

# **Hockwold cum Wilton PARISH COUNCIL**

## **COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

Resolved by Council December 2023

Review date: October 2026

### **The aims of this policy**

Hockwold cum Wilton Parish Council recognises its overarching role at the heart of the community and values its unique position to be able to provide community leadership. Our communication strategy is set out in this document with the aims of setting a standard for engagement both within the Council and with its community. The Council recognises that the services it provides must reflect the needs of residents and the locality. As a Council, it wants to ensure that communication is two-way – telling people about the Council and listening to what people say about the services they would like to see. It will set the framework by which Councillors communicate with each other as well as with the community. The Council is committed to providing open and transparent information about its business.

### **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 Data Protection Act 1998, and other legislation which may apply to the Council's Standing Orders and Finance Regulations. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information, the disclosure of which, is prohibited by law. The Council can not 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 Councils publication scheme.

### **The main principles for all forms of Communication**

The Parish Council will ensure that it communicates with residents in a timely and effective manner, and to inform and consult them about matters which affect the Parish.

All methods of communication should:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant.
- Be concise.

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## **COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

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- Not disclose information which is confidential.
- Reflect the views of the Parish Council not the individual.
- Not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive.
- Not promote political parties.
- Not publicise personal information.

### **Methods of communication that may be used by the Parish Council**

- Parish Council meetings
- Noticeboard
- Mailing List Post
- Telephone
- Website
- Newsletter
- Social Media
- Public Meetings

The Clerk will respond where required to all correspondence within 10 working days, either with a full response or with details of when the Parish Council will consider its response (the exception to this will be during periods of absence, including but not limited to annual leave and sick leave).

### **Parish Council Meetings**

All Parish Council meetings are open to the press and public and, in accordance with council's standing orders, time will be set aside at each meeting for public comment. Residents, local organisations, District Councillors, representatives of local air bases, the local press and police are welcome to attend Parish Council meetings and bring to the Council any proposals or comments they may have. It is expected that all participants in the meeting will abide by the code of conduct. All meetings will be held in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders.

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## **COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

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### **Notice board**

The Clerk will maintain a noticeboard located in the Village Hall carpark near to the village shop on Main Street. Contact details for the Clerk and Parish Councillors, agendas for its meetings and other information relating to Parish Council business will be displayed.

### **Email**

The Parish Council email account is monitored by the Clerk. It is recognised that email is a fast and effective form of communication, especially when contacting several people with a single message. It avoids the costs of postage so should be used wherever possible to reduce these costs.

In order to manage the proliferation of emails the following guidelines will be followed:

- The Clerk will decide on the appropriateness of forwarding for emails received addressed to the Parish Council.
- When responding to an external email the Clerk will send a copy to appropriate Councillors if it relates to a matter they are championing. The Councillor(s) are not expected to respond to this other than directly to the Clerk.
- Councillors should not use the 'Reply All' option without forethought and should bear in mind what the content is, and if it is relevant to everyone on the distribution list.
- When forwarding emails, the sender must ensure GDPR protocols are followed.
- It is not appropriate for draft documents circulated by email to be forwarded outside the Parish Council unless it is to an individual directly involved with the subject matter.

### **Post**

All post is received by the Clerk who will ensure that it is opened promptly and dealt with in an appropriate manner.

### **Telephone**

The Clerk will be expected to deal in a professional manner with all incoming calls. An answer machine is available to receive messages when the Clerk is not available. The Clerk will check for messages in a timely fashion and return calls promptly where a reply number has been provided.

# **Hockwold cum Wilton PARISH COUNCIL**

## **COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

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### **Website**

The Parish Council will maintain an up to date website which will include the following information:

- Details of Parish Council Meetings – Schedule, Current Agendas and Minutes.
- Details of each Committee.
- Contact details for the Councillors and the Clerk.
- Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and Budget Reports.
- Details of any significant on-going projects, and helpful information.

### **Social Media**

The Parish Council may consider using social media sites where it feels this will benefit the public. The Clerk will be responsible for posting items relating to Parish Council business on social media sites. This forum will only be used for the dissemination of information and the Parish Council will not engage in online 'chat.' Anyone wishing to engage with the council will be advised to contact the Clerk via email, phone or letter.

Any Parish Councillor who has their own social media accounts, whilst free to express their views, should use them with caution and always make it clear that opinions are their own and not those of the Parish Council when commenting on issues relating to Hockwold cum Wilton or Parish Council business.

Social media may be used to

- Raise awareness of Parish Council decisions.
- Advertise events and activities in which the Parish Council is involved.
- Publicise important meetings such as public consultations, etc.
- Raise awareness of important local issues.
- Advertise vacancies.
- Share information that would benefit the parish / residents.

The Clerk will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the council's social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (Facebook, "X" etc.)

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Press

The clerk will manage the publication of press releases, the content of which will be provided by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman or Chairman of the relevant Committee. It is important that all information shared with the press is accurate and reflects the policies and views of the Parish Council. If a Councillor is interviewed, the councillor should ensure the views expressed are those of the Parish Council and the Council's Code of Conduct followed. Information of a confidential or slanderous nature must never be disclosed.