

WHITTINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

1. Whittington Parish Council (“the Council”) is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. Where this information is not available via the Council’s publication scheme, please contact the Council’s clerk.

2. The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet (“the media”).

3. This policy explains how the Council may work with the media to meet the above objectives in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

Legal requirements and restrictions

4. This policy is subject to the Council’s obligations which are 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 Data Protection Act 1998, the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 other legislation which may apply and the Council’s standing orders and financial regulations. The Council’s financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council’s publication scheme.

5. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or disclose information which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council’s standing orders, under contract or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council’s publication scheme.

This policy outlines the procedures and arrangements for handling the press and what Councillors or the Clerk should do if approached by the media or if they are involved in a situation that will attract media attention. The policy also covers the Parish Council’s use of Social Media.

Policy and Procedure

The parish council is keen to develop a good rapport and work proactively with the media, whilst ensuring that confidentiality and consent are maintained at all times.

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1. On receipt of a request from the press or other media for a statement to the Clerk or any Cllr, the person receiving the request will advise the body making the request that a statement will be considered and issued shortly.
2. On receipt of a request the journalist or other caller should be asked to make clear who they are working for or what is the exact nature of their enquiry. Further, they should be asked what and where any information they elicit will be put.
3. The Council is under no obligation to provide a statement.
4. Only the Clerk and/or the Chair shall provide the press with a verbal or written statement – ideally this statement would be after liaison with each other as a minimum and may involve input from other Councillors too.
5. The exception to (4.) above would be if the Chairman or the Parish Council at a parish council meeting had delegated a specific parish cllr(s) to make the response on behalf of the Council.
6. Under no circumstances must anything of a confidential nature be disclosed to the press or other media.
7. The response to the press or other media should be the view of the Parish Council as a whole, not the view of an individual Cllr or the Clerk. However, an individual may give a direct quote as long as they attribute that quote to their name and make it clear that is their view and not that of the parish council.
8. No response should be made that is in any way damaging to the interests or reputation of the Parish Council.
9. The Parish Council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information from the parish council under the Freedom of Information Act. The Council will respond to such requests in accordance with the Act as laid out in Whittington Parish Council's Freedom of Information policy.

The Council will not release information that is exempted. Exemptions will be:

- (a) Personal data (see paragraph 10 below);
 - (b) Confidential matters
 - (c) Information likely to endanger the health or safety of a Cllr or Clerk or any other individual.
10. Data protection – The council recognises that personal data (including photographs relating to a Cllr or Clerk are protected under the General Data Protection Regulation and this personal data will not be disclosed to the media without the consent of the person concerned.

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11. If a request for information involves a conflict of interest for a Cllr or the Clerk. In that event, the Cllr or Clerk must declare his or her interest and avoid involvement with the matter.
12. This Policy will be reviewed annually by the Finance and Executive Committee and recommendations for changes to it should be approved by Full Council.
13. The Clerk should keep a record of all communications with the Press or other media.

Meetings

A meeting of the Council and its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution. In accordance with the Council's standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council and its committees, if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.

Where a meeting of the Council and its committees include an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's standing orders.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes e.g. using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings or (iii) the following two paragraphs apply.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.

Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted.

The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, provide reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.

The Council's standing orders will confirm if attendance by the public, their participation, photographing, recording, filming or other reporting is permitted at a meeting of a sub-committee.

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Social Media Policy

Whittington Parish Council realise that social media and networking websites have become a regular part of everyday life and that many people enjoy membership to sites such as Facebook.

2. Why are the Parish Council using social media?

The Parish Council's aim is to inform members of the community and the wider local area, through as many communication channels as possible, about what is happening within the Parish and local area and share important news and information. Social Media forms part of the Parish Council's Community Engagement Strategy.

- The Parish Council's social media channels supplement the information published on their website.
- The Parish Council can remind people of important events and alert followers instantly to breaking news.
- The Parish Council can link to interesting and useful information about the Parish and local area published by other people.
- The Parish Council can better communicate with those using mobile devices.

3. Use of Official Accounts

Whittington Parish Council operate a Facebook account for the promotion of activities and events and as a communication and broadcast tool.

Examples of acceptable corporate content are:

- Marketing campaigns
- Consultation documents
- News feed & emergency information
- Event listings
- Key dates
- Short debates & quick comments on hot topics and relevant news (discussion board)
- Polls and information gathering
- Useful links

The following outlines the limits of their use:

- An official account on any social media website may only be set-up with consent from the Parish Council.
- Once approved, each account will be set up.

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- Only authorised staff may use these accounts to post online and access to the account is strictly limited. The Parish Council's Facebook Account is currently monitored and updated by a councillor.
- All information published on the internet must comply with the Parish Council's confidentiality and data protection (privacy) policies.
- Any employee, Councillor or member of the public who becomes aware of social networking activity that would be deemed distasteful should make the Parish Clerk aware as soon as possible.
- The Local Government Act 86, S2 states that a Local Council shall not publish any material which, in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.

Facebook

The Parish Council's Facebook page is managed by a councillor.

Facebook pages are used to highlight news, make announcements, engage with the community and share information.

Comments posted on and messages received on the Facebook page are views of individuals and do not represent the views of the Parish Council.

If you would like to request for something to be posted on the Parish Council's Facebook page, please contact the Parish Clerk.

Social media moderation policy

The Parish Council Facebook page is reactively moderated. We cannot accept responsibility for the content of any comment.

We reserve the right to remove comments received on Facebook that:

- Contain abusive, obscene, indecent or offensive language, or link to obscene or offensive material
- Contain swear words or other sorts of profanity
- Are completely removed from the topic of conversation or are not relevant to the item posted on the wall
- Contain abusive language towards an individual involved in the thread, other organisations or the page administrator
- Constitute spam or promote or advertise products, except where it is for an event, publication or similar item that has direct relevance to the subject of discussion. Information about locating and sharing knowledge and expertise is welcomed, but within the specific discussion

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- Are designed to cause nuisance to the page administrator or other users

For serious and/or persistent breaches of the moderation policy, we reserve the right to prevent users from posting further comments.

Use of Photos and Video

Only The Parish Clerk and the Councillor responsible for managing Facebook has permission to upload photos and videos. The appropriate permissions must be obtained for all imagery.

Personal Accounts on Social Media

Staff need to use social networking in a way that does not conflict with the terms of their contract of employment. The absence of, or lack of, explicit reference to a specific website or service does not limit the extent of the application of this policy. Where no policy or guidelines exist, employees should use their professional judgment and take the most prudent action possible. If the Parish Council is referred to in a way that is deemed defamatory or confidential information is disclosed, we reserve the right to report the comment and request that it be removed.

Purdah

In the six week run up to an election – local, general or European – Councils must take care not to publish anything on controversial issues or to record views or proposals, in such a way as to identify them with any member or a political group. However, it is permissible to publish factual information which identifies the names, wards and parties of candidates standing for election. Consequently, although the publicity code authorises local authorities to otherwise publish websites and blogs posting material produced by third parties, this arrangement has to be suspended during the election period to prevent any inadvertent breach of the legal restrictions. We will continue to publish important service announcements using social media but will monitor and remove responses if they are overtly party political.

Will the Parish Council respond to direct messages posted on social networking sites?

If appropriate, the Council will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible to all questions received via social networking sites. We do, however, still ask that all formal requests, comments, enquiries or complaints be emailed to the Parish Council using the contact details on the Website.

The Parish Council may monitor forums and blogs to gain indirect feedback. The Parish Council may post replies on forums or blogs to answer queries or address factual corrections but would generally take a cautious approach before getting involved in contentious issues.

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The Parish Council reserves the right to take any necessary steps to protect members of the Parish community and will delete any comments referencing the Parish Council, which are deemed abusive or offensive in anyway.

The Parish Council's Facebook page is monitored **periodically**.