



## Hordle Parish Council Press & Media Policy

**Approved: 15.10.24**

### 1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

1.2 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. Keys Aims

2.1 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/ social media – 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.

2.2 It is important that the press have access to the Clerk/ Members and to 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 that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

### 3. The Legal Framework

3.1 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 governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

3.2 The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

### 4. Contact With the Media

4.1 The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media and should act with integrity at all times.

4.2 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 appropriate action taken.

4.3 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 solicitor before any response is made.

4.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These 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 before any response is made to the media.

4.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk, Chairman or the Chairman of Committees are authorised to make contact with the media.

4.6 Statements made by the Chair or the Chair of Committees and the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.

4.7 Other Councillors 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. When responding as an individual to issues including planning matters, members must not use their Councillor title or invoke Hordle Parish Council. Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made, while it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the news media.

4.8 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. 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. Social Media**

5.1 Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained.

5.2 Online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

5.3 Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderator and/or Council as required.

5.4 Not all communication through social media requires a response from the Council, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate. If a matter that is raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised during either the public session or as a full council agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Again, the 'poster' 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 Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

5.5 When content is published / shared as Hordle Parish Council (HPC), the content should follow the following content guidelines:

- Notices and minutes of meetings
- Advertising events and activities
- Posting of good news stories

- Links to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet HPC's expectations of conduct
- Advertising staff and Cllr vacancies
- Sharing information from partners i.e. NFDC, NFNPA, HCC, Police, etc
- Announcing new information appropriate to the Council
- Posting or sharing information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, clubs and community groups
- Posting other items as the Council see fit

### **Rules For Using Social Media**

- i. Staff and Councillors must not allow their social media interaction to damage their working relationships with others.
- ii. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, Councillors, the Parish Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that HPC works with and serves.
- iii. Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.
- iv. If staff or Councillors use social media as individuals and not in their role as a Councillor or member of staff, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council.
- v. All staff and Councillors must ensure that they use HPC social media facilities appropriately. If using a Council provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity.
- vi. Parish Council social media facilities must not be used for personal or political blogs.
- vii. The policy for printed press as laid out above is also applicable to social media.

## **6. Attendance Of Media At Council Meetings**

- 6.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.
- 6.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.
- 6.3 Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chairman of the meeting (see Standing Orders).

## **7. Press Releases**

7.1 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.

7.2 The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release or newsletter article, however they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (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.