

**ORFORD & GEDGRAVE PARISH COUNCIL**

**The Town Hall, Market Hill, ORFORD, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 2NZ**

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**ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION and SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

**INTRODUCTION:**

The Parish Council understands that the use of digital and electronic communication enables it to interact in a manner that improves the communications both within the Parish Council and between the Parish Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Parish Council has a website and uses email to communicate. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Should the Parish Council add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PARISH COUNCIL:**

Communications from the Parish Council are expected to meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Parish Council does not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- If official council business, it will be moderated by the Clerk to the Parish Council as the Proper Officer.

Parish Council website:

Occasionally, the Parish Council may direct those contacting the Council to its website to see the required information if it is in the public domain. The website can be found at (<http://www.orfordparishandtrust.onesuffolk.net/>).

Parish Council email:

The Clerk to the council has its own email address ([orfordtownhall@btconnect.com](mailto:orfordtownhall@btconnect.com)). The email account is monitored mainly during the morning of Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and the Parish Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as practically possible. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk and otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Please note that the Clerk works part-time so will respond as soon as she can. The Parish Council may not respond to every comment it receives particularly if it is experiencing a heavy workload or the comment is for information purposes only.

Emails to the Parish Council become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

**SMS (texting):**

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

**Internal communication and access to information within the Parish Council:**

The Parish Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement. Parish Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct in all their work on behalf of the Parish Council.

Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972 covers meetings and proceedings of local authorities. Previously, paragraph 4(2)(b) requires principal and parish councils to send summonses to attend meetings by post to their members' home addresses, or under 4(4), by post, to an alternative address specified. In practice, this covered all the papers to be considered at meetings, not just the agenda. The Government, under The Order made under Section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000 amended Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 to allow local authorities to send their members summonses to attend meetings, including agendas and related papers to meetings, electronically. The Parish Council has amended its own Standing Orders to allow the authorising of the use of electronic communication. Occasionally, the electronic communication may include attachments, such as a meeting agenda or papers, or a web-link enabling a parish councillor to view meeting papers.

As more and more information become available electronically, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Parish Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Parish Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails and avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option (whilst ensuring that the people who need to know the information are copied in) and ensure that email trails have been removed.

**Social Media:**

To ensure that all discussions on pages set up by the Parish Council are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the guidelines listed below should be followed:

- Be considerate and respectful of others.
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive
- Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Parish Council members or staff, will not be permitted

**Communications from the Parish Council will:**

- be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;

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- (if official council business) be moderated by either the Chair of the Parish Council or the Clerk to the Parish Council.
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Communications to the Parish Council are expected to:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content copied from elsewhere, for which the enquirer does not own the copyright;
- not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.

**Adopted at the full Council meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2022.**

**To be reviewed February 2023.**

**Signed Chair** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_