

Icklesham Parish Council

Media and Publicity Policy and Protocol

Adopted 4th May 2021

Re-Adopted 15th May 2023

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Media and Publicity Policy and Protocol

1. Introduction

- a. The purpose of this policy and protocol is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Parish Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media
- b. In 2001 the National Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity was amended to include changes introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. Icklesham Parish Council has adopted the principles in its approach to communications.
- c. The Code provides guidance on communications between communities, individual people and local authorities and aims to foster effective and impartial communications.

2. Key aims

- a. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – and other communications such as a regular newsletter, are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with the media to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
- b. The media has an important role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important the media has access to the Clerk and Councillors and to the background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure the public are properly informed of all relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

3. The Legal Framework

- a. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988 as amended by the Local Government Act 2000. The Council must have regard to the Governments' Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Some aspects of the Code are relevant to this policy:
 - 'Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims, and the provision of services, should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or an explanation or both.'
 - 'Publicity touching on issues which are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council, should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimplify facts, issues or arguments.'
 - Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.'
- b. The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders must be adhered to

4. Contact With The Media

- a. The Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Councillors should always have regard to the long-term reputation of the Council in all dealings with the media.
- b. Confidential documents, exempt or confidential minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish those responsible and appropriate actions taken.
- c. When the media wishes to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's Solicitor before any response is made.
- d. There are a number of personal privacy issues for Officers and Councillors that must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the Council's Policies on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. These issues include the release of personal information, such as home addresses and telephone numbers (although councillors' contact details are in the public domain), disciplinary proceedings, grievances and long term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations advice must be taken from the Parish Clerk before any response is made to the media. The Parish Clerk may seek expert advice in such cases.
- e. When responding to urgent approaches from the media, the Chairman of the Council should be the authorised contact with the media in consultation with the Parish Clerk. However, the Council may delegate authority to the Chairman of a Working Group or Sub-Committee where the subject concerns the work of that Group. The Council may also delegate responsibility if appropriate to the Parish Clerk. Where practicable, however, all responses to the media should be agreed by the Council.
- f. Statements made must reflect the Council's opinion and not any individual's opinion.
- g. Other councillors have the right to talk to the media but are asked to ensure that it is made clear the opinions given are their own and not those of the Council. Councillors should avoid bringing the Council into disrepute as this is a reportable offence to the Monitoring Officer.

- h. Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual inaccuracies in letters from other correspondents. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.
- i. Letters representing the views of the Council should only be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council of a relevant Committee. If an individual councillor chooses to send letters to express their own opinions on Council Policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Parish Clerk. It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or an individual councillor.
- j. At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

5. Attendance Of Media At Council Or Committee Meetings

- a. Agendas and Minutes of Meetings will be supplied to media outlets together with dates of meetings being available on the Council's website.
- b. The Local Government Act 1972 requires agendas, reports and minutes be sent to the media upon request, prior to a meeting.
- c. The media are encouraged to attend Council and Committee meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.
- d. Filming or taping of Council or Committee proceedings will not be made other than by the Council without the express permission of the Council or Committee.

6. Elections

- a. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Councillors and for the public around the time of an election. The Code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used to publicise individual councillors unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council. The following extracts contain the main points:
 - 'Publicity about individual Councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the Council (for example Chairman of a Committee), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.'
 - 'Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual Councillor which are relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward the justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of those of a particular party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.'

- 'The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election.'
- b. In line with practice elsewhere in the country, the Council will not quote any Councillor in a news release or involve them in proactive publicity events during an election period, regardless of whether or not they are standing for election. The only exception to this (as laid down in the Code of Recommended Practice in Local Authority Publicity) is during an emergency or where there is genuine need for a councillor level response to an important event outside the control of the Council.

7. Press Releases

- a. 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 all Officers and Councillors to look for opportunities where the issue of a Press Release may be beneficial.
- b. Any Officer or Councillor may draft a Press Release, however they must all be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee in order to ensure the principles outlined in section 3 (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of Press Releases may be monitored.
- c. The Council may delegate to the Parish Clerk authority to issue Press Releases on any subject it wishes. In such cases the Parish Clerk will report these to the next available meeting of the Council or an appropriate Committee.

8. Notices and Newsletters

- a. The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and the latest news and will be updated regularly by the Deputy Parish Clerk under the supervision of the Parish Clerk.
- b. The Council will issue a regular newsletter to all residents to convey information of interest and the latest news. This will be coordinated by the Parish Clerk but it is the responsibility of all Officers and Councillors to seek to make contributions to the newsletter. The newsletter will initially be issued three times a year but this will be kept under review should more frequent editions be preferable and appropriate.
- c. The Council has a Policy for its Notice Boards. Formal Parish Notice Boards will be used to advertise Agendas, Minutes and other Council information. But subject to the following, information of interest to the community in which the boards are located will also be permitted on these boards. Community notice boards are primarily for this purpose although the Council reserves the right to post notices of interest published by it in preference to other notices.
- i. It is the overall policy of Icklesham Parish Council that no material of discriminatory, inflammatory or purely commercial nature should appear on those notice boards under its control;

- ii. Notices will normally be issued by the Clerk to the Council and will have originated either with the parish council, district council, county council or such bodies as may be considered appropriate to local council business;
- iii. From time to time the Clerk, or Ward Councillors, may wish to display other material relevant to local community life and this is permissible provided that it falls within the general constraints outlined in paragraph i) above;
- iv. Where there is doubt as to the acceptability of an item proposed for display, the Clerk should be consulted before it is posted. If the matter remains unresolved, it must be put before full council for a final decision ;and
- v. The Clerk and key holders of the Notice Boards should ensure that the boards remain uncluttered and that the Agenda and the draft Minutes to be approved at the next Council meeting should be prominently displayed in each ward's parish notice board together with any other important Parish Council information.

The Parish Clerk will from time to time inspect the notice boards to ensure this policy is adhered to.

9. Urgent Situations

- a. In the case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a Council or Committee meeting, this may be issued by the Parish Clerk with the agreement of the Chairman of the Council or relevant Committee following circulation of a draft version electronically to other Councillors for comment.
- b. In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the councillors and officers with specific roles and responsibilities under this Policy, the following delegations will apply:
 - i. The Vice Chairman of the Council may act in the absence of the Chairman;
 - ii. The Vice Chairman of a Committee may act in the absence of the Chairman;
 - iii. The Parish Clerk may act in the absence of the Vice Chairman of the Council or a Committee.

Dated Adopted: 4th May 2021

Signed: Cllr P Turner (Chairman)

Reviewed and Re-Adopted: 15th May 2023