

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and dealing with the day to day relationship between the Council and the media.
- Define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the public and dealing with the day to day relationship between the Council and the public.
- Provide guidelines on the use of electronic equipment
- Provide guidelines on the use of electronic communications

In the context of this policy, IT equipment includes desktop computers, laptops, tablets, smart mobile phones, network routers, modems or any other device which provides an electronic method for internet access, messaging or document storage. Electronic communications covers emails, Facebook and any other social media tool used by the council, councillors or staff

1. Working with the media

Councillors should not use Parish Council resources for political purposes or to promote business or personal interests.

The Clerk, if asked by the Council, will correct any factual errors made in the press.

The Clerk, if contacted by the media for information, must only give the facts and the view of the Council as a body.

The Parish Council expects councillors not to misrepresent Council policies or decisions if contacted directly by the press, to act with integrity, and to refrain from expressing personal views when acting or commenting as a spokesperson for the Council as a Corporate Body.

Photographs relating to Parish Council matters should not be supplied to the press without permission from the Clerk and the Chairman.

Official press releases

The Clerk is the Press Officer for the Parish Council and is responsible for issuing press releases on behalf of the Parish Council.

Press statements will be clear, consistent, based on fact and in keeping with the council's policies, aims and priorities.

The Chairman of a Council committee may also issue a press release on a matter relating to the work of that committee.

Any press release must be approved by the Clerk or Chairman.

Personal press releases

Councillors can issue personal press releases. When commenting in a personal capacity, Councillors should avoid giving any impression that they are acting or speaking for, or on behalf of, the Parish Council as a corporate body. Each press release should also contain the following statement: *“this is a personal statement and is not the view of the Parish Council”*.

Confidential documents

Confidential documents, such as exempt minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be disclosed to the media. If such disclosures do occur an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action taken.

Attendance of media at Council meetings

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas are sent to the media on request. The media are encouraged to attend meetings and seating and workspace should be made available for them.

Elections

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for members and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual members. The Council will not quote any councillor in a press release or involve them in proactive publicity events during the election period, regardless of whether or not they are standing for election. The only exception laid down in the Code is during an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member response to an important event outside the control of the Council.

Communication with individuals and organisations

The general principles of working with the media, outlined above, will also apply to communication with organisations and individuals.

2. Guidelines on the use of electronic equipment

Equipment, security and passwords Councillors and staff may be provided with IT equipment to enable them to carry out the work of the Council at a time that is convenient to them. Any Councillor or member of staff provided with a laptop is responsible for ensuring that the equipment is properly looked after and kept secure at all times. The equipment remains the property of the Parish Council and must be returned to the Council in good working order by demand of the Council or in the event of the termination of employment for any reason.

Any equipment provided for official use will have suitable internet protection software installed and operating. All equipment is to be password protected and have internet security software installed. Passwords must be kept confidential.

Councillors and staff should exercise caution when opening e-mails from unknown external sources or where, for any reason an e-mail appears suspicious. On receipt of an e-mail containing a link to another address, the link should not be “clicked”; rather the full address as shown should be typed in manually (not copied and pasted) to the address bar of the web browser.

E-mail etiquette and content

E-mail, including text messaging services, is a vital business tool but an informal means of communication and should be used with great care and discipline. Councillors and staff should always consider if e-mail is the appropriate medium for a particular communication. Messages sent on the e-mail system should be written as professionally as a letter. Messages should be concise and directed only to relevant individuals. Abusive, obscene, discriminatory, racist, harassing, derogatory or defamatory messages must not be sent.

All councillors must use an official Parish council email address when conducting council business.

Emails which are sent from a private address should be signed in a personal capacity, without the word 'councillor' attached to the name, and should not give the impression that they originate from the Parish Council. This is in order to distinguish between communications sent in an official capacity, for example as a committee member, and those sent as a private individual. Councillors and staff are reminded that e-mail messages transmitted on Parish Council IT equipment are entered in the public domain on transmission.

Councillors using personal IT equipment to send e-mails on Council business are responsible for ensuring that their system has adequate internet security software installed and enabled.

E-mails sent on official Council business should contain the approved Council disclaimer statement (available from the Clerk). Councillors should be aware that e-mails sent on Council business may also be treated as in the public domain and subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

In general, Councillors and staff should not:

- send or forward private e-mails at work which they would not want a third party to read;
- send or forward chain mail, junk mail, cartoons, jokes or gossip either within or outside the council;
- contribute to system congestion by sending trivial messages or unnecessarily copying or forwarding e-mails to those who do not have a real need to receive them;
- agree to terms, enter into contractual commitments or make representations by e-mail unless appropriate authority has been obtained from the Clerk or from approved delegated authority from the Council or Committee. A name typed at the end of an e-mail is a signature in the same way as a name written in ink at the end of a letter;
 - download or e-mail text, music and other content on the internet subject to copyright protection, unless it is clear that the owner of such works allows this;
- send messages under an assumed name unless specifically authorised;
- send confidential messages via e-mail or the internet, or by other means of external communication which are known not to be secure.
- send a message without double checking that the recipient's address is correct

Councillors and staff who receive an e-mail which has been wrongly delivered should return it to the sender of the message. If the e-mail contains confidential information or inappropriate material (as described above) it should not be disclosed or used in any way.

Use of the internet

Councillors and staff should not use the Parish Council's IT systems to:

- visit internet sites that contain obscene, hateful, pornographic or otherwise illegal material;
- download or pass on such material to colleagues or external people;
- perpetrate any form of fraud, or software, film or music piracy;
- send offensive or harassing material to other users;
- download commercial software or any copyrighted material belonging to third parties, unless this download is covered or permitted under a commercial agreement or other such licence;
- hack into unauthorised areas;
- gamble on-line;
- disclose any confidential corporate information without express consent

Personal use of Council systems

Brookenby Parish Council permits occasional and reasonable personal use of its internet, and telephone systems browse the web and make personal telephone calls provided that this does not interfere with work performance or security.

Our policy on personal use is a privilege and not a right. The policy is dependent upon it not being abused or overused and we reserve the right to withdraw our permission at any time.

All communications and stored information sent, received, created on, or contained within Council equipment is the property of the Parish Council.

Use of IT equipment during Council meetings

Brookenby Parish Council, as far as practical, wishes to adopt a 'paperless office' regime during official meetings of the Council and its Committees.

Where considered necessary for the efficient conduct of the business of the meeting, the Chairman or Clerk will arrange for IT equipment to be used to support one or more of the items on the agenda.

The use of personal IT equipment by Councillors during Council meetings (full Council and Committee meetings) is permitted providing that:

- the use is only to support the business of the meeting (such as to display meeting documents);
- does not impact on the ability of any other Councillor to participate in the business of the meeting
- the equipment sound is muted (not audible)

The Chairman of the meeting may require any Councillor using personal IT equipment to cease using that equipment if in his opinion the use of the equipment is adversely affecting the conduct of the business of the meeting.

3. Guidelines on the use of electronic communications and social media

Brookenby Parish Council uses a website and Social Media to publish information about its work to a wider audience and to improve communication with the public.

The Parish Clerk is responsible for publishing content on the Council website.

The Parish Clerk is responsible for publishing content on the Council's Social Media, responding to any questions or queries posted and dealing with offensive posts.

When posting on these sites staff and councillors should:

- Be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites (e.g. Facebook) and adhere to these at all times.
- Ensure that information published is factual, fair, thorough and transparent. • Be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.
- Respect copyright laws. • Ensure that conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
- Ensure that other organisations are not referenced without their approval (when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible).
- Not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
- Remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council, and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.
- Avoid publishing any information that they could only have accessed in their position at the Council.
- Be careful if making 'political' points, and avoid being specific or personal about individuals.
- Not post anything in haste.
- Not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or in face-to-face contact.
- Not use Council facilities or resources for personal or political purposes.

Personal electronic communication

Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of Brookenby Parish Council.

The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If Councillors use Social Media in their official capacity as a councillor, they should always be mindful of the Code, and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

All social media accounts used by Councillors in their official capacity must prominently carry the following statement: "this is a personal statement and is not the view of the Parish Council".

It is incumbent on councillors to ensure that information listed on such social media profiles is kept up to date and accurate.

4. Correspondence

The point of contact for the Parish council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish council should be addressed.

The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.

All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper.

Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).

5. Communications with Parish Council staff

Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the council).

No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chair of the council, the Chair of a committee or other meeting, or are styled "Leader" of the Council, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Parish council.

E-mails:

- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;
- Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;
- E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk;
- Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

Meetings with the Clerk or other officers:

- Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
- Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;
- Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

6. Consequences of breaches

Brookenby Parish Councillors and staff are to have regard to this policy at all times.

Breaches of this policy by Parish Council employees may be dealt with under the Parish Council's disciplinary procedure.

Breaches of this policy by Councillors will be addressed under the Code of Conduct adopted by the Parish Council.