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MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Presented to Council 23 May 2024

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) in 2011. 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 councillor and officers understand the implications of this code which this policy explains within a local context.
- 1.3 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct.

2. Approach to publicity

- 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, Deputy Chairman or committee Chairman) to draft the press release, but the Clerk (or other nominated officer) 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 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.
- 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 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 an election and the election itself, all proactive publicity about candidates is halted.
- 6.2 During the pre-election period, all council publicity shall be managed by the Clerk (or other nominated officer), and any quotes provided in support of press releases will be given by authorised officers.

7. Social media

- 7.1 The council recognises that for some residents, accessing information via social media platforms is their preferred method. While there are too many social media sites to include all of them, the council will endeavour to use those which are most widely used, and regularly review the type and number of social media sites used.
- 7.2 Social media sites will be used to support other communications issued by the council, and will help provide a consistent message across all media formats. To help achieve this, all social media releases will be approved by the Clerk (or other nominated officer).
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 Officers using social media in this way must respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws, and be aware of the risks of action for defamation. Officers must not use insulting or offensive language, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace or elsewhere.

8. General guidance for councillors and officers

- 8.1 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.

- 8.2 Councillors and officers 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 Any officer failing to follow the guidance set out in this policy could face disciplinary action.

9. Protocol for filming and recording at public meetings

- 9.1 The Parish Council supports the principle of transparency and encourages filming, audio recording and taking photographs at its meetings that are open to the public. It also welcomes the use of social networking websites (such as Twitter and Facebook) and micro-blogging to communicate with people about what is happening, as it happens.
- 9.2 Although not required to do so, anyone intending to record a meeting of the Parish Council and/or its committees is encouraged to contact the Parish Office (01273 833264) in advance of the meeting for advice and guidance. Reasonable advance notice will enable practical arrangements to be made and special requirements to be discussed e.g. bringing large equipment. It should be noted that the Chair of the meeting will have absolute discretion to terminate or suspend any recording and/or reporting if, in their opinion, it is distracting or otherwise disrupting proceedings at the meeting. Disruptive behaviour includes any action or activity which disrupts the conduct of the meeting or impedes others from being able to see, hear or film etc. the proceedings, for example:
- Excessive noise in recording or re-siting equipment during the debate/discussion,
 - Intrusive lighting and use of flash photography,
 - Moving to areas outside the areas designated for the public without the consent of the Chair; or
 - Asking for people to repeat statements for the purposes of recording.
- 9.2 Termination or suspension of recording and/or reporting might also occur in other circumstances, for example where:
- the meeting is suspended; or
 - The meeting agrees formally to exclude the press and public from the meeting due to the confidential/exempt nature of the business being discussed
- 9.3 The Parish Council expects those recording proceedings not to edit the film/audio record/photographs in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings or infringe the core values of the Parish Council. This includes refraining from editing any record in a way that may ridicule or show a lack of respect towards those being photographed/filmed/recorded.
- 9.4 The use of flash photography or additional lighting will not be allowed unless this has been discussed in advance of the meeting and agreement reached on how it can be done without disrupting proceedings. Meeting agendas will state that the meeting may be filmed, recorded or photographed. Letters/emails to applicants, supporters or objectors on planning applications regarding when the application will be heard will state that the meeting may be recorded. In this way all attendees will be aware that proceedings may be recorded. Written minutes of meetings, once confirmed by the parent body, will remain the formal record of all decisions taken.
- 9.5 Recordings of the Parish Council's meetings by those other than the Parish Council are the responsibility of the person making the recording in whatever form, and any breaches of the law which may result are similarly their responsibility. The Parish Council accepts no liability whatsoever for such breaches.