

## Parish Council Communication and Media Policy

### 1. Introduction

The Parish Council is committed to open and transparent communication with residents, stakeholders, and the wider public. This policy sets out guidelines for how the Parish Council communicates via different channels, including the media, and ensures that all communication is accurate, clear, and timely. Each councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community.

### 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Establish clear, easy to use channels of communication between the Parish Council, Parishioners and the Media and vice versa
- Ensure consistency in communication
- Uphold the council's reputation.
- Maintain transparency with residents and stakeholders.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of councillors and staff when dealing with the media.

### 3. Scope

This policy applies to all Parish Council members, employees, and representatives when engaging with the public, media, or other stakeholders. It covers communications in both formal and informal settings, including:

- Press releases.
- Social media posts.
- Parish newsletters.
- Public consultations.
- General correspondence (mail, email, phone, face-to-face)

### 4. Key Principles

- **Transparency:** All communications should be open, accurate, and accessible to the public.
- **Consistency:** Ensure that messages and information are consistent across all channels.
- **Confidentiality:** Sensitive or confidential information should not be disclosed without prior consent or in breach of legal obligations.
- **Respect and Professionalism:** All interactions, whether verbal or written, should be conducted respectfully and professionally.
- **Engagement:** Actively engage with the community and encourage feedback to ensure that residents are well-informed and involved in decisions.
- **Legally Compliant:** Communication should conform to GDPR requirements

### 5. Communication Channels

- **Press Releases:** The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide public information or to explain Council policy on a particular issue.

## Appendix K

The Parish Clerk or any member of the council may draft a press release but, all press releases must be approved and issued by the Parish Clerk or by a member explicitly authorised by the Clerk to do so. Press releases should be factual, clear, and neutral.

- **Social Media:** The Parish Council will maintain the agreed official social media accounts, such as Facebook, to share updates, events, and news. Only authorised personnel (e.g., the Parish Clerk or designated councillors) may post on these platforms.
- **Parish Council Meeting:** Parish Council meetings are held 10 times a year, dates, times and venue as published on the council website. Members of the public are welcome to attend these meetings and 10 minutes at the start of the meeting are reserved for questions from the public. Members of the public wishing to record the meeting must make the Chair aware before the start of the meeting. The Council may record the meeting and will make all aware if recording is to take place prior to the start of the meeting.
- **Annual Meeting of the Parish:** This meeting is a legal requirement and is held between March and May each year to provide parishioners with a platform to promote the wide range of activities within the parish and for the Parish Council to inform the village of its activities and plans.
- **Parish Newsletters:** The Parish Council may produce a regular newsletter to inform residents of key issues, upcoming events, and council decisions. The newsletter will be distributed via email, the parish website, and physical copies where necessary.
- **Website:** The Parish Council's website [www.goringparishcouncil.go.uk](http://www.goringparishcouncil.go.uk) will be regularly updated with agendas, minutes, meeting dates, reports, and other relevant information. Agendas and associated papers will be posted at least three days before the meeting. Draft minutes will be posted as soon as possible and within a month of the meeting, with final minutes posted within 24 hours of their approval by full council or relevant committee.

In addition to the above, in compliance with The Local Government Transparency Code 2015, the Clerk will ensure publications of the following items no later than 1 July each year:

*All items of expenditure above £100,  
End-of-year accounts,  
Annual governance statement,  
Internal audit report,  
A list of councillor or member responsibilities,  
Details of public land and building assets,*

The Parish Clerk is the webmaster for the Parish Council website and will ensure that contact details for the council, including email address are published.

- **Notice Boards:** The Council has four notice boards in the village, the primary/official one being in the Arcade. Notice boards will be used to display the following items:

**Commented [bn1]:** I've omitted the bit about only questions on items on the agenda. This has been raised by David B. I can see no legal requirement to restrict questions.

## Appendix K

- Parish Council meeting dates for the year
- The Parish Council meeting agenda – which will be posted at least 3 clear days in advance of each meeting
- Agenda of other council committee meetings – to be posted 3 clear days in advance of each meeting

- **Community Channels:** The parish Council will provide established community communication channels such as Genie and GGN with appropriate information and updates on a timely basis.
- **Inbound Communication:** Residents or media wishing to contact the council should communicate to the Clerk ([clerk@goringparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@goringparishcouncil.gov.uk), Parish Council Office, The Old School, Station Rd, Goring RG8 9HB). All communication on behalf of the council will usually come from the Clerk. However, all Councillors have their own Council email address. Councillors communicating with parishioners where appropriate, should copy the Clerk on any such correspondence. All emails sent from @goringparishcouncil.gov.uk addresses will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act requirements. Personal information should never be shared outside of the Council.

### 6. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Parish Clerk:** The Parish Clerk as Proper Officer is responsible for coordinating the day-to-day communication, including maintaining the website, approving & issuing news releases, and liaising with the media. The Clerk may designate tasks as appropriate.
- **Chair of the Parish Council:** The Chair may act as the spokesperson for the Parish Council when communicating with the media but may designate as appropriate. The spokesperson will represent the council's collective view, ensuring consistency and neutrality.
- **Councillors:** Councillors should refer to the Clerk or the Chair before making public statements on behalf of the council. They can engage with the media as individuals but must make clear that they are speaking in a personal capacity, not representing the council unless authorised and should be cautious of making comment on council policy in a personal capacity. If in doubt, advice of the Clerk should be sought.
- **Designated Media Contact:** The Parish clerk or a designated person will be the first point of contact for media inquiries.

### 7. Media Relations

- All media inquiries should be directed to the Parish Clerk or the designated media contact.
- Press releases or statements to the media should only be issued after consultation with the Parish Clerk, the Chair and, where appropriate, with the Communication WG, to ensure accuracy and consistency with council policy.

## Appendix K

- Any media coverage of the council should be reviewed for accuracy. Inaccuracies should be corrected promptly, either by issuing a follow-up statement or through direct communication with the journalist involved.
- The council may invite media representatives to public meetings where appropriate but should ensure that discussions remain focused on council business.

### **8. Social Media Guidelines**

- The Parish Council's social media accounts should be used to share council-related news, events, and initiatives.
- The council will monitor social media platforms for feedback, complaints, and inquiries from residents, responding within a reasonable timeframe.
- Social media posts should reflect the council's values of impartiality, neutrality, and respect and be factual.
- Councillors and staff must avoid discussing council business on personal social media platforms unless it is in accordance with the council's public statements.

### **9. Crisis Communications**

In the event of a crisis or emergency (e.g., a public health issue, natural disaster, or controversial decision), the Parish Council will:

- Ensure accurate and timely information is communicated to residents.
- Coordinate communication through the Parish Clerk, Chair, and designated spokesperson.
- Respond promptly to media inquiries, providing consistent and factual information.

### **10. Complaints and Feedback**

The Parish Council encourages feedback from residents and the public. Complaints related to council activities should be directed to the Parish Clerk, who will ensure that they are dealt with in accordance with the council's complaints procedure.

- Complaints about the content of council communications should be made in writing and will be reviewed by the Parish Clerk and Chair.
- The Parish Council will endeavour to resolve any communication issues or misunderstandings in a fair and transparent manner.

### **11. Training and Awareness**

All Parish Councillors, employees, and volunteers should be provided with training on the communication policy, particularly in relation to social media and media engagement. Training will be updated regularly, and all members of the council should stay informed about best practices for public communication.

### **12. Review and Monitoring**

The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed annually, and changes in legislation, and feedback from residents and councillors will be taken into account. Any changes or updates to the policy will be communicated to all relevant parties.

---