



## **Heworth Without Parish Council**

### **Parish Council Communications Policy**

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### **Introduction**

This Communications Policy applies to all Members and Staff of the Parish Council. Its purpose is to provide clear guidance on managing communications internally, with the media, the public, and each other, ensuring accuracy and professionalism in all communications.

### **Council Commitment**

The Parish Council is committed to providing accurate and timely information about its functions, decisions, and actions. Care must be taken to ensure communications are clear, lawful, and respectful.

### **Legal Context**

This policy operates within the legal frameworks provided by:

- The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
- The Local Government Acts 1972 and 1986 • The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Data Protection Act 1998 (and subsequent GDPR updates)
- The Council's Standing Orders

### **General Communication Guidelines**

- Where clarity is essential, Council decisions and communications should be documented in writing and formally approved.
- Anonymous correspondence will not be acknowledged or responded to.
- Miscommunication risks should be mitigated by seeking formal written approval for significant communications.
- Communications constituting debate, discussion, or decisions should be carried out at Council meetings in public view or, in the case of delegated sub-committees or working groups, reported to Council meetings, unless otherwise prohibited by GDPR.
- Any discussion carried out in a closed meeting due to GDPR will have the outcome minuted and reported publicly while keeping in accordance with GDPR and data privacy.

### **Official Communications**

- Official statements must align with the Council's corporate position. Members and staff must avoid misrepresenting Council views or providing personal opinions in an official capacity.
- When authorised to communicate on behalf of the Council, individuals must explicitly state their role and authority, signing communications as "on behalf of [Council Name]."

### **Personal Communications**

- Councillors and staff must not use their official titles in personal communications.
- Personal views on Council decisions or actions should not be expressed publicly in a way that misrepresents or conflicts with the Council's stance.
- To mitigate a risk of misunderstanding or misrepresentation, Councillors must make clear when they are communicating 'not as a councillor' or 'as a councillor'

### **Communicating Internally**

- All internal communications are subject to FOI and must follow the Council Code of Conduct.
- Internal communications should be for logistical and information-sharing purposes and not constitute debate, discussion, or decisions
- No communications should constitute debate or discussion leading to a Council decision. All decisions must be made in public meetings unless explicitly delegated.
- Any working group, sub-committee, or meeting of Councillors outside of a Council meeting should be reported at the next Council meeting.

### **Communicating with the Public**

- The Parish Council values open communication with members of the public and aims to respond courteously and promptly to inquiries.
- All official communications with the public should be clear, factual, and professional.
- **Councillors and staff should only convey the Council's agreed position, avoiding personal opinions or speculation.**
- For clarity, significant public communications should be provided in writing and formally approved by the Council.
- When engaging with the public informally (e.g., at events or casual meetings), Councillors must ensure they do not misrepresent the Council's views or commit the Council to any actions without proper authority. **Actions can only be agreed at Council meetings.**
- Anonymous inquiries or correspondence may not be acknowledged or responded to, except in exceptional circumstances approved by the Clerk.

### **Communication with the Media**

- The Clerk is the primary contact for all media enquiries, including interviews, statements, or articles. If the Clerk is unavailable, the media should contact the Chair or Vice-Chair.
- Only the Clerk is authorised to communicate on behalf of the Council unless another individual has been expressly authorised by a Council resolution.
- All communications with the media must reflect the corporate views and positions of the Council.
- Councillors or staff speaking in a private capacity must not use Council titles (e.g., "Councillor" or "Clerk") and must clarify they are not representing the Council.

### **Communication in Writing (Including Emails)**

- Official Council email addresses should be used for all correspondence to ensure transparency and compliance with Freedom of Information laws. Personal email accounts should not be used for Council business and may be subject to legal scrutiny.
- Councillors must ensure respect and professionalism in their written communications, in line with the Code of Conduct.
- Council business discussions should occur in public meetings unless otherwise specified in the Standing Orders. Emails should not be used for debate unless permitted for specific matters, such as planning issues.
- Confidential information must remain protected, and GDPR requirements must be observed.

### **Other Forms of Communication (Phone, Text, Online Platforms)**

- Councillors and staff may use other practical means of communication to carry out Council business (e.g., sharing logistical information) for the purposes of expediency but should be aware that all channels used will be subject to FOI.
- Any meeting of Councillors should be noted in the next Council meeting.

**Social Media and Online Platforms**

- The Clerk manages the Council's official website and social media accounts, ensuring compliance with legal and professional standards.
- Social media posts by the Council are limited to factual, up-to-date information. Responses may be monitored and removed if deemed inappropriate.
- Councillors and staff may maintain personal online presences but must not imply Council representation or use official titles in personal posts.

**Persistent Correspondence – Individuals and Groups**

- The Council may limit responses to repeated or vexatious correspondence, particularly if it becomes abusive or places undue strain on resources.
- Decisions to limit correspondence must be formally resolved by the Council, with individuals informed of the decision and provided with a right to appeal.
- Correspondence from groups lacking clear official representation (e.g., without a signature from a secretary or chairman) may not be acknowledged.
- Groups will be informed if the Council decides not to respond further to their communications.

**Adopted:** 16<sup>th</sup> June 2025

**Review date:** June 2029 or sooner if the relevant legislation changes Council Recording Policy