GOSFIELD PRESS, MEDIA & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



1. **Introduction**

This policy has been compiled to act as a guidance note for the Parish Council, its members and officers. It represents the policy of the Parish Council in respect of its relationships with the Press and all forms of Media. The policy has been prepared to ensure consistency in the Parish Council's dealings with the Press and Media.

The aim of the protocols are to ensure that the Parish Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner and it is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech, rather than to establish a framework for achieving effective exchanges of views in a public setting.

2. **Code of Conduct**

All interactions with the press, media and on social media platforms made by officers or members of the Parish Council must comply with Sections 3 & 4 of the Parish Council's Code of Conduct.

In summary:

- Treat others with respect. Avoid personal attacks and disrespectful, rude or offensive comments
- Comply with equality laws. Take care in publishing anything that may be considered sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith
- Refrain from publishing anything that has been received in confidence
- Ensure that the Parish Council or its' officers and members are never brought into disrepute
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3. **Press Releases & the Gosfield Parish Council Website**

i) Official Press Releases & Information published on council's website

An official Parish Council press release is made on behalf of the Parish Council as a whole. It will be written by a member or officer of the Parish Council and issued by the Clerk. It is non-party political and if necessary, can include quote(s) from the relevant Councillor(s). This also applies to Committees of the Council.

The Clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Parish Council, is authorised to receive all communications from the Press or Television Media and to issue press releases/statements on behalf of the Parish Council as instructed or as the Clerk may consider appropriate. Any interviews with the Press will normally be conducted by The Chairman of the Council or the Vice-Chairman or a Councillor nominated for this role by the Clerk.

Whenever possible, any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.

No other officer or member of the Parish Council, unless authorised by the Clerk, can speak or communicate with the press on any matter relating to or affecting the Parish Council or its business. Any officer or member of the Parish Council may draft a press release, however, they must all be issued by the Clerk.

Only The Clerk has access to the Parish Council Website and any additions and alterations are to be made via The Clerk.

ii) Parish Councillor Press Releases

When Parish Councillors are speaking or providing written material to the Press, they must make it clear in what capacity they are providing information. For example:

- As Chair of the Parish Council
- As Chair of a committee or working group
- As an individual
- As a spokesperson or press officer for a political party

A copy of any written material provided by a Parish Councillor, representing the Parish Council, to the press shall be forwarded to the Clerk for approval and will be issued by the Clerk to the press.

Parish Councillors may issue their own press releases, but it must be obvious to the recipient that these are personal and are not issued by or on behalf of the Parish Council. These releases may or may not be political and should not include the name of a Parish Council officer, or a Parish Council telephone number as a point of contact. Member releases must not use Parish Council logos. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases, especially those of a factual nature, to be provided to the Clerk.

In the years when elections occur, during periods from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day of the Election ('Purdah'), Parish Council officers will issue no releases quoting Parish Council Members. During 'Purdah' any quotes will be from Parish Council officers only.

4. Audio & Visual Recordings at Parish Council Meetings

The right to record, film and to broadcast meetings of the parish council meeting, its committees, sub-committees and any joint committees is established under the Openness of Local Government Regulations 2014. This is in addition to the rights of the press and public to attend such meetings.

The Parish Council supports the principles of openness and transparency in its decision making; it supports the video or audio recording by the public and press of meetings that are open to the public, for either live or subsequent broadcast. It also supports the use of modern communication methods such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs to report what is happening at meetings as they take place. For the purpose of this policy the term "record" means any form of audio, visual or electronic recording. Such recording is permitted under the lawful direction of the council meeting.

While those attending, the meeting are deemed to have consented to the recording and broadcasting of meetings, the Parish Council recognises that some members of the public attending their meetings may not wish to be recorded and their rights under the Data Protection Act and the Human Rights Act must be respected. It will be the responsibility of the individual who is making the recording to ensure that they have received permission from members of the public present, or their guardians.

The right to film or record is limited to the duration of the meeting. Recording must not start until the meeting is called to order and must cease when the Chairman closes the meeting. Public question time may not be part of the formal meeting and recorders should take advice on their rights to make any recording during that period.

The Parish Council asks those recording proceedings not to edit the film or recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings, infringe the values of the Council. The person making the recording will remain responsible for any subsequent use or misuse to which the material is put.

The Parish Council is not responsible for any views expressed by the public at meetings and the public should be aware that the opinion of an individual councillor may not represent the views of the council, and cannot be used to bind the council.

- Filming or recording equipment cannot be left in the meeting room at times when the public is excluded and should not be left unattended at any time.
- All recording must be clearly visible to anyone at the meeting.
- Equipment which needs setting up must be in place when the meeting starts.
- Oral commentary is not permitted.
- Speakers must not be asked to repeat statements for the purpose of recording.
- Excessive noise, intrusive lighting, and the use of flash photography are not permitted.
- Roaming while filming or recording is not permitted – that operating equipment must stay in the public area.
- Intrusive filming of a specific individual or individuals could be considered harassment and will not be permitted.
- The minutes of a council meeting remain the statutory and legally binding formal record of council decisions

5. Use of Social Media Platforms

Social Media represents a great opportunity to support the leadership roles that the Parish Council plays in the community. It is also an excellent way to create community conversations, debates and to innovatively create new ideas and solutions to important local issues. Social Media is an effective way of keeping the 'finger on the pulse' of local concerns and needs.

For the Parish Council, the rapidly growing social networking platforms, provide a modern, alternative means to communicate with residents of the Parish. It gives the Parish Council the opportunity to share unlimited content including:

- Sharing articles/blog posts/expertise
- Able to facilitate discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction
- Able to create surveys to encourage participation from visitors
- Able to upload images and videos
- Able to announce and advertise forthcoming events

It is important to remember that whilst the use of Social Media is no more or less vulnerable to mistakes, misunderstanding or misuse, any post, tweet, image, blog, picture or video is permanently available for the whole world to see.

Official Parish Council postings on Social Media are only to be made by the Parish Clerk in consultation with The Chairman of the Parish Council, The Vice Chairman or The Council where practicable. This also applies to Council Committees.

Any legal pitfalls can be avoided by making sure that any content from or on behalf of the Parish Council is objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

i) Libel – If the Parish Council publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation, they may take libel action against the Parish Council. This will also apply if the Parish Council allows someone else to publish something libellous on the Parish Council website or on any social media account.
ii) Copyright – Publishing images or text from a copyrighted source without permission is a breach of copyright legislation. All care must be taken, or permission sought before publishing existing text or image content.
iii) Data Protection – Publishing the personal data of any individual without their express permission must be avoided.
iv) Bias and Pre-determination – Avoid publishing anything that may suggest that the Parish Council does not have an open mind about a matter that it is determining. To do so raises the possibility that any decision could be invalidated.
v) Obscene Material – Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.
vi) Images that include young people can only be published with parental permission

It is important that any officer or member of the Parish Council gives due regard to internet security to avoid misuse of all forms of Social Media.
The Parish Council has a professional image to uphold and conduct online can impact this image.

Suggested Etiquette for Social Media Platforms:

- Make commenting policy clear
- Allow for disagreement
- Think before publishing
- Beware of irony (irony or sarcasm may be misunderstood)
- Beware of using terminology like 'friending' or 'following'.
- If a mistake is made, clear acknowledgment and appropriate action should be taken
- If 'trolling' occurs, ignore if necessary

Any misuse of Social Media platforms will be subject to the Disciplinary & Code of Conduct policies of the Parish Council.

Re-Adopted
Date 11th May 2026
Minute reference 26/091 Item Z
Signed ……Chairman
Review Date: May 2027