



## **PRESS & MEDIA POLICY**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

(a) The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Pucklechurch Parish Council (known as “the Council”) for working with the press and media (known as “the media”), as well as the management of its communications channels. It deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

(b) It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena.

### **2 KEY AIMS**

(a) 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 – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them 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 themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to the Clerk and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public is properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

(c) The Council also aims to communicate with members of the community and the wider local area, through social media channels, its website and in the parish newsletter. This enables the Council to for example:

- remind people of important events and to alert followers to news.
- to link to interesting and useful information about the Parish and local area published by other people.
- to better communicate with those individuals and groups using mobile devices.

### **3 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

(a) 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. 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 explanation or both.”
- “Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular



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care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly, and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimplify facts, issues or arguments.”

- “Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.”
- “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) In particular, the Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

(c) Confidential documents, exempt 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 take appropriate action in accordance with the Standing Orders and Code of Conduct adopted by the Council.

(d) 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 the Council’s legal advisor before any response is made.

(e) There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members 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 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 to the Parish Council before any response is made to the media.

### **4 CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA**

(a) When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk to the Council should be the authorised contact with the media in consultation with the Chairman of the Council, or in absentia the Vice Chairman of the Council.

(b) Statements made must reflect the Council’s opinion. Where the Council has not had an opportunity to formulate a corporate opinion the response may be ‘no comment’ unless a response has been formulated in accordance with provisions referenced at paragraph 7 (c).

(c) Other Members can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

(d) 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 errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.

(e) Letters representing the views of the Council should only be issued by the Clerk to the Parish Council following agreement by the Council. If individual Members choose to send letters to express their own opinions on Council policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Clerk to the Parish Council. It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or of an individual Member.



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(f) 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) All relevant council meetings are open to the public and press and comply with Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

(b) Agendas and minutes of meetings will be published on the Council's website and also displayed on its notice boards.

(c) The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes be sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting.

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

### **6 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 unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in 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 the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

(b) The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued only by the Clerk to the Parish Council following agreement by the Council in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section 3 above (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

(c) In the case of an urgent response, letter or press release being required in advance of a Council meeting, this may be issued by the Clerk to the Parish Council with the agreement of the Chairman of the Council following circulation of a draft version to other Members for comment.

(d) In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the relevant Members, the Vice-Chairman of the Council may act in the absence of the Chairman.

### **8 NOTICES**

(a) The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Clerk to the Parish Council.

(b) The Council notice boards will be used for the advertising of agendas, minutes, and other council information.



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### 9 SOCIAL MEDIA

(a) The Council's Facebook page will be managed and monitored by a minimum of two nominated Members and the Clerk.

(b) The Council's Facebook page will not be used as a substitute for the website and no Council correspondence may be dealt with directly via this channel – all correspondence must be addressed to the Clerk in writing as usual via email or letter.

(c) The Council's Facebook page will be used to share, for example, parish council news, surveys, general community information and information provided by other bodies such as South Gloucestershire Council, Avon Local Council Association and other local town and parish councils. Content may also, for example, draw attention to:

- Consultation documents
- News feeds & emergency information
- Event listings
- Key dates and meetings
- Polls and information gathering
- Useful community links

(d) All information published on the Facebook page will comply with the Council's privacy policy and data protection measures.

(e) The Council Facebook page is reactively moderated. The Council cannot accept responsibility for the content of any comment and reserves the right to remove comments received on Facebook that:

- contain abusive, obscene, indecent or offensive language including swear words or other sorts of profanity.
- link to obscene or offensive material.
- Contain abusive or inappropriate comments directed towards an individual, other organisations or the page administrators.
- Constitute spam or promotion of products.
- Are designed to cause nuisance to the page administrators or other users.

For serious or persistent breaches of the moderation policy, Council reserves the right to prevent users from posting further comments.

(f) Members are at liberty to set up and use their own accounts but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view.

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