

WARBLETON PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA and COMMUNICATIONS POLICY WPC 4

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, as issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The code is statutory guidance and therefore councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. This policy should be read in conjunctions with the Members' Code of Conduct.

2. Approach

- 2.1. The Council welcomes enquiries from the press and media, and recognises that a good relationship with the press helps communicate effectively with residents.
- 2.2. 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

- 3.1. 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

4. Official Council Press Releases

- 4.1. The Council recognises that the use of press releases is a key technique for publicising Council activities, decisions and achievements.
- 4.2. 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.
- 4.3. 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.
- 4.4. Press releases will be issued to local newspapers 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

- 5.1. Any request for an interview with a Councillor or the Clerk should be referred to the Clerk in the first instance. In ideal circumstances, the Clerk in liaison with the Chairman will determine the most appropriate Councillor to put forward for interview or determine if it should be the Clerk.
- 5.2. 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 view.
- 5.3. Where the Clerk 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.
- 5.4. 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

- 6.1. There are specific rules governing publicity when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of election and the election itself (purdah), all proactive publicity about candidates is halted.
- 6.2. During the purdah 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

- 7.1. The Council recognises that for some residents, access information via social media platforms is their preferred method. While there are too many social media sites to include all of them and the Council does not currently use one, the Council will review this situation and endeavour to work towards using one in the future.

8. General Guidance for Councillors and the Clerk

- 8.1. Councillors and the Clerk 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.
- 8.2. Councillors and the Clerk should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.
- 8.3. 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.
- 8.4. 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.
- 8.5. Failure by the Clerk to follow the guidance set out in this policy could face disciplinary action.