

Broadclyst Parish Council

MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

DRAFT MAY 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Summary	2
Distribution	2
Context.....	2
2. The Parish Council's approach to publicity	2
3. Identifying Newsworthy Items.....	3
4. Handling Media Enquiries	3
5. Press Releases and Letters or Emails to the Media	3
(a) Council Press Releases	4
(b) Councillor Press Releases.....	4
6. Interviews.....	4
7. Media Coverage of Meetings.....	4
8. Publicity during Elections	4
9. Non-Council Related Media	5
10. Managing Negative Issues.....	5
11. Correcting Inaccurate Reporting.....	5
12. Parish Council Newsletters	5
13. Monitoring and Evaluation	5
14. Freedom of Information and Data Protection	5
15. Internet Use	6
16. Code of Conduct.....	6
17. Social Media	6
Behavioural Use of Social Media.....	6
Instigation and Administration of Corporate Social Media Accounts	7
18. Management.....	8
Policy management.....	8
Breaches and non-compliance.....	8
How the impact of the policy will be measured	8
Evaluation and review.....	8

1. SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this Policy' is to clarify to Council Members, employees, and volunteers how they should conduct themselves when using all corporately provided social media as a means of business communication and interaction for professional purposes.

The Council has set out its expectations regarding the 'Personal Use of Social Media by Employees' in the Employee Code of Conduct. If you are unclear in any way about those expectations; please ensure that you familiarise yourself with the statements for 'Personal Use of Social Media by Employees' under section 25 of the Code of Conduct for Employees as soon as possible.

All employees shall further ensure that they will not adversely affect the Council or its business, in particular, damage the Council's or its employees' reputations or otherwise breach any of the Council's policies.

Distribution

All Broadclyst Council employees with access to corporate Internet resources.

Context

Background

The Council permits all employees who have accepted this policy, access to social media networking sites from Broadclyst Council issued 'managed devices' such as laptops and smart phones, for business purposes only. For example, to view business related films on sites such as You Tube, or to access sites such as Facebook and Twitter to follow and gauge public opinion on a range of Council related topics.

Objectives

This policy seeks to help users of social media to make effective use of such tools for work whilst reducing risk to Broadclyst Council and themselves.

Such use must however always be lawful, proportionate and must not compromise the Council's information and computer systems/networks.

Scope

Broadclyst Council expects all employees, casual workers, agency workers, contractors and interim staff to comply with this policy whilst engaged on Council business.

(For ease of reference the policy refers to "employees" throughout, but is intended to refer to all those listed as in scope, as above.)

2. THE PARISH COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO PUBLICITY

The media plays a large role in informing residents about what the Council does and how it spends their money. It is therefore vital that the Council communicates effectively with the media and wherever possible takes a positive approach to meeting media requests for information and interviews so that

- The Council is recognised as one which is open, accountable, accessible and willing to listen
- There are opportunities to share and celebrate the Council's successes
- Information is provided about policies and services as well as the democratic process so that people feel more informed about the Council and its work
- Negative issues are handled clearly and decisively

Without proper co-ordination, it would be difficult to ensure that the messages put out by the Council are consistent and accurate. However, if communication is managed effectively, the Council will be able to create and seize opportunities to communicate with partners and the public and build an accurate and positive reputation.

Throughout the year, Broadclyst Parish Council:

- receives enquiries from the media
- issues news releases
- organises photo opportunities
- arranges interviews
- produces its own newsletter within the local press

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all Officers and Members involved in dealing with the media and to provide guidance on how to handle media interest. It is further to ensure that the Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner. In all cases, the Council's approach to the media should be:

- open and honest
- proactive
- responsive and timely
- in line with the Council's Equalities policy
- in line with the adopted Code of Conduct

The main media are the local and regional press together with local radio and television stations. It is unlikely that Broadclyst would be involved in media communications at a national, international or specialist level but this policy is written to ensure that it is relevant to these cases should they occur. It is also recognised that the internet is the fastest growing area of the media and that many broadcasters and newspapers have easy access to information on Broadclyst Parish Council, its Members, and its employees.

3. IDENTIFYING NEWSWORTHY ITEMS

It is the responsibility of everyone working within the Council to identify newsworthy items; these will include a range of Council activities and decisions and it is the responsibility of the Clerk (as the Proper Officer) to make the decision if a new release should be issued, having liaised with the relevant Members.

4. HANDLING MEDIA ENQUIRIES

The Clerk will co-ordinate all media enquiries into the Parish Council office. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for the Deputy Clerk or Chairman to respond to the enquiry.

Members of the Parish Clerk's staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts and should confer with the Clerk/Deputy Clerk before responding.

Members of the Council who are directly approached by the media may respond in accordance with the guidance contained in this policy.

The Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members. The phrase "no comment" should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The Council is open and accountable and should always explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

5. PRESS RELEASES AND LETTERS OR EMAILS TO THE MEDIA

The use of press releases is a key technique for publicising Council activities, decisions and achievements.

There are two types of press releases:

(a) Council Press Releases

An official Council release is made on behalf of the Council; it will be written and issued by the Clerk. Official Council releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Council, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Councillor. Releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Councillors, identify a Member's political party or persuade the public to hold a particular view.

All official Council releases will be placed on the Council's website within one working day of issue.

(b) Councillor Press Releases

Councillor press releases are personal and are written and issued by the Councillor responsible. This type of release may or may not be political and should not include the name of any Officer, use the Council logo or the Council telephone number as a point of contact. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases, especially those of a factual nature, to be provided to the Clerk. Councillors seeking advice are advised to contact the Clerk.

6. INTERVIEWS

Any member of staff contacted by a journalist requesting an interview should refer the matter to the Clerk, the Chairman or the appropriate committee Chairman. The person put forward for interview will depend on the situation and the information required by the journalist. Officers should never give their opinion on specific Council policy but must keep to the corporate line and key messages, their role being to provide expertise and factual knowledge only in support of the Council's approved and agreed policies.

7. MEDIA COVERAGE OF MEETINGS

Many stories relating to the Council will be picked up from agendas and reports in advance of meetings, all agendas being sent direct to local media and background papers being available on the Parish Council website. All background papers carry the message "This report may contain the recommendations of an Officer or Member of the Council but these are subject to the final decision of the Parish Council at its meeting".

Provision is made for members of the media to attend Council and committee meetings. During meetings Members should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue.

8. PUBLICITY DURING ELECTIONS

The rules governing publicity change when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself all proactive publicity about candidates and other politicians is halted. This applies to scheduled local, national or European elections. During this period Council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual Members or groups of Members. This is to make sure that no individual Councillor or political party gains an unfair advantage by appearing in corporate publicity. In these circumstances, where a quote is required this may be provided by the relevant Officer, in accordance with national guidelines.

9. NON-COUNCIL RELATED MEDIA

Officers and Members of the Council who have contact with the media in a personal capacity or as members of organisations on which they are not a designated Council representative must not refer to their Council membership and must make it clear to the journalist concerned that they are speaking in a personal capacity or on behalf of the non-Council related organisation.

10. MANAGING NEGATIVE ISSUES

From time to time the Council must respond to negative issues. It is important that these situations are managed carefully to limit the potential for negative publicity.

Members and Officers must alert the Clerk as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media.

Members and Officers must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted the Council about an issue.

11. CORRECTING INACCURATE REPORTING

Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about the Council, a quick decision needs to be taken on any action necessary to correct it. The issue should be discussed with the Clerk to decide what action is appropriate. This could be a letter or news release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, a personal letter to the editor or legal advice. It will also be necessary to decide who is the most appropriate person to take the agreed action.

It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain; each case should be judged individually.

Occasionally the Council may get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake, apologising and stating how the Council will learn from the error or put it right.

12. PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTERS

The Parish Council has its own quarterly newsletter (The Broadsheet) which is published and made available free of charge throughout Broadclyst. It aims to promote council services, activities and initiatives as well as community groups and events. The content is created in-house in consultation with the Comms Committee. Ideas for articles will be welcomed and should be passed directly to the Clerk.

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Council office will continually monitor the media coverage and will discuss any concerns with the Chairman and/or Chairman of the relevant committee.

14. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND DATA PROTECTION

Council Members are reminded that they must not misuse Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes. Should the Council receive a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act on a topic on which there is correspondence (written or email), that correspondence will normally have to be disclosed unless it is exempt (further information is available from the Council's Model Publication Scheme). The fact that the disclosure may prove embarrassing would not prevent disclosure.

In addition care should be taken when processing personal data. The Data Protection Act 1998 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents.

15. INTERNET USE

Internet use covers all websites, networking sites, forums and blogs which may be used by both Officers and Councillors. If they are used in an official capacity or on Council-related business, the guidance in this policy must be adhered to and they must be used in a responsible and appropriate manner.

When acting in the capacity of Broadclyst Parish Council, websites should not:

- contain content that may result in actions for libel, defamation or other claims for damages
- be used to process personal data other than for the purpose stated at the time of capture
- promote any political party or used for campaigning
- promote personal financial interests or commercial ventures
- be used for personal campaigns
- be used in an abusive, hateful or disrespectful manner

16. CODE OF CONDUCT

The Parish Council has adopted a Code of Conduct and all matters relating to media communications should be conducted in line with the principles of this Code.

17. SOCIAL MEDIA

The Council has set out its expectations regarding the 'Personal Use of Social Media by Employees' in the Employee Code of Conduct. If you are unclear in any way about those expectations; please ensure that you familiarise yourself with the statements for 'Personal Use of Social Media by Employees' under section 24 of the Code of Conduct for Employees as soon as possible.

Behavioural Use of Social Media

In accordance with the Corporate Internet Policy, please be reminded that the Council logs and monitors all Internet usage and reserves the right to inspect any individual's activity on social media sites where there is suspected misuse. Access may be withdrawn in any such circumstance.

Individuals are personally accountable for postings on social media. Do not disclose information, make comments, make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of the Council unless you are authorised to do so. If you have any doubts about posting on social media in your work capacity, take advice from your line manager or the Corporate Communications Team.

Individuals accept and acknowledge that the information contained on social media sites is often subjective and that they will rely on it at their own risk.

The Council excludes all liability, in so far as permitted by law, against any losses, claims, demands, damages, costs and expenses incurred by the individual as a result of proactively posting or responding to posts on social media sites.

Responsible use of social media forums for professional discussion is permitted. You must however make every attempt to avoid bringing the name of Broadclyst Parish Council into disrepute or to adversely affect its reputation, customer relations or public image.

Do not publish or link to any posts or content (text, images or video) that may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection and confidence or other claims for damages. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, discriminatory, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.

Social media must be used for lawful purposes only, and must comply with relevant legislation such as, but not limited to; the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Obscene Publications Act, The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1998, Computer Misuse Act 1990.

The list of circumstances which are likely to be regarded as gross misconduct (listed in the Employee Code of Conduct and the Council's Disciplinary and Capability Procedure) includes "Misuse of the Council's facilities including unauthorised use of computer, communications or information services systems". As such, employees will be subject to a disciplinary investigation if you misuse Council systems and equipment. You may also be placing yourself at risk of prosecution if unlawful action is involved.

Electronic communications and files are admissible in court as evidence. Do not write anything about anybody that you cannot prove and evidence. Individuals also have the right to see a copy of information held about them at any time under the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

You must be vigilant towards social engineering and phishing attacks through social media in the same way as you would email. Be particularly cautious when receiving any 'direct messages' containing links. If you have any concerns that your device has become infected with a virus/malware or notice suspicious activity when or after visiting a particular social media site, please report it immediately to the Council's ICT Department (Clystnet)

Council Members and employees must not comment on or use the Parish Council social media accounts for political purposes or specific campaigning purposes. The Council is not permitted to publish material which 'in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party' (LGA 1986)

Council Members and employees must not promote personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns through corporate social media accounts.

Employees: Social media access for the Council's business purposes has a time cost to the organisation. Whilst not explicitly prohibited, any use of personal social media accounts during working hours should only be used at a minimum, during breaks and at the discretion of your line manager.

Instigation and Administration of Corporate Social Media Accounts

Any business interaction on social media must always be through one of the Council's existing corporate social media accounts that have already been approved.

You must not set up any new social media accounts for Broadclyst Parish Council business purposes without permission from the Council's Comms Committee. Whilst separate social media accounts (subject to a business case) will be considered, wherever possible Council seeks to maintain a single corporate social media presence with varied and regularly updated content.

Any social media account that is created must be administered by designated, accountable officers, who will be responsible for managing content, monitoring the account, setting and administering passwords to secure the account against unauthorised use. Usual good practice must apply in terms of using strong passwords which are regularly changed.

Whenever an officer leaves the organisation or moves to a role which no longer requires access to a corporate social media account, the password or other credential must be removed or changed immediately.

18. MANAGEMENT

Policy management

Authority is delegated to the Clerk to undertake amendments of an administrative nature to this Policy as are necessary, or to secure continuing compliance with the law.

Any changes to this policy will be communicated throughout the organisation using appropriate communication channels.

Breaches and non-compliance

Any potential misuse identified on social media websites will be reported to the appropriate officer or Comms Committee. Serious breaches of this policy by Council employees will amount to gross misconduct and may result in dismissal.

Any breach of this policy which comes to the Council's attention will be investigated, and may result in action being taken under internal disciplinary and capability procedures, up to and including dismissal for actions of gross misconduct.

How the impact of the policy will be measured

Monitor the experience of staff in using social media and how it has supported and facilitated their work via the regular staff survey. Monitor the number of breaches or issues reported to Communications Committee.

Evaluation and review

This Policy will be reviewed as part of Council's annual review procedure.

Signed:

Chairman of the Council

Signed:

Parish Clerk

Dated:

