



Greenham Parish Council

Media and Communications

Policy Adopted 12082020 v2

GREENHAM PARISH COUNCIL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Greenham Parish Council's relationship with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key.
- 1.2. Effective media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between Greenham Parish Council ("the Council") and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.
- 1.3. Greenham Parish Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions
- 1.4. The Council may communicate with those whose work involves gathering material for editorial publication in print, broadcast and electronic form ("the media"). The Council will also have its own methods of publication, including social media.
- 1.5. This document sets out the framework for Greenham Parish Council Members and employees to follow in dealings with the media, to inform the public about the Council's activities, decisions and the services it provides.
- 1.6. The purpose of this policy is:
 - to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media
 - to ensure that the views and policies of the Council are presented accurately
 - to clarify who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council
 - to provide guidance for Members and Officers on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the press and media
 - to ensure consistency in the Council's dealings with the press and media
 - to ensure that all elements of the press and media will be treated equally

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 2.1. This policy is subject to the Council's statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the GDPR Act 2018, the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council's Standing Orders.
- 2.2. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Some aspects of the Code are relevant to this policy:
 - 2.2.1 Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims, and the provision of services, should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.
 - 2.2.2 Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should

not oversimplify facts, issues or arguments.

2.2.3 Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.

2.2.4 Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.

2.3. Members must also have regard to their Code of Conduct.

3. MEDIA ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

3.1. Meetings of the council, its committees and sub-committees are open to the public and press unless the Council resolves that their presence is prejudicial to the public interest, by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, or for other special reasons.

3.2. In accordance with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, the Council allow for reporting of meetings via social media of any kind.

3.3. In accordance with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, the Council will allow any member of the public to take photographs, film and/or audio-record the proceedings, and report on, all public meetings. While no prior permission is required to carry out this activity, it is advisable that any person wishing to film or audio-record a public meeting let their local government staff know so that all necessary arrangements can be made for the public meeting. This is important because the Council is only required to provide reasonable facilities for any member of the public to report on meetings.

3.4. In accordance with standing orders and the relevant legislations, persons may be required to leave a meeting if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.

3.5. Where meetings include time for public participation and subject to the Council's standing orders, media representatives may speak and ask questions.

The press/media are entitled, on payment of postage or other necessary charges, to copies of the agenda and necessary supporting papers for a meeting. Their representatives shall be given reasonable facilities for taking and communicating their report of a meeting.

4. SPECIFIC ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1. The Clerk

4.1.1 Wherever possible all communications with the Press and Media should be made through the Clerk. The Parish Clerk is effectively the Press Officer for the Council.

4.1.2 The Clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council, following the procedures set out in this Policy.

4.1.3 In the absence of the Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Deputy Clerk or Locum Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman. In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman and/or relevant Committee Chairman will be consulted. In the absence of the Clerk and Deputy/Locum Clerk, media communications will be handled by the elected Interim Proper Officer, in consultation with the Chairman. In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman and/or relevant Committee Chairman will be consulted.

4.1.4 Communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk should not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk, they should inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response within 24 hours where practical. The Clerk should then consult with the Chairman or relevant Councillor(s) on a suitable response, which may in fact be "no comment".

4.2 Individual Members

4.2.1 Members of the Council should be aware in all their interactions with the media and social media that, unless they are specifically authorised to do so on particular issues, no individual councillor can speak for the Council.

4.2.2 Whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that s/he voted against a policy if this took place in an open session, Members should not seek to undermine a decision through the Press.

4.2.3 Members of the Parish Council who identify a media opportunity should refer this to the Chairman and Parish Clerk, so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.

4.2.4 If a Member of the Council receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be referred to the Chairman and Parish Clerk. A decision will then be made, following the procedures set out in this Policy, about the format and content of any official Council response.

4.2.5 Unless a Member has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Members who are asked for individual comment by the media should first

take into consideration their responsibilities under the Legal Framework of this Policy. It is recommended that Members take advice from the Clerk to check facts and the legal framework. If individual Members choose to make a comment to the media, they must make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

4.2.6 If a Member has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, then the production of any statement should follow the procedures laid out in this Policy for releases to the media.

4.2.7 It is considered reasonable that any Member of the Council, when asked for individual comment by the media, should refer them to the Parish Clerk and make no further comment.

4.2.8 Any Member taking part in a radio or television broadcast should only do so on behalf of the Parish Council with the approval of the Chairman and/or Clerk, in consultation with other Members where necessary.

4.2.9 These guidelines do not prevent a Member from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example, by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site.

Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views and, where these views are a reiteration of publicly available information, such as decisions made at past meetings, this should also be made clear. However, Members should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Legal Framework of this policy, in particular the Local Government Code of Conduct.

4.2.10 It is recommended that, where individual Members have their own means of public communication (personal public social media accounts, e-newsletters, etc) they include this wording or equivalent wording:

“Views and opinions expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of Greenham Parish Council. All data and information provided here is for informational purposes only.”

5. RELEASES TO THE MEDIA

5.1. A ‘press release’ is any official statement to the media, made by the Council as a whole, or by a Member authorised by the Council to speak on a specific issue. It is recommended that a standard format for media statements is used. The Clerk should be given as the point of contact for all press releases

5.2.1 Any Member who identifies that a press release would be beneficial for the Council, whether to encourage open and constructive dialogue or the provision of accurate information in respect to the Council’s functions, decisions and actions, should refer this matter to the Clerk. In the absence of the Clerk, the matter should be referred

to the Deputy/Locum Clerk or, in the absence of both the Clerk and a Deputy/Locum Clerk, the elected Proper Officer.

- 5.2.2 The Clerk (or in the absence of the Clerk, the Deputy/Locum Clerk or elected Proper Officer) should promptly refer the matter to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman. If the matter relates to a subject managed by a committee, the chair of that committee will also be consulted. In the absence of either the Chairman or Vice -Chairman, the chair of a relevant committee can be consulted in place of either the Chairman or Vice-Chairman, or another councillor can be consulted. In the absence of either the Chairman or Vice- Chairman, they will be informed by email of the actions taken.
- 5.2.3 Consideration should be then be given to whether it is agreed that a press release will be in the best interests of the Council, taking into account the importance of encouraging open and constructive dialogue and the provision of accurate information in respect to the Council's functions, decisions and actions
- 5.2.4 If the Clerk, Chairman and Vice-Chairman (or substitutes as per this Policy above) agree that a press release is in the best interests of the Council, then a statement for release will be drafted. Press statements may be drafted by either the Clerk, or a councillor, in which case, the draft would be passed to the Clerk.
- 5.2.5 The Clerk will then send the draft press statement to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman (or substitutes as per this Policy above), and committee Chair, if relevant, for approval.
- 5.2.6 The final statement will be sent to all Members for information.
- 5.2.7 A record of all press releases will also be kept by the Clerk. Press releases should be added to the Council website, even if their primary release was through other media.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA

6.1 Council accounts

6.1.1. An appropriate use of social media channels is necessary for effective media relations and to ensure an open and constructive dialogue with members of the public and other relevant organisations.

6.1.2 Use of social media channels that provide a record of communications is considered suitable for the Council. For the purposes of this Policy, these are: Facebook; Twitter; Instagram. Use of more ephemeral or one-to-one social media channels, such as SnapChat, are not considered suitable for the Council for the purposes of this Policy.

6.1.3 The Council should have its own social media accounts.

6.1.4 For the purposes of this Policy, 'posts' should be considered to include Facebook Page posts, Tweets and Instagram posts.

6.2 Greenham Parish Council accounts

- 6.2.1 Specific accounts should be managed for the Council and clearly named as such.
- 6.2.2 The Chair, Vice-Chairman and certain Members chosen by the two named above will be given access to these accounts.
- 6.2.3 Posts should be informative – about council meetings, council decisions and any updates for the parish - or to raise awareness of parish amenities. This can include information on external events. Posts should not be political or be the opinions of individuals.

6.3 Social media tips

Remember – what is said, is public information and is subject to the same laws and restrictions as mainstream media.

Include a picture, video or web link where appropriate and be aware of copyright laws. Do not share confidential information. Only decisions that have been approved by council.

6.4 Personal accounts

- 6.4.1 Members may have their own social media accounts and use them for personal and in a work capacity.
- 6.4.2 Members are encouraged to use social media to engage with their followers about council activity, its work and decision. They should be mindful that by doing this they are representing the council and should make clear in their profile that their views are their own. See the section 'Individual Roles & Responsibilities: Individual Members' of this Policy for more detail.
- 6.4.3 As well as the legal framework of this Policy, consideration must be taken to the laws which cover communications and protect individuals, organisations or companies from abuse, defamation, or libel. The Defamation Act 2013 Chapter 26 provides useful easy to understand information on this. A common mistake many people make on social media, when posting negative comments about a person or organisation, is to think that either the laws do not apply or that, by leaving out names and only alluding or insinuating to the subject, they are free to say anything. Many of the laws which cover communications and protect individuals from abuse, defamation or libel still apply to messages which do not specifically name the person or organisation being discussed.

7. WEBSITE PUBLICATION RULES

- 7.1 Currently there are four authorised roles within GPC, that it has been agreed, can update the current GPC website:
- 7.2 The Clerk – Will be responsible for updating the GPC website.
- 7.3 The Deputy Clerk – Will also be responsible for updating the GPC website
- 7.4 The Chair – Will have the ability and access to update the GPC website
- 7.5 The Vice Chair - Will have the ability and access to update the GPC website
- 7.6 All website content must only be related to Greenham Parish Council and the business of the Council
- 7.7 All website content must follow the Councils guidelines as detailed above for Social media entries.