

KEYWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1 INTRODUCTION

This policy will focus the communication efforts of the Parish Council and support it to be effective and efficient in its activity to serve the people of Keyworth and our wider audiences (referred collectively as 'our community').

1.1 Policy context

This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity ('the Code'), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5670/1878324.pdf

The Code is statutory guidance and the Parish Council must have regard to it and follow its provisions. It requires that publicity must:

- Be lawful
- Be cost effective
- Be objective
- Be even-handed
- Be appropriate
- Have regard to equality and diversity
- Be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

It also takes account of national guidance, for example 'The Good Councillor's Guide 2018 (National Association of Local Councils – 'The Guide').

1.2 The need for a communications strategy

Keyworth Parish Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders.

Better communications lead to recognition and respect – reputation matters. Many councils fail to effectively communicate who they are and what they do – and the less people know about an organisation, the less likely they are to rate it highly.

Achieving the council's aims and objectives requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with, or provide services for.

Without proper co-ordination it would be difficult to make sure messages communicated by the Parish Council are consistent and accurate. But if communication is managed effectively, the Parish Council can create and seize opportunities to communicate with partners and the public and build an accurate and positive reputation.

1.3 What should we be communicating?

Research by MORI, an independent research organisation, and the Local Government Association, states the most important drivers of council reputation among local residents are:

- Perceived quality of services overall
- Perceived value for money

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- Media coverage
- Direct communications
- Council performance
- Clean, green and safe environment
- Positive experiences of contact with council employees and contractors.

If the council is to build a strong reputation, effectively inform residents, engage and improve customer satisfaction then these drivers must form the basis of our communications strategy.

There is also a need for proactive and reactive information:

- Proactively – telling people information to influence and change attitudes
- Reactively – giving residents information they want to know

2 COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

2.1 To ensure the Parish Council is aware of and responds in a timely manner to what the people of Keyworth want and need to know.

2.2 To use a variety of digital and traditional communication channels to make sure the information we provide is accessible for the whole community.

2.3 To ensure our messages are relevant, clear and factual to ensure maximum impact and interaction between the Parish Council and our community.

2.4 To provide a user friendly and accessible website to drive interaction with our audiences.

2.5 To celebrate success of interest to the village.

3 COMMUNICATIONS PRINCIPLES

Five principles underpin the strategy. Our communication channels need to:

- Be accessible for all
- Be convenient to access
- Help manage expectations
- Be relevant, clear and factual
- Encourage two-way positive engagement and to 'act together'.

3.1 Identifying newsworthy items

It is the responsibility of everyone working within the Parish Council to identify newsworthy items; these will include a range of Parish Council activities and decisions and it is the responsibility of the Parish Clerk to make the decision as to whether or not a press release should be issued. The content of a Press Release should be approved by the Council Chair and/or a Member of the Communications Working Group.

3.2 Handling media enquiries

The Parish Clerk co-ordinates all formal media enquiries to the Parish Council. Members and Parish Council staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts. If Members are in any doubt they should consult the Parish Clerk. Parish Council staff should refer all media enquiries to the Parish Clerk in the first instance.

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The Parish Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members. The phrase “no comment” should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The Parish Council is open and accountable and should always try to explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

3.2.1 Managing negative issues

From time to time the Parish Council has to respond to negative issues. It is important that these situations are managed carefully so as to limit the potential for negative publicity.

Members and Officers must alert the Parish Clerk as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media. Members and Officers must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted the Parish Council about an issue.

3.2.2 Correcting inaccurate reporting

Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about the Parish Council, a quick decision needs to be taken on any action necessary to correct it. The issue should be discussed with the Parish Clerk to decide what action is appropriate. This could be a letter or news release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, a personal letter to the editor or legal advice. It will also be necessary to decide who is the most appropriate person to take the agreed action.

It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain; each case should be judged individually.

Occasionally the Parish Council will get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake, apologising and stating how the Parish Council will learn from the error or put it right.

3.3 Press releases

The use of press releases is a key technique for publicising Parish Council activities, decisions and achievements. An official Parish Council release is made on behalf of the Parish Council as a whole; it will be written and issued by the Parish Clerk. Official Parish Council releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Parish Council, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Parish Councillor.

Parish Council press releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Parish Councillors, identify a Member’s political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.

All official Parish Council releases will be placed on the Parish Council’s website within one working day of issue.

3.4 Interviews

Any member of staff or elected Member who is contacted by a journalist requesting an interview in their capacity as a representative of the Parish Council should refer the matter to the Parish Clerk.

The situation and the information required by the journalist will inform the choice of person put forward for interview. Officers should never give their opinion on specific Parish Council policy but must keep to the corporate

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line and key messages, their role being to provide expertise and factual knowledge only in support of the Parish Council's approved and agreed policies.

3.5 Media coverage of council meetings

Provision is made for members of the media to attend Parish Council and Committee meetings. During meetings Members and Officers should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue.

Where a meeting of the Parish Council and its committees includes an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Parish Council's Standing Orders.

Both the media and the public are entitled to film and record council meetings held in public.

4 AUDIENCES AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

The Parish Council is clear on the range of audiences it needs to communicate with, the reasons for doing so and their information requirements. Our audiences include:

- Keyworth residents (individuals and target groups (eg young people)
- Local Community groups
- Businesses and Employers in Keyworth
- Other interested bodies
- Local Gov (County and
- Local sports clubs
- Existing and potential suppliers
- Local schools
- Parish Council members
- Parish Council employees
- Local charities
- Media

4.1 Freedom of Information and data protection

Should the Parish Council receive a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on a topic on which there is correspondence (written or email), that correspondence will normally have to be disclosed unless it is exempt. The fact that the disclosure may prove embarrassing would not, in itself, prevent disclosure. In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data.

The Data Protection Act 1998 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents.

The Parish Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Parish Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Parish Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law. Parish Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Parish Council, a copy of which is available via the Parish Council's website.

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The purpose of this policy is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all Officers and Members involved in dealing with the media and to provide guidance on how to handle media interest. It is also to ensure that the Parish Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner.

This policy does not seek to regulate Parish Councillors in their private capacity but does provide advice and guidance on their sensible use of conventional and social media. The Parish Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Parish Council. If the views of Parish Councillors are different to the Parish Council's corporate position and views, it is the responsibility of every councillor to make this distinction clear.

Subject to the obligations on Parish Councillors not to disclose information referred to in section 4.1 and not to misrepresent the Parish Council's position, Parish Councillors are free to communicate their position and views.

In all cases, the Parish Council's approach, in accordance with the Code and the Guide, is that all individual councillor communications should:

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to the Parish Council's policies, particularly Equality and Diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity (eg elections).

If in doubt, never say anything you will be uncomfortable repeating in court.

5 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The type of communication channels used will depend on the target audience and the message to be communicated. These will include:

1. Parish Council website
2. Social media
3. Consultations and feedback forms
4. Correspondence (general)
5. Direct responses (email, phone, in person representations)
6. Parish Council meetings
7. Parish Council working groups
8. Nominated Parish Council spokesperson (e.g. for social media responses)
9. Village working groups/forums/events/surgeries
10. Annual Parish meeting
11. Keyworth Parish Councillors
12. Features submitted to local newsletters (e.g. regular presence in Keyworth News)
13. Parish Council publications
14. Posters, flyers, newsletters
15. Village notice boards
16. Networking links with partners/stakeholders.

5.1 Website

The Parish Council website is an important vehicle for the promotion of Parish Council and wider Parish activities. The website will not:

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- contain content that may result in actions for libel, defamation or other claims for damages
- be used to process personal data other than for the purpose stated at the time of capture
- promote any political party or be used for campaigning
- promote personal financial interests or commercial ventures,
- be used for personal campaigns
- be used in an abusive, hateful or disrespectful manner.

5.2 Social media

Social media can be used by the Parish Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

The aim of this part of the policy is to make sure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of Parish Council-based services through the use of social media
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
- That Parish Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
- That the Parish Council is not brought into disrepute.

Social media activity isn't something that stands alone. To be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be included in social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

The council's social media policy is attached as the Appendix.

6 PUBLICITY DURING ELECTIONS

The rules governing publicity change when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself ('purdah') all proactive publicity about candidates and other politicians is halted. This applies to scheduled local, national or European elections, plus referendums.

During this period Parish Council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual Members or groups of Members. This is to make sure that no individual Parish Councillor or political party gains an unfair advantage by appearing in corporate publicity. In these circumstances, where a quote is required the relevant Officer may be quoted, in accordance with the guidelines in this policy.

The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature – this includes web advertising. There are additional requirements, such as imprint standards, for materials which can be downloaded from a website. Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

Accounts may need to be closed for a defined period before local and national elections in order to comply with legislation which affects local authorities.

Political blogs cannot be linked from the Parish Council's website and the Parish Council will not promote any Parish Councillors' Twitter accounts during the election purdah period.

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Parish Council Members are reminded that they must not misuse Parish Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes. Any queries regarding publicity during a purdah period should always be referred to the Parish Clerk for further advice.

7 REVIEW

The communications working group will oversee the development and implementation of the policy.

This will be reviewed annually by the Finance and Risk Committee, but all decisions will be taken by the full Council.

APPENDIX – SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Keyworth Parish Council Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

This policy provides Councillors and Council staff with an overview of social media, guidelines on how to use social media, and advice on minimising or mitigating any risks or pitfalls associated with social media.

Keyworth Parish Council (KPC) acknowledges social media as a set of useful communication tools. However, clear guidelines are needed to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix, and that their use does not expose the Council to security risks, reputational damage or a breach of the General Data Protection Regulations.

This document provides a structured approach to using social media effectively, lawfully and without compromising KPC. Councillors and Council staff must use social media sensibly and responsibly, in line with Council policy. They must ensure their use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

This policy applies to Councillors and Council staff at KPC.

2. Definition of Social Media

Social media is a term describing online tools, websites and interactive media that enables users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction focuses on user participation and features user-generated content.

Social media:

- Covers many formats, including text, video, photographs and audio;
- Allows messages to flow between different types of device, such as computers, smart phones and tablets (e.g. iPad);
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information;
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information;
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications;
- Lets communication take place in real time or intermittently.

Examples of popular social media tools include: Email, smart phone apps, social networking sites, blogging, tweeting and other sites centred on user interaction. Popular social media platforms include: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, You Tube, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Google Plus. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of such systems, with people sharing similar interests being attracted to share information.

Please note: Email is a form of social media!

3. Why the Council needs a social media policy and presence

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Social media increases our access to audiences and improves the accessibility of our communication. It allows us to communicate with a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to our activities, providing updates, news, information and 'retweeting' of relevant information from other sources. It also provides an opportunity to communicate directly with young people, the business community and harder to reach groups. This enables us to be more active in our relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders, and encourages people to be involved in local decision making, enabling better engagement and feedback, ultimately helping to improve the services we provide.

It can also:

- Provide a forum for debate, where those speaking can choose to either be identified or remain anonymous;
- Be used to encourage feedback and interaction;
- Provide a less formal means of promoting key facts/events and engaging with individuals.

This method of communication is two-way. It is as much about listening as speaking. As such, it resembles a recorded conversation far more than a website or notice board. Councillors should conduct themselves on social media with the same transparency, authenticity, professionalism, and adherence to the NOLAN principles that they would conduct themselves with when engaged in conversation.

KPC recognises and welcomes these uses of social media as part of the wider communications landscape. KPC understands these diverse voices can be heard worldwide, and each individual or group opinion is important.

4. Dangers of social media

While social media tools are a very useful way of sharing information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of. These pitfalls are generally the same as those associated with everyday conversation, though they are exacerbated by their being written down. The following risks have been identified with social media use (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Disclosure of confidential information;
- Damage to the Council's reputation;
- Social engineering attacks (also known as 'phishing');
- Bullying or 'trolling'. An internet 'troll' is a person who starts arguments or upsets people, by posting inflammatory or off-topic messages online with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response, or of otherwise disrupting normal discussion, often for their own amusement;
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation;
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals;
- Breach of the code of conduct for Councillors through inappropriate use.

KPC appreciates not all social media users share its point of view or its goals, and that differing perspectives must be treated with respect. This is especially important where an issue is contentious.

Opinions, questions and discussions appearing on social media should be treated as if they are available for all to see, as they often are. Once posted, they will remain accessible for future users to find.

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KPC will use approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control their use to minimise risks such as those stated above.

5. How to use social media

Social media will be used by KPC as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity. When using social media, all Councillors and KPC staff will:

- Engage with individuals and communities to successfully promote Council-based services;
- Ensure a consistent approach is adopted and maintained;
- Ensure KPC information remains secure and is not compromised;
- Operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation;
- Ensure KPC's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected;
- Aim to keep communication effective, timely, appropriate and useful;
- Utilise cross-promotion of other KPC communication tools (for example, website, noticeboard, Keyworth News).

Social media activity does not stand alone. To be effective it must be integrated as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities should utilise cross-promotion with other KPC communication tools (for example, website, noticeboard, Keyworth News) to increase reach and exposure.

6. Responsibilities

Councillors and Council staff must use social media sensibly and responsibly. As with all communication, it should not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

In addition to the NOLAN principles, the following guidelines set out standards of behaviour expected from KPC representatives when using social media:

- Social media must not be used in a way that might lead to a complaint that you have breached the Council's Code of Conduct.
- Members of KPC must have separate social media profiles for their role as Councillor, distinct from their private life. (Rushcliffe Borough Council has reported that Members using personal social media accounts is what causes the biggest problems with social media. Insisting upon separate accounts will avoid this. It will also make GDPR less galling. For example, a Councillor can be forced to share all their Council emails but not their personal emails if the two are kept separate).
- You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a libel action for which you will be personally liable; no indemnity from the Council will be available.
- Social media sites are in the public domain, so it is important to ensure you are confident of the nature of all information you publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without your consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed.

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- Make use of stringent privacy settings if you do not want your social media to be accessed by the press or public. Read the terms of service of any social media site accessed and make sure you understand their confidentiality/privacy settings.
- Do not disclose personal details of others, such as home addresses and telephone numbers. Ensure you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's data protection policies.
- Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are open to misuse by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report them.
- Do not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or exempt reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the Freedom of Information Act 2000).
- Copyright laws still apply to social media. Using images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.
- Be aware of your own safety when sharing information on social media, and do not publish information which could leave you vulnerable.
- Use of the Council's social media platforms must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal or political opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor.
- Statements made on behalf of KPC should be either statements of fact or KPC policy.
- Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

7. Principles for using social media

You should follow these five guiding principles for any social media activities:

- **Be respectful** – set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language, and be cordial, honest and professional at all times. Respect people's confidentiality – do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others.
- **Be credible and consistent** – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure what you say online is consistent with your other communications.
- **Be honest about who you are** – it is important that any accounts or profiles you set up are clearly and easily identifiable. Be clear about your own personal role.
- **Be responsive** – make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you cannot. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner.
- **Think twice** – think carefully about all your social media posts. Once published it will be too late to change your mind. If unsure, say nothing.

Follow these rules and seek further guidance if needed.

8. Inappropriate Use of Social Media by Others

Anyone receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the police.

Other inappropriate content can be reported to the social media site directly to ask for it to be removed.

You may wish to save a screenshot in these circumstances.

9. Guidance for Councillors – social media and meetings

KPC encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of Keyworth issues and the use of social media can help with this, especially during official Council meetings. Below are extra guidelines for Councillors to consider if they use social media during Council meetings:

- Handheld devices and laptops are permitted (indeed encouraged) for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings, not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'.
- Councillors' tweets/blogs during Council meetings should refer to discussions taking place at the meeting. Tweeting/Blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting, so should be avoided.
- Councillors have a responsibility to take Council business seriously and it is not appropriate for Members to use social media to tease or insult other Members. Keyworth residents expect debate and to be informed about Council business. They do not expect to witness petty arguments.
- Remember that if you break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.

10. Structure

The communications working group will oversee the KPC social media presence. In addition to the guidelines outlined above, the role of the team is also to:

- Advise upon and monitor social media interactions.
- Create, disable and remove social media accounts and posts.

The communications team will consist of five councillors plus the Clerk. Members of the team will be appointed by the Parish Council and membership will be reviewed annually at the Annual Parish Council meeting.