

Media and Communications Policy

1. Introduction and purpose

1.1 This policy sets out how the Parish Council communicates with residents, the media, partner organisations and other stakeholders. It supports accurate, timely, lawful and respectful communication about the Council's decisions, activities and responsibilities.

1.2 The policy applies to councillors, the Clerk, any Council employees or volunteers acting on behalf of the Council, and any person authorised to communicate in the Council's name.

1.3 The Council is committed to openness and transparency, while recognising that some information cannot lawfully be disclosed. This may include confidential information, personal data, commercially sensitive information, legal advice, or matters restricted by statute, contract or the Council's Standing Orders.

2. Legal and governance framework

2.1 This policy should be read alongside the Council's Standing Orders, Code of Conduct, Publication Scheme, Data Protection Policy, Freedom of Information procedures, complaints arrangements and any separate Social Media Policy.

2.2 The Council will have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, which requires publicity to be lawful, cost effective, objective, even-handed and appropriate. It also requires publicity to have regard to equality and diversity, and to be issued with particular care during periods of heightened sensitivity, such as the pre-election period.

2.3 The Council will also comply with applicable legislation, including the Local Government Acts 1972 and 1986, the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 The Clerk is the proper officer and the usual first point of contact for official Council communications, media enquiries and requests for information. Formal correspondence issued on behalf of the Council should normally be sent by, or with the approval of, the Clerk.

3.2 The Chair may speak on behalf of the Council where authorised to do so, or where an urgent response is required and it is not practicable to obtain prior Council approval. Any urgent statement should be factual and proportionate, and should be reported to the Council as soon as reasonably possible.

3.3 Individual councillors must make clear whether they are speaking in a personal capacity or on behalf of the Council. Councillors must not present personal views as the formal position of the Council unless the Council has agreed that position or delegated authority has been given.

3.4 Council resources, including email accounts, stationery, noticeboards, website content and social media channels, must be used only for properly authorised Council business and must not be used for party political or personal campaigning purposes.

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4. Official communications

4.1 Official communications should be accurate, balanced, clear, courteous and consistent with decisions made by the Council. They should avoid speculation, personal criticism, party political content, or statements that could misrepresent the Council's position.

4.2 Significant public statements, press releases and website notices should, where practicable, be approved by the Council or by the Clerk in consultation with the Chair or relevant councillors acting under delegated authority. Routine factual updates may be issued by the Clerk under delegated authority.

4.3 Communications should distinguish between decisions already made by the Council and matters still under consideration. The Council should not raise expectations before a matter has been discussed and resolved at a properly convened meeting, unless delegated authority applies.

4.4 Anonymous correspondence will not normally receive a response. Abusive, discriminatory, threatening or vexatious communications may be managed in accordance with the Council's policies and legal obligations.

5. Media enquiries and press statements

5.1 Media enquiries should be referred promptly to the Clerk. Councillors who receive media enquiries should avoid giving an immediate substantive response unless they are authorised to speak on the matter.

5.2 The Council will aim to respond to legitimate media enquiries in a timely way, subject to availability of information, legal restrictions, confidentiality and the need to obtain approval where appropriate.

5.3 Press statements should normally be factual and attributable to the Council, the Clerk, the Chair or another authorised representative. They should not include party political material or commentary that could reasonably be seen as seeking to influence public support for a political party, group or candidate.

6. Meetings, filming and reporting

6.1 Council and committee meetings are open to the public and press unless the meeting resolves to exclude them for a lawful reason, such as confidential business or another special reason in the public interest.

6.2 Members of the public and media may film, photograph, record or report on open Council meetings, provided this does not disrupt the meeting. The Chair may require disruptive behaviour to stop, in accordance with Standing Orders.

6.3 The Council should be mindful of privacy, safeguarding and data protection considerations when photographs, recordings or personal information are involved.

7. Website, noticeboards and social media

7.1 The Council may use its website, noticeboards, newsletters, email updates and social media channels to provide information about meetings, consultations, decisions, services, projects, vacancies, community safety information and matters of local interest.

7.2 Information published by the Council should be kept under review and updated or removed when it becomes out of date. Statutory notices, agendas and minutes should be published in accordance with legal requirements and the Council's normal procedures.

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7.3 Social media may be used to share Council information and signpost residents to relevant services. It should not be used to conduct Council debate or make Council decisions. Decisions must be made at properly convened meetings or through lawful delegated authority.

8. Pre-election period and political neutrality

8.1 During the period between the publication of a Notice of Election and polling day, the Council must take particular care to ensure that publicity is politically neutral and does not appear to promote or disadvantage any candidate, councillor, political party or group.

8.2 Ordinary Council business may continue during this period, including factual information about services, statutory notices, agendas and minutes. However, publicity should avoid controversial issues, personalisation of Council activity, new initiatives involving elected members, or material that could reasonably be seen as influencing voters.

8.3 Councillors may campaign in a personal or political capacity, but must not use Council resources, officer support, Council email accounts, stationery, noticeboards, website space or social media channels for electioneering or party political purposes.

8.4 Where there is uncertainty during the pre-election period, advice should be sought from the Clerk and, where necessary, the principal authority's Monitoring Officer or Returning Officer.

9. Confidentiality, data protection and records

9.1 The Council will not disclose confidential information or personal data unless there is a lawful basis to do so. Councillors and staff must handle information in accordance with the Council's policies, the Code of Conduct and applicable data protection legislation.

9.2 Emails, messages and other written communications relating to Council business may be disclosable under information legislation. Councillors and staff should therefore write communications on the basis that they may later need to be retrieved, reviewed or lawfully disclosed.

10. Review

10.1 This policy should be reviewed annually, or sooner if there are changes to legislation, national guidance, Council procedures or local circumstances.

Formal Approval of this Media and Communications Policy

Approved by:

Dullingham Parish Council

Adopted: 5 November 2020

Reviewed: 3 July 2026