



Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council
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Telephone: 01273 833264

Village Centre
Trinity Road
Hurstpierpoint
West Sussex BN6 9UY

DRAFT MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Adopted by Council XX

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 **and Appendix A: How the Council Communicates**.

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 must use their official @hurstpierpoint-pc.gov.uk email address when conducting Council business. This ensures compliance with data protection requirements, supports transparency, and prevents confusion with personal correspondence. Use of personal email addresses for Council business should be avoided, and councillors should contact the Parish Office if they experience any access issues with their Council email account.
- 8.3 Councillors and officers should be mindful of forwarding on emails which may contain personal data, confidential, privileged or sensitive information. If in doubt, please refer to the Clerk or other nominated officer prior to sending on any internal communications to outside individuals or organisations.
- 8.4 Councillors and officers should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the council.
- 8.5 Councillors should not use the prefix 'Councillor' when writing to the press or when posting on social media as an individual. This implies you are stating council policy, which is not necessarily consistent with your personal opinion.
- 8.6 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.
- 8.7 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.



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Appendix A: How the Council Communicates

The Parish Council is committed to keeping residents informed and engaged. We use a range of channels to share news, promote events, publish official information, and hear from the community. This document sets out the main ways we communicate and explains how councillors, staff and residents can make best use of them. It supports the Media and Communications Policy and is intended as a practical guide.

General Principles

- Official Council communication (such as website updates, social media, press releases and notices) is coordinated through the Parish Office. Councillors must not issue statements that could be interpreted as representing the Council unless authorised.
- Councillors may contact residents, community groups and organisations directly as part of their role but should use their official Council email address and take care to distinguish between personal views and the agreed position of the Council.
- The office ensures that all communication is:
 - Accurate, timely, and consistent
 - Accessible to residents
 - In line with the statutory Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011)

Outgoing Communication

1. Website

- The Council's official website is www.hurstpierpoint-pc.gov.uk.
- The website is the primary platform for:
 - Agendas and minutes of Council and Committee meetings
 - Policy documents and strategies
 - Announcements, notices, and public consultations
 - General information about the Council's services, facilities, and community initiatives
- The Parish Office is responsible for maintaining the website, ensuring accuracy and timely publication. Councillors can assist by notifying office staff of any errors, out-of-date material, or missing documents.

2. Social Media

- The Council maintains a social media presence, primarily through Facebook.
- Posts may also be shared into local community groups where appropriate.
- Social media is used to:
 - Share time-sensitive announcements

- Highlight forthcoming events or consultations
- Direct residents to the website for full information or signpost residents to other organisations, services, or councils where matters fall outside the Parish Council's responsibilities
- All social media content must be issued via the Parish Office to ensure consistency and compliance with policy.

3. Monthly "Hurst Life" Article

- The Council contributes a monthly article to *Hurst Life*, the free village magazine distributed locally.
- Each two-page article is written by a nominated councillor and collated by the Parish Office before being sent to the publisher.
- The programme of monthly topics and the councillor responsible is agreed annually in the Hurst Life Protocol, which is reviewed at Communications Strategy meetings.
- Councillors who wish to suggest a subject or volunteer to write an item should contact the Parish Office in the first instance.
- Draft articles must be submitted to the Parish Office by the internal deadline to ensure inclusion.

4. Noticeboards

- The Council maintains public noticeboards in key locations across the parish.
- These are used to display:
 - Statutory notices, including agendas for Council and Committee meetings
 - Information on Council-organised events
 - Notices of councillor vacancies and election information
 - Items of interest, particularly in Hurst Meadows
- The Parish Office is responsible for updating noticeboards and ensuring the information displayed is current.

5. Press Releases

- Official press releases are issued by the Parish Office, in line with the Media and Communications Policy.
- Where appropriate, councillors (usually the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, or Committee Chair) may provide quotations or assist with drafting.
- Press releases will also be published on the website, and a summary may be shared on social media with a link to the full text.

6. Council and Public Meetings

- Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Parish Council and its Committees.
 - In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, residents can ask questions or make representations during the public participation session of each meeting.
 - Meeting agendas and supporting documents are published on the Council's website and noticeboards in advance, giving residents the chance to see what will be discussed.
- The Council also holds an Annual Parish Meeting, which is a meeting for electors of the parish.

- This provides the opportunity for residents to hear reports from the Council and local organisations, raise issues of concern, and ask questions in a more informal setting.
- Copies of the Annual Report are available at this meeting, providing an overview of the Council's financial position and its activities over the previous 12 months.

7. Community Events

- Each year the Council takes part in the St Lawrence Fair by running a Parish Council stall.
 - The stall provides an opportunity for councillors to engage directly with residents, share information about Council projects and services, and gather feedback.
- The Council also hosts an annual Community Forum.
 - This event provides networking opportunities for local groups and organisations, encourages partnership working, and enables the Council to listen to community priorities.
- Other community events may also be used for outreach, subject to Council approval.

Incoming Communication

Residents can contact the Council in several ways:

- **Post:** Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council
Village Centre
Trinity Road
Hurstpierpoint
West Sussex
BN6 9UY
- **Email:** office@hurstpierpoint-pc.gov.uk
- **Website contact form:** <https://www.hurstpierpoint-pc.gov.uk/contact/> which sends direct to the office email account
- **Facebook:** The Parish Council Facebook page has the facility to accept incoming messages
- **Telephone:** by calling 01273 833264 during office hours
- **In Person** at the Parish Council Office during opening times, or at one of our meetings or community events as set out in paragraphs 6 and 7.
- **Public Consultations:** Residents are encouraged to participate in public consultations initiated by the Parish Council, promoted via the communications channels outlined elsewhere in this document.

The shared office email, phone line and front desk are monitored by Parish Office staff during working hours, and responses are provided in a timely, polite and helpful manner. Queries received are dealt with by Parish Office staff, or referred to the appropriate councillor, committee, or external organisation as required.