

St Peter the Great County Parish Council

Communication Policy

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council in relation to contacts with parishioners, corporate bodies, organisations and the media.

1.2 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it is to provide, where required, instruction and guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when interacting with external parties, including the media.

1.3 Any communication made by Council members under this Policy will also be copied in advance to the Clerk and the Chairman.

2 KEY AIMS

2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. Internet (social media), the press, radio, TV, print, email – are crucially important in conveying information to the community. The Council will maintain positive, effective communication channels and media relations so as to increase public awareness of the services, facilities and issues affecting the Parish and for the explanation of particular decisions, policies and priorities.

2.2 It is important that the media have access to the Clerk/ Councillors and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will respond to any criticism it considers unfounded and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using appropriate channels of communication.

2.3 It is important that in its communications the Council gives agreed views in a consistent manner.

3 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

3.2 The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders shall be adhered to.

4 CONTACT WITH AND CONTENT OF COMMUNICATION WITH PARISHONERS

4.1 If a parishioner contacts a Councillor, before replying to the parishioner the Councillor shall normally consider notify the Clerk of the details of the communication, and seek any guidance the clerk shall give. The clerk as the Council's Responsible Officer will refer the communication to the relevant portfolio holder, Vice Chairman, Chairman, City and County Councillor or City/County Officers for any actions required.

4.2 When communicating with a parishioner the Councillor will follow any views or position agreed by the Parish Council on the subject and where expressing personal views will identify this as such in the communication.

4.3 Parishioners have the right to attend Parish Council meetings (in line with Standing Orders) and raise issues during the public session.

4.4 Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by a Parishioner must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chairman of the meeting

5 CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

5.1 The Clerk and Councillors shall always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

5.2 Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence shall not be passed to the media. If such a situation is found to have occurred, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action taken.

5.3 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then appropriate advice shall be obtained before any response is made.

5.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues that will be subject to Data Protection legislation and may therefore require careful and sensitive handling. Examples include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Councillor contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary proceedings; and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Council's Data Protection Officer before any response is made to the media.

5.5 Unless not practicable, all official enquiries from the media to the Council shall be directed in the first instance to the Clerk who, as Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications from the press and media and to issue all written Press Statements on behalf of the Council.

5.6 The Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, Vice Chairman and relevant Portfolio Holder is authorised to draft and publish press statements. Press Statements will be circulated to all Councillors for information before being released.

5.7 When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk, Chairman, Vice Chairman and relevant portfolio holder, as applicable, are authorised to speak with the media on behalf of the Council. Any statements made by the Clerk, Chairman, Vice Chairman or relevant Portfolio Holder shall reflect the Council's opinion, where known.

5.8 Other Councillors may occasionally talk to the media but must ensure that it is made clear that they are not speaking as a Parish Councillor where their personal opinions differ from any established viewpoint of the council, as expressed in any policy, statement or resolution previously adopted.

5.9 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a written statement, for

example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters shall be kept brief and balanced in tone. All correspondence would normally come from the Clerk.

6 ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

6.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.

6.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

6.3 Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chairman of the meeting.

7 PRESS RELEASES

7.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Councillors to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

7.2. Press releases on behalf of the Council will normally be prepared by the Clerk following any meetings of the Council. If Press Releases are drafted by any other officer of councillor, they can only be issued by the Clerk, following consultation with the Chairman, Vice Chairman and relevant Portfolio Holder. This is to ensure that any Press Release reflects council policy and decisions, adheres to all legal requirements and provides a consistency of style across the council.

8 CONTENT OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA, PRESS RELEASES ETC

8.1 Due regard shall be given to section 4 above.

8.2 The content of communication with the media carried out by the Clerk or by any member of the Council will not include any comment in relation to party politics.

9 CONTACT WITH AND CONTENT OF COMMUNICATION WITH A CORPORATE BODY

9.1 Contact with a Corporate Body would customarily be through the Clerk, on occasion through the Chairman in liaison with the Clerk or if agreed by the Council with the relevant Portfolio Holder in liaison with the Clerk.

9.2 The Clerk and Councillors shall always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with Corporate Bodies.

9.3 Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence shall not be passed to a Corporate Body.

9.4 Financial spend to a Corporate Body can only be granted by the Council and actioned by the Responsible Financial Officer (The Clerk).

10 CONTACT WITH AND CONTENT OF COMMUNICATION WITH EMERGENCY SERVICES AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

10.1 Contact with the Emergency Services or a Member of Parliament will be through the Clerk, on occasion through the Chairman in liaison with the Clerk or if agreed by the Council with the relevant Portfolio Holder in liaison with the Clerk.

10.2 Any such communication will express any agreed view of the Council.

11. NEWSLINK RESPONSIBILITY AND CONTENT

11.1 The Chairman and Clerk ensures that the format and content of Newslink meets the necessary legal standards for publications.

11.2 Articles for publication produced by Council members in respect of their portfolio responsibilities shall be consistent with any relevant agreed policy of the Council.

11.3 Articles will not include any advertising of products or services provided by any commercial organisations. Any such organisations will only be referred to if they have provided a free service, or sponsorship to the Parish or Parish event.

11.4 The only paid for advertising authorised will be for one sponsoring organisation, advertising on the back page and for up to two supporting organisations, normally advertising on the inside front cover.

11.5 The content of any article will not include party political comments. No advertising is allowed for political parties.

11.6 The Clerk is the final authority on the content of articles and adverts and will liaise with the chairman, portfolio holder and Editor as to their decision, if required.

12. Parish Council Facebook Page and Twitter Account

12.1 The Council Media Portfolio Holder and the Clerk are the only Parish Council member and officer respectively who are authorised to post articles and comments.

12.2 Articles and comments will not include any advertising of products or services provided by any commercial organisations. Any such organisations will only be referred to if they have provided a free service, or sponsorship to the Parish or Parish event.

12.3 The content of any article and comments will not include political comments. No advertising is allowed for political parties.

12.4 The Clerk is the final authority on the content of articles and comments and will liaise with the chairman and portfolio holder as to their decision, if required.