



# Great Gonerby Parish Council

## Communication and Social Media Protocol

1. This communication procedure is designed to ensure that the Council manages its internal and external communications effectively, including its formal presence on social media platforms.

## Parish Council Correspondence

2. **Custody / Access to Communication.** No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to access confidential information / documentation unless they can demonstrate that they need to know it.
3. **Formal Point of Contact.** The formal point of contact for the Council is the Clerk, and all correspondence for the Council should be addressed to the Clerk. All correspondence from Councillors or Officers should be copied to the Clerk. The Clerk is empowered to deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
4. All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper. Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).
5. Virtual correspondence sent by the Clerk is to be copied to all Councillors who need it. Printed correspondence will be available to be read at Council meetings.

## Agendas for Council, Committee, Sub-Committee and Working Party meetings

6. It is the Clerk who sets the agenda. An agenda should be clear and concise. It should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting. Items for information only should be kept to a minimum on an agenda: where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes to share information with fellow Councillors, this will be circulated by the Clerk separately.

## Communications with the Press and Public

7. It is vital when the Chair, Councillors or Clerk is communicating with the press or public that they remember the Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles<sup>1</sup>):

- a. The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the Council or the Chair of the relevant committee.
- b. Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be released by the Clerk or a Council officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- c. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that theirs is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.
- d. Unless a Councillor is certain that they are reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
- e. If a Councillor receives a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure or via a Council agenda item depending on the cause of complaint.
- f. Anonymous correspondence received by the Council will be disregarded.

## Social Media

8. The use of social media does not replace other forms of communication, it compliments them. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- a. The Council Website.
- b. Facebook and other social networking sites.
- c. Twitter and other micro blogging sites.
- d. YouTube and other video clip and podcast sites.
- e. LinkedIn.
- f. Bloggs and discussion forums.

9. **Permitted Social Media Use.** The Parish Council may use social media to:

- a. Distribute agendas and post minutes and dates of meetings.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>

- b. Advertise events and activities.
- c. Promote good news stories, a linked website or a press page.
- d. Advertise vacancies.
- e. Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as principal authorities, the police, a library, a health authority or similar.
- f. Announce new information.
- g. Post or share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups or charities.
- h. Refer resident queries to the Clerk and other Councillors.

10. **Code of Practice.** In the main, Councillors and council staff have the same legal duties when using social media (including email) as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. They are responsible for what they post in a Council and personal capacity. They may use a pseudonym when using social media, but this must have been declared to the Parish Council and approved at a main meeting. The Council has a Code of Practice to provide guidance to the Chair, Councillors, council staff and others who engage on behalf of the Council using online communications: this supplements the above-mentioned Nolan Principles.

11. Parish councillors and council staff must ensure that online content is accurate, objective, balanced and informative and must keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. They must not:

- a. Present personal opinions as that of the Council.
- b. Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council.
- c. Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council.
- d. Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
- e. Engage in personal attacks, online fights or hostile communications.
- f. Use an individual's name, unless given written permission to do so.
- g. Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission.
- h. Post any information that infringes copyright of others.
- i. Post any information that may be deemed libel. Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and / or a fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site.
- j. Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.

- k. Bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity.
- l. Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief.
- m. Conduct any online activity that violates laws or regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.

12. **Legal Claims.** If a legal claim is brought against a member of the Council and results in an award of damages, these damages will be against the individual and not the Council. This may also result in an investigation, by the Monitoring Officer at SKDC, into any possible breaches of the Code of Conduct.

13. **Declaration of Interest.** Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute pre-disposition, pre-determination or bias. The individual may then be required to declare an interest at Council meetings.

14. **Reporting Content.** Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish Councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk.

15. **Moderator.** The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator of Council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove from Council social media pages any posts made by third parties which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

### **Electronic Communication between Parish Councillors**

16. It is recognised as the world evolves the Council may wish to explore different ways to work and communicate. To ensure that the Council can respond effectively to the work required, the principles below are to be employed.

17. **E-mails.** If a response to an email is required within 24 hrs, then the Clerk is to place a note on the WhatsApp group to ensure Councillors are aware of the email. Email subject lines are to pre-fixed with:

- a. **Action.** The subject line should also include the deadline for the required action. Councillors are required to acknowledge receipt of the email, the action required and the deadline.
- b. **Agree.** The subject line should also include the deadline for the required response. Councillors are required to provide a decision on a topic.
- c. **Info.** Councillors can read at a time that suits them. If the information is required before a particular date or event, then this should be stipulated in the main body of the email.

18. **Messaging Apps.** Messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and text messaging, can be used to conduct Council business, but any decisions or commitment of funds are to be formalized in email or at a Council meeting.