

# CHURCHILL PARISH COUNCIL



# EMERGENCY AND CRISIS PLAN

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## **AIM**

The aim of this document is to set out Churchill Parish Council's response and contingency plan to deal with situations and occurrences which have the potential to adversely affect the daily lives of Churchill and Langford parishioners and the functioning of its Parish Council. The document deals with three specific areas of potential risk;

- Physical incidents, emergencies and crises, local and countrywide.
- Loss of effectiveness or the ability of the Parish Council to conduct its business.
- Significant funding difficulties.

This document has been endorsed by Churchill Parish Council and will be reviewed and amended on a 2 yearly basis.

## **Background**

Throughout the UK experience has shown that during major incidents and crises the emergency services and government agencies often require the assistance of established and organised local bodies to overcome the situation. Accordingly, it is the fundamental duty of the Parish Council to act as a resilient, effective, well organised and accountable public body on behalf of the parishioners. It is therefore essential that Churchill Parish Council has contingency frameworks in place in order to be able to manage and deal with each potential risk area.

The courses of action set out in this document give a broad framework for guidance. Flexibility of response and well thought out action at the time are vital for success.

## **EMERGENCIES AND CRISES**

### **Definition**

The very nature of emergencies and crises mean that they are usually unpredictable; however examples of the types of emergency or crises which may require Parish Council action to assist parishioners and authorities are detailed below;

- Prolonged failure of utilities, water supplies, electricity or gas.
- Prolonged loss of fuel supplies (petrol and diesel)
- Adverse weather such as severe cold and snow, excessive rainfall resulting in flooding or prolonged heat wave.
- Epidemics / Pandemics, human and animal, such as influenza / Covid 19 / foot and mouth disease.
- Major building or facility fire such as schools, churches, village hall and care homes.
- Major road accident involving HazChem spillage requiring the evacuation of residents.
- Aircraft crash into residential areas or facilities.
- Subsidence or land slide resulting in major damage to public buildings or roads, or where multiple private residences are seriously damaged.

### **Parish Council Response Principles**

The Parish Council is not expected to act in place of trained organisations, personnel or authorities. Major emergency or crisis assistance afforded by the Parish Council should follow the principles set out below;

#### **i. Information**

It is vital to gather all the information and then fully understand the situation in order to take effective action. However, it may be that information is scarce in the initial stages, so it may be that the Parish Council has to act based on minimal information. Experience has shown that it is usually better to act early rather than wait until the situation worsens. In other words it is easier to step back from an over reaction than to grip a situation that has got out of hand.

In many cases major occurrences can adversely affect infrastructure, property and public facilities. The Parish Council by its nature has a wide knowledge of its parishioners, landowners and of its facilities and is therefore best placed to pass accurate information to authorised persons when required. This is particularly important when there are situations which have the potential to severely affect the elderly, infirm or vulnerable members of the parish.

ii. Co-ordination

Experience has shown that during emergencies and crises there are always offers of help from varied individuals and organisations. The Parish Council should act as a co-ordinator in order to make the best and most effective use of this sort of help. Examples would be something as simple as tea making to more complex tasks such as procuring or issuing goods or supplies to those in need.

iii. Implementation

The Parish Council will be expected and should be prepared to take action during major and prolonged occurrences where appropriate. Often this will be on behalf of the emergency services or as a result of their activities. Examples might be the setting up of an evacuation centre or the passing of information throughout the parish on behalf of the emergency services.

iv. Communication

It is extremely important that good clear communications are maintained between all of the people and organisations involved in managing and controlling the situation.

It is also vital that all those affected by an incident or occurrence are kept informed. There are a number of simple ways in which the Parish Council can do this;

- Post information on the website.
- Print and distribute leaflets or notes.
- Display information on the notice boards.
- Make statements on local radio and television.

Whenever a serious i.e. newsworthy, incident occurs the press will descend on the area and will expect statements and information and as such the Parish Council may be called upon to respond. This can be daunting and fraught with pitfalls but it can also be an opportunity to get information out, ask for help from the public or allay public anxiety.

As a rule of thumb, stick to the facts, do not speculate, if something is not known or understood say so and if something stated previously turns out to be incorrect, correct it. Always highlight the positive activity.

## **How to Respond in Practice**

It is highly likely that the Parish Council Chairman or Parish Clerk will be contacted in the first instance. However depending on the circumstances, any one of the Councillors could be contacted first. Whatever the case they should immediately endeavour to contact as many other Councillors as possible.

Being a small Parish Council it is important that as many Councillors as possible are available to respond as a team. Ideally they should be under the leadership of the Chair and Vice Chair.

It is vital to respond and act in a calm, measured and focused manner. In the initial stages of any occurrence information will be confused and inaccurate. This is normal but can be overcome by judicious verification and corroboration of information using reliable sources.

It is very important early on to nominate a suitable strategic venue from which the Parish Council can conduct operations. The following should be considered when choosing a suitable venue;

- Location; close enough to the situation to be effective but not too close to be adversely affected.
- Vehicle and pedestrian accessibility.
- Telephone communications including mobile phone coverage.
- Light, heat, and power should be available.
- Catering and refreshment facilities should be available.

Examples might be the memorial hall, either of the schools, local public houses or the Doctors' surgery. Additionally, depending on the nature of the occurrence, it might be considered that Councillors with specific delegated tasks can conduct those tasks from home.

A broad outline Parish Council step by step response is set out as follows;

- Contact and inform as many Councillors as possible.
- Convene an extraordinary meeting at a strategic venue. The Meeting should be chaired by the current standing Chair person. If unavailable the Vice Chair, or if the Vice Chair is also unavailable any of the Councillors.
- Liaise with the Police /Fire incident commander, agency or those in charge of the situation.
- Establish communications and publicise contact numbers. To aid unhindered communication establish 'call in' 'call out' lines. Note; more than one of each may be required.

- Set up a visible state board which shows;
  - Definite facts.
  - Important but uncorroborated information.
  - Assumptions made.
  - Actions taken.
  - Points of contact.
  - Contact numbers.
- Raise and maintain an actions and decisions log.
- Take steps to understand the resources available immediately and what may be needed as the situation develops.
- Brief third parties with information they need to carry out their particular task. Don't waste time with unnecessary detail.
- Take steps to ensure that the Parish Council actions are in accord with the District Council intentions.
- Nominate a spokesperson.
- Agree statements and lines to take.
- Issue situation reports regularly, the timings of which being dictated by the situation.
- Act decisively and with justification.
- For protracted situations it may be necessary for a 'shift' or duty system within the Parish Council to be established
- Hold regular progress/review meetings. Depending on the nature of the situation daily may suffice but could in some severe cases be hourly.

As a rule, as the situation develops it will soon become clear how long a response is required, by which time consideration should be given to a response run down and a re-establishment of normality plan.

When all of the response activity has been completed a meeting should be held, in public if necessary, at which the Parish Council can carry out a review in order to establish what went well and worked, and what did not. Actions and matters arising from the incident response review can be addressed and if required put in place ready for the next time.

## **LOSS OF EFFECTIVENESS OR ABILITY OF THE PARISH COUNCIL TO CONDUCT ITS BUSINESS**

### **Definition**

In order for any Parish Council to be credible and effective it must carry the mandate of the parishioners. Without that mandate it would difficult, if not impossible, for the Parish Council function. Examples of situations which would mean the loss of the ability to carry out its ability to conduct the running of the parish might be as follows;

- Loss of parishioner confidence due to major conflict of interest, corruption or malpractice.
- Major irresolvable disagreement amongst Parish Councillors or two or more councillors with detrimental hidden agendas.
- Mass resignation of Parish Councillors.

### **Parish Council Response Principles**

In all of the above examples it is prevention rather than cure which is needed. However, as with dealing with emergencies and crises, it is vitally important in the first instance to fully understand the problem. In order to address the issue or matter the Parish Council should gather information, co-ordinate, implement and communicate, as set out in the above response to emergencies and crises. However, the difference being that the Parish Council should take action as a coherent body to address the situation and solve the problem.

### **How to Respond in Practice**

#### **i. Loss of Parishioner Confidence, Malpractice, Disagreements and Hidden Agendas.**

It is important to rebuild parishioner confidence quickly by taking decisive and immediate action to solve the problem.

- Meet, call an extraordinary meeting if necessary to discuss the matter or issue as a single agenda item. Ideally this should be a public meeting.
- Define the problem or issue exactly.
- Deal with the issue working with hard and fast evidence, avoid relying on hearsay or opinion.
- Discuss and explore possible solutions and if necessary obtain expert advice.
- Be prepared for emotions to 'run high' and build in time for cooling off or time out during the meeting.

- Once a solution has been found, set out a strict timetable and plan to implement the solution.
- Where there are several or varied solutions a vote should be held. The solution selected by majority vote must then be fully accepted by all Councillors regardless of personal views and implemented in full.
- Be wary of matters arising from corruption or malpractice in that the Parish Council may uncover criminal activity and have no option other than to call in the Police.
- Publicise the matter and inform the parishioners in detail of the action being taken using the usual methods.
- The Parish Council should be prepared to publicly apologise with humility and grace.

## **ii. Mass Resignation**

An issue or matter serious enough to prompt a Parish Councillor mass resignation should never be allowed to get that far. Again prevention is better than cure. However, in the unlikely event that this should happen the Parish Council would lose its mandate to continue operating. Great reliance would then be placed on the Parish Clerk to continue with the facilitation of the Parish Council long term contractual commitments but no new business could be progressed.

### **Responsibility to the Parishioners**

The nature of a 'mass resignation' problem implies that there may not be a Parish Council to address the immediate aftermath. However, the Parish Council as a body would be duty bound to apprise the Parishioners of the situation. This could be carried out in the normal ways, notice boards, website etc but courtesy would dictate that a public meeting should be convened to inform the Parishioners how and why the situation has arisen. It should be noted;

- Parishioners may not want to accept the resignations.
- Tempers may get frayed and discussion may get heated.
- Be prepared for criticism, some of which may be harsh.
- Establish what can be done to address the situation rather than what can't or won't be done.
- Take the first steps to re-build the Parish Council by canvassing opinion and establishing whether there are any volunteers to stand for election.
- District Council/Local Government help and legal assistance will be needed.

## **SIGNIFICANT FUNDING DIFFICULTIES OR IRREGULARITIES**

### **Definition**

A major proportion of the Parish Council's work relies on having the backing of sufficient funding with ability to control and access it when required. The system relies on open and clear decision making processes which carry majority endorsement.

With the regulation and systems in place coupled with the audit process it is highly unlikely that the Parish Council should find itself in financial difficulty. However, it is possible that circumstances beyond Parish Council control could adversely effect the financial situation such as a major banking crisis resulting in the freezing of the Parish Council bank account or, at the beginning of the financial year, District Council difficulties in administering the precept. Additionally it may be that the auditor uncovers a hidden financial irregularity during an audit.

### **Parish Council Response Principles**

Financial difficulties have the potential to curtail many of the Parish Council's standing tasks and projects. It is important to bear in mind that there is a large proportion of activity which does not require finance. In dealing with a financial difficulty the Parish Council must not lose sight of its other business and activities.

### **How to Respond in Practice**

Should financial difficulties arise similar to the examples given above the Parish Council response should be as follows;

- Call an extraordinary meeting in order to gather and discuss all the facts.
- If the situation is outside of the Parish Council control and is unlikely to be short-lived, consideration should be given to interim measures with third parties such as Parish Council employees and contractors. It is vital that legal advice is sought.
- It may be that the finances are much less than planned for which will require re-discussion, re-planning and agreement across all of the Parish Council sub committees.
- Once the situation is fully understood the parishioners should be informed via the usual channels. It is important to be clear on the effect the situation will have, or is having, and exactly what the Parish council is going to do about it.
- If it transpires that an individual associated with the Parish Council is knowingly responsible for the financial irregularities, legal advice should be sought at the earliest opportunity. It may also be that the Police become involved, in which case it is important to be open and honest with the parishioners. An early public statement by the Parish Council Chairman may be required.

**AUTHORISATION AND AMENDMENT**

This document will be reviewed and amended as necessary on an annual basis. Proposed amendments will be incorporated after having been endorsed by majority vote at a full meeting of Churchill Parish Council.

Cllr Mrs J Bush  
Chair Churchill Parish Council