

GAYTON PARISH COUNCIL

Communications Policy

Aims

To establish clear, easy to use channels of communication between the Parish Council and the Parishioners, and vice versa.

To provide information on important matters in an appropriate manner so as to facilitate and encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

The overall aim is to make Council communications a two-way process: to give people information to understand accurately what Gayton Parish Council (GPC) does, whilst also enabling GPC to make informed decisions using information received from residents, partners and village organisations.

The principles of this Policy applies to Parish Councillors and the Clerk. It is also hoped that it will help others communicating with the PC.

The importance of good communications.

Good communications will enable GPC to:

- better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities.
- raise resident's satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about issues, services and opportunities in the parish and surrounding area.
- be an effective voice of the community.
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people.
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the image and integrity of GPC or the parish.

Parish Clerk

The Parish Clerk (PC) has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies.

The PC is provided with a council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business.

Councillors

Councillors will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with will reflect on GPC.

When in doubt about how to respond to an enquiry, the guidance of the Parish Clerk will be sought.

At no time should councillors make any promise to the public about any matter raised with them other than to say that they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to GPC. Depending on the issue, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways;

- refer the matter to the PC who will then deal with it as appropriate.
- request an item be added to the relevant agenda.
- investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the PC.

Councillors must ensure that all communication with the public on council-related matters reflect the decisions and policies of GPC regardless of the individual councillor's views on any subject.

Council Meetings and Councillor Interaction.

GPC will meet on dates to be advised, Meetings start at 7:30pm. The floor is open to the public for representations.

GPC has a number of working groups and sub-committees whose activities are reported back to the Council in their monthly meetings.

An initial draft of the Minutes shall be produced by the Clerk and issued to all Councillors within 10 days by email for review. Any amendments shall be made and a subsequent draft issued for publication. The Agenda and Minutes of the meetings are published on the Council website and noticeboard following approval at a Council meeting.

Councillors who have taken on responsibility for some action which involves written or verbal communications with third parties shall lodge a copy of any such communication with the Clerk.

Guidance on interaction

- GPC Councillors should always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council.
- All media enquiries should be directed to the Chairman or the PC.
- If appropriate, for a specific issue, the Chairman may authorise another councillor to make a statement on behalf of GPC.
- All media comment must accurately reflect GPC's position as adopted in documents such as the minutes and policies.
- All decisions of GPC made in open meeting can be quoted and made available to the media.
- The person responding to the media enquiry should have the necessary facts and understanding and be able to speak with some authority, using plain English.
- Councillors should not make "personal comments" which could damage the reputation of GPC or negatively impact on teamwork or the credibility of the council or members of the community.
- Comments on matters which are, or may be likely to be, subject to legal proceedings should be subject to advice taken from GPC's Solicitor before any response is made.

- Councillors wishing to make a “personal statement” to the media must clearly inform them that these are their own comments and are not necessarily the view of GPC, that other councillors may hold a different view and that the matter may still need to be discussed or resolved by GPC.

Who we should be communicating with.

The Council’s audience is wide and varied but will typically include;

- Residents
- Local Authority (does this need to be re-worded in light of Unitary Authority?) Councillors and staff
- Hard to reach groups such as young people.
- The media.
- Voluntary groups, village clubs and organisations.
- Local businesses
- MPs
- Other public sector organisations, e.g. police, health, fire.

How we should be communicating.

Different forms of communication will appeal to different ages, social groups and demographics so it is important to ensure that, within reason, all options for increasing communication and participation are reviewed over time in order to communicate effectively with everyone.

Gayton News.

Gayton Village website

GPC Website.

Gayton Facebook

All entries to first be approved by GPC Chairman and PC.

Press – Manage the media effectively.

Key points for effective management of media relations ...

- Respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time.
- Be helpful, polite and positive.
- Never say “No comment”.
- Ensure that all statements and responses to hostile enquiries are cleared by the PC or Chairman.
- Issue timely and relevant press releases.
- Pre-empt potential stories arising from Council Agendas/Minutes by issuing proactive PR where possible.

Noticeboards.

The village noticeboards will be kept updated to ensure that members of the community who are less active online are kept aware of key information.

The PC will manage all postings to the boards.

The following items will be displayed permanently:

- Councillors names, telephone numbers and email addresses. Home addresses can be included, subject to individual Councillor's approval.?
- Council meeting dates for the year.
- Annual audited accounts, when appropriate.
- Date of next meeting displayed at least # days in advance of the meeting.

Council Website.

Online information should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What is written on the web is permanent.

GPC's website is to be regularly updated.

All communications should promote the council's website and, if/when appropriate its' social media accounts

It is important to ensure links to the website are provided from other key partners and vice versa.

Content should include Councillor names and contact details, Councillor specialisations, sub-committees, dates of Council meetings, Minutes and Annual Report

Village Magazine/Newsletter.

The Chairman's Report will be published annually.

Every opportunity should be taken to include some appropriate information in each publication.

Social Media

If and when GPC has its' own Facebook page, any information posted on the Facebook page which is not in line with our Communication Policy criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the page."

Email.

GPC Councillor's emails should be considered to be in the public domain.

When we arrange our own website we should pursue having "gaytonparishcouncil.gov.uk POP email addresses.

clerkgaytonpc@gmail.com will continue as the email address managed by the PC

Review.

This document will be reviewed annually.

Comments

Any comments or queries regarding this document should be made to the Parish Clerk.