

DUNSFOLD PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1. Introduction and Aim

- a) This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, as issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2011 (now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government). The code is statutory guidance and therefore Councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.
- b) Failure to follow the Council's Media and Communications Policy could lead to a breach of the statutory code and the risk of adverse publicity, which could damage the council's reputation. It is important that all Councillors and Officers understand the implications of this code which this policy explains within a local context.
- c) This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct.
- d) The aim of this policy is to make the Councils' communications a two-way process; to give people the information to understand accurately what we do, while also enabling the Council to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

2. Approach to publicity

- a) The Council welcomes enquiries from the news media and recognises that a good relationship with the news media helps communicate effectively with residents. All news media enquiries should in the first instance be directed to the Clerk.
- b) Equally, the Council recognises that taking a proactive approach to communication ensures information is made available to residents in a timely manner and is accessible via as many media sources as possible including emerging social media platforms.

3. Principles of communication

- a) The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity identifies key principles regarding publicity, and the Council will ensure any publicity:
 - Is lawful
 - Is cost effective
 - Is objective
 - Is even-handed
 - Is appropriate
 - Has regard to equality and diversity
 - Is issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity
- b) At its core, the Council exists to provide essential services to residents and to make their community a better place to live and work. To identify and serve the needs of local people, it's crucial to establish strong communications. Good communications will enable the Council to:
 - better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities.

- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about services provided by the Council.
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the reputation, capabilities and/or integrity of the Council.

4. Official Council press releases

- a) The Council recognises that the use of press releases is a key technique for publicising Council activities, decisions and achievements.
- b) An official Council press release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for a Councillor (normally the Chairman, Vice Chairman or committee Chairman) to draft the press release, but the Clerk will be responsible for checking and subsequently issuing any official Council press release.
- c) All press releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Council, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Councillor. Releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Councillors, identify a Councillor's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.
- d) Press releases will be issued to local media and copies will be made available on the Council's website. An edited version may be available via the Council's social media platforms, with a link to the full story available.

5. Requests for interview

- a) Any request for an interview with a Councillor or Officer should be referred to the Clerk (or other Nominated Officer) in the first instance. The Clerk, in liaison with the Chairman, will determine the most appropriate Councillor or Officer to be put forward for interview.
- b) Where a Councillor is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council, it is their responsibility to ensure they are clear on the corporate position of the Council, and that their responses to questions accurately reflect this.
- c) Where an Officer is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council, they must never give their opinion on specific Council policy and must remember their role is to provide expertise and factual knowledge in support of the Council's agreed policies.
- d) If a Councillor has not been specifically authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, a Councillor who is asked for a comment should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as such.

6. Publicity during elections

- a) There are specific rules governing publicity when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the pre-election period itself, all proactive publicity about candidates is halted.
- b) During the pre-election Period, all Council publicity shall be managed by the Clerk. During the election Period, all Council publicity shall be managed by the Clerk and any quotes provided in support of press releases will be given by the Clerk.

7. Social media

- a) The use of social media aims to build strong communications, inform the community of Council services and activities, protect the reputation of the Council and maintain a consistent and corporate approach by operating within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation. The Council social media Strategic Plan details how social media will be implemented, monitored and evaluated.
- b) The Council recognises that for some residents, accessing information via social media platforms is their preferred method. The Council currently has a corporate Facebook page only. The Council may utilise other social media channels as it seeks to improve communications. This policy may be amended at any time to reflect these changes
- c) The Clerk is the designated owner of all social media accounts in the Council's name.
- d) All social media releases will be approved by the Clerk prior to publication. The Clerk will moderate posts and content and will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Councils' social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature and not in line with the Code of Conduct.
- e) Reports of any concerns regarding content on social media platforms should be reported to the Clerk.
- f) The Clerk must respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws, and be aware of the risks of action for defamation. The Clerk must not use insulting or offensive language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace or elsewhere.
- g) Where officers use social media in a professional capacity to represent the Council, the Council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual Officer.
- h) If officers and Councillors use social media as individuals and not in their role for the Council, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Parish Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- i) Councillors and Staff should not use their own personal social media accounts when posting or commenting on the Council social media posts pages.
- j) Behaviour required by the Code of Conduct also applies to all online activity in the same way as it does to other Council activities.
- k) Residents and Councillors should note that not all posts and comments on social media require a response. There will not always be immediate responses to posts and comments as depending on their nature they may be discussed by the Clerk, or Full Council before a response is agreed.

8. Other forms of communication

- a) The Council has a corporate presence via the Council website. This is maintained, updated and monitored by the Clerk/
- b) The Clerk is responsible for producing a newsletter which is distributed to the local community.
- c) The Council has a noticeboard outside the Village Shop & Post Office.

9. General guidance for Councillors and Officers

- a) Councillors and Officers must ensure they do not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press or other media on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on Council or committee agendas or at any other private briefing.
- b) Councillors and Officers should always act with integrity when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.
- c) Councillors should not use the prefix 'Councillor' when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy, which is not necessarily consistent with your personal opinion.
- d) Any Councillor failing to follow the guidelines set out in this policy may find themselves in breach of the Members' Code of Conduct and subject to a complaint to the Monitoring Officer.
- e) Any Officer failing to follow the guidance set out in this policy could face disciplinary action.

Adopted: September 2025

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