

Geldeston Parish Council

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

The aim of this policy is to ensure effective communication between the Parish Council and local residents, members of the public, other agencies and the press within the resources available.



1. The main method of communication by the Parish Council with local residents and the public is its six meetings a year. These meetings are supported by information posted on its website and village noticeboard¹ some of which is required by the government's transparency code for smaller authorities (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transparency-code-for-smaller-authorities>)
2. An up-to-date schedule of Council meetings shall be published.
3. Members of the public and press are welcome to attend all meetings of the Parish Council and its Committees as observers. Participation by members of the public at meetings is permitted only in accordance with the agenda and at the discretion of the chairman of the meeting.
4. Meetings of the Council and its committees may be recorded or broadcast. See Annex 1 for guidance.

Contacting the Council

5. Between meetings the point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence, in whatever form, to the Parish Council should be addressed. E-mail is the preferred method of contacting the Clerk. Local residents are also encouraged to speak with Councillors about local issues.
6. Correspondents with the Council should be aware that any communication received by the Council may at its discretion be placed in the public domain. Anonymous communications will either be passed to the Police if they contain accusations of a criminal nature or they will be destroyed by the recipient without further circulation.
7. Copies of any correspondence between Councillors and other parties should be sent to the Clerk as soon as possible.
8. Councillors who are asked for comment by other agencies, the press or members of the public, should make it clear that it is their personal view being given unless it has been agreed that a Member has been specifically tasked with reporting the view of the Parish Council.
9. Press reports from the Parish Council, committees, working groups, etc., should be provided by the Clerk or by a reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
10. Any complaints received by Councillors or the Clerk should be handled under the complaints procedure.

¹ The website is the preferred way of publishing Council information. Current notices will be posted on the village noticeboard whenever possible.

Council documents

11. The agenda for Council meetings and meetings of its committees will contain enough information to provide an understanding by the public of the topics to be discussed and any decisions to be taken. The agenda shall be published as required at least three full working days before the day of the meeting. Other documents prepared for Council meetings shall be published on the website as soon as they are available. One printed set of all documents will be available at the meeting.
12. Minutes of meetings will be published in draft as soon as possible after the meeting and within a maximum of 28 days. Minutes will record all decisions taken, the reasons for these decisions and the names of the people who will implement them. Items for information and other discussion considered at a meeting will be noted briefly.

Retention of documents and e-mail correspondence

13. Documents considered at a meeting will be retained on the Council's website for at least a year following the meeting and longer if practicable.
14. Requests for documents that are not available on the website should be made to the Clerk. Such requests will be responded to if and as soon as resources allow. A charge will be made for printed copies and for the Clerk's time at the discretion of the Council (see Annex 2). Any request made under the Freedom of Information Act will be handled in accordance with the current legislation (see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-freedom-of-information/publication-scheme>).
15. Email correspondence received and sent by the Council and its Clerk shall be reviewed on a regular basis, at least annually, and deleted permanently once an issue has been resolved.
16. Documents that need to be retained as required by current legislation and best practice shall be stored securely locally and when appropriate transferred to the Norfolk County Records Office. A list of Council documents stored at the NCRO will be published locally.
17. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis and as new legislation requires.

Annex 1: guidance on recording and broadcasting meetings

18. The audio or video recording, reporting or broadcasting of all public meetings is permitted. No prior permission is required. However the chair person at the beginning of the meeting must be informed by any person present who wishes to record or broadcast the proceedings.
19. Council will ensure that reasonable facilities are made available to the public and press to assist recording of meetings.
20. Meetings or parts of meetings from which the press and public are excluded may not be recorded or broadcast.
21. Recording must be carried out in a manner that is not disruptive and only from areas designated for the public. Disruptive behaviour is any action or activity which disrupts the conduct of meetings or impedes other members of the public being able to see, hear or record etc., the proceedings. Examples include but are not exclusive to moving to areas outside the areas designated for the public; excessive noise in recording or setting up or re-siting equipment during the proceedings; use of intrusive lighting and flash photography; and asking for people to repeat statements for the purposes of recording.

22. The chairman of the meeting, or any Council representative as designated by the chair person, has the authority to take appropriate action (including suspending the meeting) if any person is considered to be acting in a disruptive manner.
23. In order to safeguard children, vulnerable adults and individuals who do not wish to be recorded, Council will ensure that space is provided where individuals cannot be recorded. In addition, recording of members of the public should be kept to a minimum and focus on those making representations to the meeting.
24. Any person or organisation choosing to record or broadcast any meeting of the Council or its committees is responsible for any claims or other liability resulting from so doing and by choosing to record or broadcast proceedings they accept that they are required to indemnify the Council, its members and officers in relation to any such claims or liabilities.
25. The Council will publish requirements for recording or broadcasting on its website and those undertaking these activities will be deemed to have accepted them whether they have read them or not.
26. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis and as new legislation requires.

Annex 2: Charges for supplying copies of Council documents

27. Requests for documents under the Freedom of Information Act will be charged according to current legislation and guidance.
28. For other requests Council will make a charge of 25p per page for supplying copies of documents plus postage. Council may also levy an hourly charge for the Clerk's time in researching, retrieving and redacting documents. Such charge will reflect the Clerk's current hourly rate.
29. Council documents stored at the Norfolk Records Office must be accessed by the public directly from the Records Office and any charges paid. A list of Council documents stored there will be published locally.
30. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis and as new legislation requires.

Signed:

Patrick Dawnay Chairman
Date: 12th September 2018
Date of review: August 2019