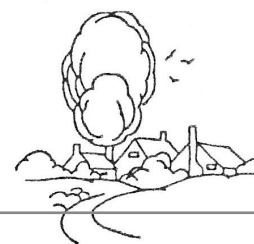


BOUGHTON UNDER BLEAN PARISH COUNCIL

Communications & Media Policy

Adopted: 13 June 2023

Next review: June 2025



1. Introduction

- 1.1. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Parish Council's standing orders and code of conduct. The Council's Standing order 22 states:
'Requests from the press or other media for an oral or written comment or statement from the council, its councillors or staff shall be handled in accordance with the council's policy in respect of dealing with the Press and/or other media.'
- 1.2. The Parish Council recognises its responsibility to help communicate accurate and timely information to the public and Press in a professional manner. Proper co-ordination will ensure that messages put out by the Parish Council are consistent and accurate.
- 1.3. The Parish Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communication. The overall aim is that Council communications should be a two-way process:
 - to give people the information to understand accurately what the Council does, so that they can make informed decisions; and
 - to get information from residents and stakeholders so that the Council can understand their needs.
- 1.4. The purpose of this policy is to ensure councillors and staff effectively communicate this information to promote the openness and transparency of the Council.
- 1.5. The Parish Council also recognises the distinction between communication from 'the Parish Council', and communication from individuals as 'councillors'.
- 1.6. The communication of information may be viewed in four main mediums; print, electronic, media relations, and public relations. However, communication with the public takes place every day on a very basic level, i.e. desk enquiries, social media enquiries, speaking to residents in the street.
- 1.7. 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 2018, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), other legislation which may apply and the Council's standing orders and financial regulations. The Council's standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council's publication scheme.

2. Who should the Council be communicating with?

The Council's audiences are wide and varied but will typically include:

- Residents
- Parish Council employees and contractors
- The media
- Kent County Council / Swale Borough Council
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- MPs
- Other public sector organizations (police, health, fire)
- Visitors and those who work in the Parish

3. The Council's aims:

The Council's communications work will:

- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence levels
- raise awareness of services provided by the Council
- raise the profile of Boughton under Blean as a parish
- support elected members in their role as community leaders
- make best use of technology to engage with the wider community
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the image or integrity of the Council

The Council's vision for its communications work is that residents will:

- know what services the Council provides and the quality of service they can expect
- feel confident and satisfied with the services and their costs
- understand how to get involved with, or influence, the work of the Council

4. Handling General Requests

- 4.1. All employees and councillors are responsible for communicating basic and routine information to the public in relation to their specific job duties or role within the Council and its committees.
- 4.2. Requests for information outside of the remit of an individual's responsibilities should be referred to the Clerk, Chairman or Vice-Chairman.

5. Dealing with the media and public

- 5.1. The Parish Council respects the media's role in delivering information to the public and requests for interviews, information or photographs from the media should be referred initially to the Clerk, or in their absence, to the Chairman.
- 5.2. Any response will be collated in conjunction with the Clerk. Where possible, responses will be given by the Chairman, and in their absence the Vice-Chairman and then the relevant Committee Chairman.
- 5.3. Official statements from the Parish Council must be issued on a document bearing the Council's logo, include an appropriate title, be dated and contain the details of the person to contact for further information.

- 5.4. Any response will be collated in conjunction with the Clerk. Where possible, responses will be given by the Chairman, and in their absence the Vice-Chairman and then the relevant Committee Chairman.
- 5.5. Official statements from the Parish Council must be issued on a document bearing the Council's logo, include an appropriate title, be dated and contain the details of the person to contact for further information.
- 5.6. Statements made must reflect the minuted opinion of the Parish Council, where applicable.
- 5.7. Members of the Parish Council approached by the media in their capacity as a Parish Councillor shall direct all enquiries to the Parish Clerk and not respond directly to any media source.
- 5.8. A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press or public on any matter which has been discussed as a confidential item (in closed session) on the Council's or Committees' agenda or at any other private briefing.
- 5.9. The Parish Council recognises that councillors have private lives and may be approached by the media in relation to their roles outside of the Council. In this instance, members must make it clear that they are not commenting as an elected councillor or on behalf of the Parish Council.
- 5.10. Requests to take photographs of councillors or staff in relation to Council business must be agreed by the individual and in the case of staff, by the Chairman.
- 5.11. The Parish Council should not pass comment on anonymous allegations or allegations about individual councillors, employees or contractors.
- 5.12. The Parish Council is open and accountable and should always explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

6. Media attendance at Parish Council meetings

- 6.1. The Press will be provided with reasonable facilities at meetings or part of a meeting at which they are entitled to be present, as outlined in standing order 3.N.
- 6.2. The photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of meetings by the media is outlined in standing order 3.L.

7. Parish Council website

- 7.1. The Council's website www.boughtonunderbleanpc.org should provide an informative online resource for residents and visitors, giving information about the Council, the parish, councillors and staff, services provided by the Council, dates of meetings, the local community, news, links to useful websites, minutes and agendas, and a search facility.
- 7.2. Information on the website should be accurate and kept up-to-date.
- 7.3. Press releases and Council notices should be displayed in the news section of the website.

8. Council Community News

- 8.1. The Council will produce a monthly piece for the local Community Magazine, providing residents with a summary of the minutes of most recent Full Council Meeting.

- 8.2. The article will be produced by the Clerk. Ideas for inclusion in the article can be submitted to the Clerk by councillors.

9. Council noticeboards

- 9.1. Priority is given on the Council's noticeboard to official Council documents, such as agendas, public notices, election information and legal issues affecting the Council.
- 9.2. Where possible, the Council will display posters and information for community related issues.

10. Social Media

- 10.1. The use of digital and social media and electronic communication provides the Parish Council with the opportunity to communicate with people immediately, in real time and in a way which further improves the communications between the Council and residents, businesses and organisations it works with and serves.
- 10.2. The Council Facebook page aims to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the parish and promote the community in a positive way. All councillors and employees must have this aim in mind when posting information.

11. Criteria for the use of social media

- 11.1. Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:
- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
 - Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
 - Not contain any personal information;
 - Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.
- 11.2. The website and Facebook page are not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, it will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities.
- 11.3. Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and it will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, it is expected that users make direct contact with the Council's Clerk and/or members of the Council by direct email. The Clerk can be contacted on boughtonclerk@gmail.com

12. Parish Council email

- 12.1. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on the text of any relevant emails to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk.
- 12.2. General emails to the full Council by the Clerk will have the Subject Line starting with either: FYI or ACTION REQUIRED. This then allows Councillors to understand what is urgent.

- 12.3. In order to limit the amount of emails that councillors receive; councillors should be mindful to send emails to fellow councillors only when relevant and not to send to full council unless required.
- 12.4. Councillors should not use the 'Reply All' option without forethought and should think about what is being said and if it is really relevant to everyone on the distribution list.
- 12.5. Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners and to copy these to the Clerk. In accordance with the Council's GDPR policies and privacy notice, councillors should not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.