view of GPC.
- That other councillors may hold a different personal view.
- That the matter may still need to be discussed or resolved by GPC.
- Confidential matters, including items discussed at meetings where the press and public have been excluded must not be divulged.

#### **Online Presence**

<https://www.gaydonvillage.co.uk/parish-council>

The website should be regularly updated by the Communications Portfolio holder, online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

The website content will minimally include:-

- Agendas of meetings
- Approved Minutes of meetings
- Annual Reports
- Annual Returns
- Newsletters
- Parish Councillors details and contacts
- Contact details of GPC staff (Clerk, Village Hall Keyholder)
- GPC policies and procedures
- Information about Gaydon Village Hall

#### **Social Media**

GPC currently uses Facebook and its content is managed primarily by the Communications Portfolio holder.

The post should be informative, current and relevant.

All social media policy exists.

#### **Noticeboards**

The Parish Council provides a large notice board located in the Village Hall Grounds

The notice board is two-sided, one side is only used for official Parish Council documents, this is kept up to date by the Parish Clerk, or a delegated member of the council. The other side is available for non council related notices.

Adopted 2022

Reviewed June 2024