



Communications, Press and Media Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Boxley Parish Council for all its communications with the Press, and general public.
- 1.2. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective communications. Boxley Parish Council uses:
 - The media – press, radio, TV;
 - An up to date website;
 - Social Media;
 - Regularly updated and maintained noticeboards.

2. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 2.1. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Some aspects of the Code are relevant to this policy:-

"Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims [and the provision of services] should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both."

"Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimplify facts, issues or arguments."

"Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards."

"Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy."
- 2.2. In particular, Officers and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media and the general public.
- 2.3. Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and take appropriate action in accordance with the Standing Orders and Code of Conduct adopted by the Council.
- 2.4. When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.
- 2.5. There are a number of personal privacy issues for Officers and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the council's policies on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. These issues include the release of

personal information, such as home address and telephone numbers (although Member contact details are in the public domain), disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Parish Clerk before any response is made to the media.

3. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA (PRESS, RADIO, TV, INTERNET)

- 3.1. These can be crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities when needed.
- 3.2. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media.
- 3.3. The general principle is that the Clerk shall act as the Press Office for the Parish Council. Any official contact with the media concerning the Parish Council's policies, decisions and services should be initiated through the Clerk. The Clerk will clear all press reports or comments to the media with the Chairman of the Parish Council. However, if the subject of an enquiry relates to the work of one of the Council's Committees, the Chairman of the Council may delegate the authorised contact role to the Chairman of that Committee.
- 3.4. Statements made must reflect the Council's opinion.
- 3.5. Other Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council. Councillors should only comment if they are confident about the issue raised and the Council's policy or response to a particular activity, service or issue. It is important that quotes that are made on behalf of the Council are factual and standards and ethics are maintained. The parish office should be informed of the approach.
- 3.6. Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.
- 3.7. Letters representing the views of the Council should only be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee. If individual Members choose to send letters to express their own opinions on Council policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Parish Clerk. It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or of an individual Member.
- 3.8. At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.
- 3.9. The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Officers and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

- 3.10. Members of the Parish Council who identify a media opportunity should refer it to the Clerk and Chairman.

4. PRESS RELEASES

- 4.1. The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of all Officers and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- 4.2. Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or Chairman, in association with other Members as required, and will be informally restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council. The Clerk will refer to the Chairman of the Council or appropriate committee for specific quotes as and when required.
- 4.3. Any Officer or Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee in order to ensure there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press releases can be monitored.
- 4.4. If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be referred to the Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Chairman, in consultation with other Members as necessary, about the format and content of any response.
- 4.5. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Parish Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, if comments are made to the Press, Councillors must make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it is clearly reported as such.
- 4.6. Press releases will normally be approved by the Chairman of the Council or Committee Chairman when there are direct quotes used.

5. BOXLEY PARISH COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- 5.1. Agendas and minutes of all meetings will be on the Council's website. Full Parish Council Meeting Agendas will also be displayed on the 11 notice boards located throughout the Parish.
- 5.2. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes be sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting.
- 5.3. The media are encouraged to attend Council and Committee meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

6. ELECTIONS

- 6.1. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Members and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual Members unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council. Up to date advice on these regulations will be issued to Councillors in the run up to an election.

7. WEBSITE

- 7.1. The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Parish Office.

- 7.2. The website will remain the main source of information about the Parish Council and its activities social media posts will largely be used to enhance/direct users to the website or other sources of information/advice.
- 7.3. The website may be used to:
- Post minutes and dates of meetings;
 - Advertise events and activities;
 - Parish Council Policies and Procedures;
 - Parish Councillor information;
 - Vacancies;
 - Retweeting or 'share' of information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc;
 - Announcing new information;
 - Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups, clubs, associations, bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups;
 - Referral of resident queries to the Parish Office;
 - Planning information;
 - Beechen Hall information and hire details;
 - Allotment information;
 - Statutory publications;
 - Provision of information about the community (historical and factual).

8. SOCIAL MEDIA

- 8.1. Boxley Parish Council has a Facebook account that is managed and updated by the Parish Office. Facebook will be used to support the website information above and provide information and updates regarding activities within Boxley and promote positive thoughts and comments from residents.
- 8.2. With the rise in the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, Members and Officers need to be fully aware of the implications of using these products. All social media should only be used to present factual information about the Council or its decisions, where the person posting the information is identified as being associated with the Council.
- 8.3. **Guidance for using social media.**
When participating in any online communication:
- 8.3.1. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- 8.3.2. Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
- 8.3.3. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or red writing to emphasis points. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- 8.3.4. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- 8.3.5. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.

- 8.3.6. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- 8.3.7. Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.
- 8.3.8. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations.
- 8.3.9. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response.
- 8.3.10. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised as a full agenda item at a Committee or Full Council meeting. The 'poster' should be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
- 8.3.11. Anything of a contentious nature should be referred to the Clerk and the 'poster' should be informed of this and also invited to correspond with the Parish Clerk directly.
- 8.3.12. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

8.4. **General**

- 8.4.1. Commercial promotions or spam non-compliance will not be tolerated and can result in a ban.
- 8.4.2. Boxley Parish Council are not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any subscriber in any forum; opinions expressed in comments on Boxley Parish Councils social media forums do not necessarily represent those of Boxley Parish Council.
- 8.4.3. All comments, once posted, become the property of Boxley Parish Council and we reserve the right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display or edit. Derivative work can also be created from such postings or content, and used for any purpose, in any form and on any other media.
- 8.4.4. Boxley Parish Council are not responsible, liable for and do not endorse the privacy practices of Facebook or any linked websites. Your use of Facebook and any linked websites is at your own risk.
- 8.4.5. Boxley Parish Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from these websites.
- 8.4.6. Facebook may occasionally be unavailable and we accept no responsibility for this lack of service.
- 8.4.7. The presence of any advertisement on Facebook is not an endorsement of the authenticity or quality of the goods, services or website and Boxley Parish Council will not be held responsible for any claims arising in that respect.
- 8.4.8. We will not engage in/with, and we discourage posts or comments on, issues of a political nature.
- 8.4.9. Comments should not advertise commercial products or services.
- 8.4.10. This comment policy may be revised at any time.
- 8.4.11. By choosing to comment and/or utilise any Boxley Parish Council Social Media site, users are deemed to agree to this policy.

9. LETTERS/EMAILS

- 9.1. All letters from the Parish Council are sent by the Parish Clerk with the agreement of the Chairman or Committee Chairmen.
- 9.2. All emails to the office are answered promptly.
- 9.3. Any email requiring a detailed or complex response will be referred to the relevant Committee or Full Council for discussion before being sent by the Clerk.
- 9.4. Emails/letters requiring action on parking/maintenance/etc will be reported to MBC/KCC on behalf of the resident and they will be informed accordingly. The Office will put any items requiring discussion on the next suitable Agenda for further discussion.

10. NOTICEBOARDS

- 10.1. Boxley has 11 noticeboards throughout the Parish.
- 10.2. Noticeboards are updated monthly and will be used to display the following:-
 - 10.2.1. Notice of the annual audited accounts will be displayed when appropriate;
 - 10.2.2. Agendas for Parish Council meetings will be displayed at least 3 days in advance of the meeting concerned;
 - 10.2.3. Events being held at Beechen hall;
 - 10.2.4. An up to date list of meetings (if space allows);
 - 10.2.5. Parish Council contact information;
 - 10.2.6. Notices for residents/organisations will be displayed as and when appropriate, if space allows.

11. RECORDING OF MEETINGS

- 11.1. The Clerk or Assistant Clerk Finance can record any meeting to assist with the drafting of minutes. Recordings will be stored securely and deleted once the minutes have been signed.
- 11.2. **Members of the Public**
 - 11.2.1. Any member of the public/Press may take photographs, film and audio record proceedings of all public meetings of the Parish Council and its Committees.
 - 11.2.2. Whilst no prior permission is needed, it is advisable that any person wishing to film or audio record a meeting let the Clerk know so that all necessary arrangements can be made for the public meeting. The Parish Council will endeavour to provide a space to view and hear the meeting, preferably with a table.
 - 11.2.3. Any filming of the public should not include children, the vulnerable or other members of the public who actively object to being filmed, without undermining the broader transparency of the meeting.
 - 11.2.4. Members of the public/press who are taking part in filming or audio recording of a meeting must not act in a disruptive manner i.e. any action or activity which disrupts the conduct of meetings or impedes other members of the public from seeing, hearing, filming etc the proceedings. Anyone displaying disruptive behaviour may be excluded from the meeting.

- 11.2.5. If at any time it becomes necessary to close the meeting to the public (usually due to matters of confidentiality), filming and recording will also be requested to stop.
- 11.2.6. If the Parish Council intends to webcast its meetings, they will notify the public in advance. Tweeting and Blogging Councillors and members of the public are allowed to report from meetings by any form of social media provided it is not disruptive and does not detract from the proper conduct of the meeting. Councillors may not report confidential information from any section of a meeting that has been closed to the Public.
- 11.3. Information supplied to people wishing to record a meeting includes the following statement:

"The Council asks that those recording proceedings do not edit the film or recording in any way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings or infringe on the core values of the Council. You are asked not to tweet or blog a discussion until the decision is made".

12. URGENT COMMUNICATIONS

- 12.1. In the case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a Council or Committee meeting, this may be issued by the Parish Clerk with the agreement of the Chairman of the Council or relevant Committee.
- 12.2. In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the Members and Officers with specific roles and responsibilities under this policy, the following delegations shall apply:
 - 12.2.1. the Vice Chairman of the Council may act in the absence of the Chairman;
 - 12.2.2. the Vice Chairman of a Committee may act in the absence of the Chairman;
 - 12.2.3. the Parish Clerk may act in the absence of the Vice Chairman of the Council or a Committee.

Adopted by Council on 4 April 2022