



Boxley

PARISH COUNCIL

Communications, Press and Media Policy

Introduction

This Policy establishes a framework for all communications undertaken by Boxley Parish Council ("the Council") for all its communications with the Press and general public.

The Council recognises that effective communication is essential to:

- Promote transparency and accountability;
- Inform residents about Council decisions, services and activities
- Encourage community engagement and participation
- Support public trust and confidence in local government
- Ensure legal compliance and good governance.

The Council is committed to communicating in a professional, accurate, accessible, timely and impartial manner.

This Policy applies to:

- All elected Members of the Council
- Council employees
- Contractors and consultants acting on behalf of the Council
- Volunteers undertaking Council business.

The Legal framework

Communications undertaken by the Council shall comply with relevant legislation, including but not limited to:

- Local Government Act 1972;
- Local Government Act 1986;
- Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004;
- Data Protection Act 2018;
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR);
- Equality Act 2010;
- Human Rights Act 1998;
- Defamation Act 2013;
- Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960;
- Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014;
- Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018;
- Online Safety Act 2023.

The Council shall also have regard to:

- Government guidance on local authority publicity;
- Guidance issued by NALC and Kent Association of Local Councils;
- Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance;
- The Council's adopted Code of Conduct and Standing Orders.
- The long term reputation of the Council

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

The Council will ensure that communications are:

- **Lawful**
- Complying with all statutory requirements.
- **Accurate**
- Factually correct and based upon approved information.

- **Timely**
- Provided within reasonable timescales.
- **Accessible**
- Available in formats that are inclusive and accessible wherever reasonably practicable.
- **Respectful**
- Free from offensive, discriminatory, defamatory or inflammatory content.
- **Politically Neutral**
- Not used to promote political parties, candidates or political campaigns.
- **Transparent**
- Supporting public understanding of Council decisions and activities.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Full Council

The Council shall:

- Determine overall communications strategy
- Approve this Policy
- Authorise significant public statements where appropriate.

Chair of the Council

The Chair may:

- Act as the principal civic spokesperson
- Provide approved statements on behalf of the Council
- Support media engagement alongside the Clerk

Parish Clerk

The Clerk shall:

- Manage official Council communications including letters and emails.
- Act as principal communications officer.
- Maintain media relations.
- Oversee website and digital communications.
- Ensure compliance with legal obligations.

Councillors

Councillors:

- May communicate with residents in their role as elected representatives.
- Must distinguish clearly between personal views and official Council positions.
- Must comply with the Code of Conduct and this Policy.
- Must not present personal opinions as Council policy.

Media relations

General Principles

The Council welcomes constructive engagement with:

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Radio stations
- Television broadcasters
- Online news outlets
- Community media
- Media enquiries concerning Council business should be referred to the Parish Clerk
- No public comment shall be made on ongoing legal proceedings without appropriate professional advice.

Official Statements

Official statements on behalf of the Council shall normally be issued by:

- The Parish Clerk;
- The Chair of the Council;
- An authorised Councillor acting with delegated authority.

Councillor Commentary

Councillors retain the right to express personal opinions.

Where speaking in a personal capacity they must:

- Make clear they are not representing the Council
- Avoid disclosing confidential information
- Avoid bringing the Council into disrepute.

Press Releases

Press releases may be issued to:

- Promote Council initiatives
- Inform residents
- Publicise events
- Explain Council decisions
- Correct factual inaccuracies.

Press releases shall normally be prepared or approved by the Parish Clerk in conjunction with the Parish Council Chairman.

Information contained in press releases must be:

- Accurate;
- Evidence-based
- Non-political
- Consistent with Council decisions.

Website and Digital Services

Official Website

The Council website is the primary source of official information. The website is maintained by the Assistant Clerk.

The Council will endeavour to ensure the website complies with accessibility requirements and will maintain an Accessibility Statement.

Appropriate measures shall be implemented to protect the website and associated systems from unauthorised access, misuse or cyber-security threats.

Website Content

The website includes:

Agendas and minutes, meeting notices policies and procedures, financial information, councillor details, planning information, community information, consultation notices, news and announcements

Social Media

Purpose

The Council uses social media to, share information, promote engagement, direct users to official sources and publicise events and services.

Platforms

The Council may utilise:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- X (formerly Twitter)
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- WhatsApp Channels
- Any other platforms approved by the Council.

Official accounts shall be administered by the Clerk/Assistant Clerk.

Content should be: Accurate, Relevant, Respectful, Lawful and Non-political.

The Council will remove all content containing:

- Defamatory statements, personal attacks, harassment or bullying hate speech, discriminatory content, false information, obscene or offensive material, commercial spam, material breaching data protection laws.

Councillor Use of Social Media

Councillors using personal accounts should:

- Behave in accordance with the Code of Conduct
- Respect differing opinions
- Avoid disclosing confidential information
- Distinguish personal views from Council positions.

Moderation

The Council reserves the right to:

- Hide comments
- Remove content
- Restrict users
- Report unlawful content.

Where appropriate, records of moderation actions shall be retained.

Data Protection and privacy

The Council shall process personal data in accordance with:

- UK GDPR
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Council privacy notices.

Personal information shall not be disclosed without lawful authority.

Photographs, videos and recordings containing identifiable individuals shall only be published where there is an appropriate lawful basis.

Particular care shall be taken when processing information relating to children, vulnerable individuals and sensitive personal data.

Elections and Pre-election Periods

The Council shall remain politically impartial at all times. During the period immediately preceding elections or referendums, particular care shall be taken to ensure that communications:

- Do not influence voters
- Do not promote individual Members or candidates
- Comply with relevant legislation and guidance.

Council resources must not be used for party-political purposes.

Correspondence

Correspondence received by the Council shall be handled professionally and courteously. Responses may be issued by the Parish Clerk or an authorised member of staff or an authorised Councillor.

Complex or policy-related matters may be referred to Council or Committee for consideration.

Correspondence must be disclosed where required by law.

Confidentiality

Councillors and staff must respect confidentiality obligations which include:

- confidential meeting papers
- Legal advice
- Employment matters
- Commercially sensitive information
- Personal data.

Unauthorised disclosure may result in Investigation followed by internal action and referral to external authorities where appropriate.

Alleged breaches of this policy will be considered under The Councillor Code of Conduct, employee disciplinary procedures and relevant legislation.

The Council may take appropriate action where breaches are identified.

Adopted by Council June 2026