

GREAT WALDINGFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA POLICY

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1. Introduction

- The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Great Waldingfield Parish Council (GWPC) for working with the media and dealing with the day-to-day relationship between GWPC and the media.
- It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

2. Key Aims

- GWPC is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications (comms). All mediums for comms on are crucially important in conveying info (info) to the community so the Parish Council (PC) must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by GWPC and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
- It is important that the press have access to the Clerk/ Members and to background info to assist them in giving accurate info to the public. To balance this, GWPC will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of comms if necessary.

3. The Legal Framework

- The law governing comm in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts (LGA) 1986 and 1988. GWPC must also have regard to the government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- GWPC's adopted Standing Orders (SO) should be adhered to.

4. Contact with the Media

- The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of GWPC in all their dealings with the media.
- Confidential documents, except 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 who was responsible and appropriate action taken.
- When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from GWPC's solicitor before any response is made.
- There are several personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal info, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.
- All formal requests for comment regarding GWPC's policy on any matter should be directed to the Clerk in the first instance. If unavailable, the Chair should be contacted.
- When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk or Chair are authorised to contact the media. All responses to the press should be drafted by the Clerk with the assistance of the Chair for accuracy regarding GWPC's current policy on the matter being responded to and its lawfulness.
- Responses drafted on any matter may however be directed to another Councillor (Cllr) with the assistance of the Clerk and others under **SO 22** Relations with the Press/Media for accuracy and lawfulness. In this instance the Chair should be made fully aware of the response and agree to its contents.
- Statements made by the Chair and the Clerk should reflect GWPC's opinion. If GWPC does not have an official position on the matter raised, this should be stated as the PC's current position.
- Other Cllrs can communicate with the media but must ensure that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of GWPC. Cllrs are at liberty to communicate with the press as representatives of their area. However, they must always maintain that they speak as individuals and not on behalf of GWPC.
- There are occasions when it is appropriate for the PC to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.

5. Attendance of Media at Council Meetings

- The LGA 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.
- The media are encouraged to attend PC meetings and seating, and workspace will be made available.
- On 6 Aug 2014, the 1960 Act was amended by the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 ("the 2014 Regulations"). The amended 1960 Act provides that a person may not orally report or comment about a meeting as it takes place if he is present at the meeting of a parish council or its committees but otherwise may:
 - a) film, photograph or make an audio recording of a meeting;
 - b) use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear proceedings at a meeting as it takes place or later;
 - c) report or comment on the proceedings in writing during or after a meeting or orally report or comment after the meeting.

6. Press Releases

- The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public info or to explain the PC's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- The Clerk or any member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Clerk to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (legal framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the PC and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

7. Social Media

- Responses to media articles, Published Letters, Online Comments, Tweets, Facebook, Items.
 - .1. Every situation must be carefully assessed, and, in most cases, a corporate response may not be appropriate.
 - .2. Anyone seeing an article/ item and thinking a corporate response may be needed should inform the Chair/Vice-Chair or Parish Clerk. In assessing whether a corporate response is appropriate the following will be considered:
 - .3. Is the article/ item in question factually accurate?
 - .4. Is the article/ item expressing a personal view – and if so, is that clearly stated?
 - .5. Would further discussion on the subject be constructive?
- Any potential corporate response will be discussed with the Chair/ Vice-Chair of the PC and then forwarded to the most appropriate person/s to prepare a response on behalf of the council, e.g. Chairman of a relevant PC Working Group, etc.
- Prior to its release, the Chair/ Vice-Chair and Parish Clerk should be made aware of the broad content of any corporate response where they are not involved in its preparation.

a. Social Media Policy.

The PC will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:

- Providing and exchanging info about services.
- Gathering the communities' insights and managing community relationships.
- Promoting events or tourism for the area.
- Supporting community cohesion and neighbourliness.

b. Rules for Social Media.

- Cllrs must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other councillors or about the people, businesses and agencies that the PC works with and serves.
- Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.
- If a Cllr blogs or Tweets personally and not in their role as a Cllr, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the PC. They should not include weblinks to official council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the PC.
- If a matter that is raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the PC, it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Cllrs.
- The person who has posted shall be informed via the page or direct message, that this is the case and invited to contact the clerk directly. Any response agreed by the PC will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the clerk for referral to the PC as required.

8. GWPC website

- GWPC will appoint the Parish Clerk as moderator. They will be responsible for monitoring the content on the GWPC pages and ensure compliance with the social media policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the GWPC social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory, defamatory or of a libelous nature.
- The website will include public service businesses (e.g. Village shop and Post Office) and any business based within the parish which primarily provides its service within the parish.
- The GWPC Parish Clerk will be responsible for posting notices, agendas and minutes of meetings.

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- The Social Media working group should comprise at least 2 members of the PC. They will liaise with the Parish Clerk. They will have access codes to update the website and to keep news and events current.

This Press and Media policy was first adopted by GWPC at their meeting on 10th July 2023 and will be reviewed as required.

9. Version control and reviews

Version	Editor	Date	Comments/Amendments	Approval
v1.0	Nil	14 Oct 24	Accepted by GWPC and published on website	GWPC
V1.1	MF	Nov 24	Paragraph numbering, pagination, formatting, cross references	DH, JE & CK
V1.2	MF	23 Oct 26	Edit and incorporate VHMC elements	GWPC

