

Blackwell Parish Council

Press and Media Policy

Approval Date:



Review Date:

1. Purpose

- a. To define how the parish council will communicate with the media and manage public relations in a transparent, responsible, and professional manner.
- b. The council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective communications – the media (press, radio, TV, internet) can be crucial in conveying this information.
- c. The council also aims to communicate effectively with the local community through social media channels, noticeboards, the website and parish newsletter.
- d. It is not the intention to curb freedom of speech but to establish a framework for achieving an effective and positive working relationship with the media

2. Scope

This policy applies to all members of the council, including councillors, the clerk, and all council employees.

3. Principles

- a. Ensure factual and unbiased communication.
- b. Promote transparency and accountability.
- c. Protect confidential and sensitive information.
- d. Uphold the council's reputation and values.

4. Designated Spokespersons

- a. The Parish Clerk is usually the first point of contact for media inquiries.
- b. Councillors must not speak to the media on behalf of the council unless specifically authorised – this will depend upon the situation and information required.
- c. On all occasions, this policy must be adhered to.

5. Responding to Media Inquiries

- a. All inquiries should be directed to the Parish Clerk.
- b. No comment should be made on confidential, legal, or sensitive issues – if a response is required, legal guidance should be sought
- c. Responses should be prompt, accurate, and approved before release.

6. Press Releases

- a. Must be approved by the Clerk and/or Chair before distribution – in a best-case scenario by the whole council.
- b. Should reflect council decisions, not individual opinions.
- c. Distributed to local newspapers, radio stations, community websites, and posted on the council's website, social media sites and noticeboards.
- d. In the event of a press release or a response to a media question, all Council members and staff to be kept informed of what is happening.
- e. In the case of the need for an immediate response, the Clerk should contact the Chair, or in their absence, the Vice Chair to agree a course of action, and all Councillors informed via e-mail, and if time allows, to comment.

7. Use of Social Media

- a. Managed by designated officers only.

- b. Posts should follow the same principles as press communication.
- c. Councillors must clearly state when expressing personal opinions online.

8. Confidentiality and Legal Considerations

- a. Avoid publishing defamatory, discriminatory, or libelous content.
- b. Adhere to GDPR and Freedom of Information laws.
- c. Do not disclose information from closed (confidential) sessions of council meetings.

9. Breaches of Policy

- a. Breaches may result in referral to the **Monitoring Officer** and could be considered a breach of the councillor **Code of Conduct**.

10. During Election Periods

- a. The rules governing publicity change when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, all proactive publicity about candidates and other politicians is halted.
- b. During this time, the parish council should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. This is to ensure that no Parish Councillor gains an unfair advantage.
- c. Parish Council members are reminded that they must not misuse Parish Council resources for inappropriate purposes.

11. Non-Parish Council Related Media

- a. Officers and members of the parish council who have contact with the media in a personal capacity or as members of non-Parish Council organisations must not refer to their parish council posts and must make it clear to the journalist that they are speaking in a personal capacity or on behalf of the non-Parish Council related organisation

12. Managing Negative Issues

- a. From time to time, the parish council has to respond to negative issues. It is important that these situations are managed carefully to limit the potential for negative publicity.
- b. Staff and Councillors must alert the Clerk as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media.
- c. Staff and Councillors must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statement, other information and carry out research even if no media contacts the council.

In accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 and the Standing Orders, press and media can attend parish council meetings.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis

This policy is fully supported by the members of Blackwell Parish Council

Signed by the Chair of Blackwell Parish Council: _____

Date: _____