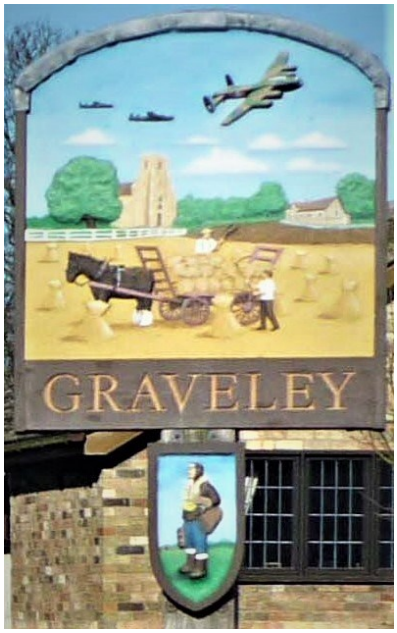


Media Policy

Document Configuration Management & Control

Version	Description	Originated	Approved	Minute Ref
Version 1	Annual Review	09/11/22	07/05/2024	24/25-36.1
Version 2	Annual Review	22/02/26		

GRAVELEY PARISH COUNCIL - MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

Graveley Parish Council ("the Council") is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. Where this information is not available via the Council's publication scheme, please contact the Council's Clerk.

The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet ("the media").

This policy explains how the Council may work with the media to meet the above objectives in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

Legal requirements and restrictions

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 General Data Protection Regulations 2018, 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 publication scheme.

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 publication scheme.

Meetings

A meeting of the Council and its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution. In accordance with the Council's standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council and its committees, if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.

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 (including 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 enables 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) the 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.

The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, provide reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.

The Council's standing orders will confirm if attendance by the public, their participation, photographing, recording, filming or other reporting is permitted at a meeting of a sub-committee.

Other communications with the media

This policy does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity.

The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. If the views of a councillor is different to the Council's corporate position and views, they will make this clear.

The Council's Clerk may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information, a statement or other material about the Council.

Subject to the obligations on councillors not to disclose information referred to above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their position and views.

Email and Social Media Statement

The use of digital and social media now has a clear and compelling impact on all areas of local government, enabling better and more direct contact between the Parish Council and the people and organizations that it serves and works with.

This Media Policy aims to describe how the Parish Council will use email and social media to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates with its residents, local businesses and the various government (local and central) agencies that it deals with. It sets out what is and is not acceptable usage of email and social media and complements the general rules in the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Scope

Social media describes a range of websites and online tools which allow people to interact. This includes blogs and postings on a wide range of platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Instagram and Snapchat. Social media is all about sharing information and people use social media platforms to give opinions, create interest groups and to build online communities and network which encourage participation and engagement.
Email communication can be used by the Clerk to inform residents of matters of interest in a timely and efficient manner, as detailed below.

Key Principles

Any communication is capable of being misinterpreted. The immediacy of email and social media and the lack of face-to-face contact can magnify any problems. Information and comments made can be broadcast to many people more quickly than other media.

The same rules apply to email and social media that govern other behaviour as a councillor but extra care needs to be taken given the immediacy and ease of dissemination. Although email and social media are conversational in tone, it is recorded and it is permanent so content and comment must be accurate, informative and thought through.

Responsibilities and Accountabilities

The Parish Clerk is responsible for all formal communication between the council and members of the public and will be responsible for maintaining the Council website, Facebook pages and any other Council social media.

Social media Use

Social media and email communications from the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- not contain content for which we do not own the copyright
- not contain any personal information other than required basic contact details

Whilst independent communications with parishioners are important in order to engage and be approachable, the overarching rules are that councillors should not make commitments on behalf of the Council, not bring the Council into disrepute and always respect confidentiality. All posts from personal social media accounts should be the personal view of the Councillor.

GPC Facebook pages

It is our intention that the Graveley Parish Council Facebook pages will provide timely information and updates regarding our Parish.

Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council is not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through the Facebook channel.

Graveley Parish Council will remove any comment or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarized material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright

- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- This list is not exhaustive

Website Content

The Website shall contain material that arises from Parish Council business such as agenda, minutes, policies, factual information about the Parish Council and Councillors. It may also include any material that has been commissioned by the Parish Council, such as reports or surveys or material that is directly derived from these.

The Website shall in principle not contain material of a deliberately contentious, offensive or disputatious nature, or material that criticises or implies criticism of one or more members of the public, individual Councillors, groups of Councillors or the Parish Council as a whole. Parish Council meetings can be disputatious, and this is recorded in the Minutes and, once passed, this material may appear on the Website in the minutes or otherwise. Additionally, it can happen that the Parish Council may approve material for inclusion on the Website that not everybody necessarily agrees with.

The Website Administrator

The Parish Clerk is the Website Administrator and retains overall control. The day-to-day working of the Website is subject to the control of the Website Administrator who is empowered by the Parish Council to make routine updates to the Website. The function of the Website Administrator is to manage the Website, adding or deleting material, and editing pages as required. The Website Administrator shall be empowered to update the Website as necessary without prior reference to the Parish Council.

Other than for totally routine matters, (like uploading minutes), the Website Administrator should keep the Parish Council informed of activities they may have conducted on the Website.

The Website Administrator may ask for professional help, as necessary. The Website Administrator is accountable to the Parish Council as a whole, not to any individual Councillor.

Where the Website Administrator has managed the Website in a manner contrary to the will of the Parish Council, it may require the Website Administrator to make good any deficiencies.

Responding to requests to upload material

The Website Administrator is empowered to edit or exclude any material submitted for uploading to the Website, without explanation to any Councillor or to the person submitting the material. Nevertheless, it would be normal for the Website Administrator to attempt to explain outright refusal to upload or major editing actions, and, in order to retain the confidence of the Parish Council, the Website Administrator must be prepared to answer for their actions in a full Parish Council meeting.

Potential legal issues

Libel – If an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation is published, they may consider it as defamatory and consider legal action.

Copyright – Using images or text on social media from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos), without obtaining permission, is likely to breach copyright laws.

Data Protection – GPC Media will be compliant with GDPR.

Resolution of Disputes

If there is a dispute about the Website Administrator's decisions or activities, the Parish Council shall adjudicate and the majority vote shall be considered final.

Analytics

The Parish Council reserves the right of use services such as, but not limited to, Google Analytics to provide information to the Council to enable them to optimise the website for future best use.

Cookie Policy

The website may place and access Cookies stored on visitors' computers. All Cookies used by the website are used in accordance with current UK and EU Cookie Law. Certain features of the website may depend upon Cookies to function. UK and EU Cookie Law deems these Cookies to be "strictly necessary".

This website may use analytics services provided by Google or other providers. Website analytics refers to a set of tools used to collect and analyse usage statistics, enabling better understanding of how Users use the website. This, in turn, enables improvements to the website and the products and services offered through it. The analytics services used by this website may use Cookies to gather the required information. Certain of these Cookies may be placed immediately when visiting the website and it may not be possible to obtain prior consent. Cookies may be removed by the user and their future use prevented.