



## HARLING PARISH COUNCIL

### PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

Harling Parish Council's interaction with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying needs and measuring satisfaction. Effective information, news and media relations are an essential factor.

This policy does not set out to be comprehensive, but is to guide Parish Council Members and anyone employed by the Council in their relations with the news media.

1. The term media encompasses many different means of communicating information to a wide audience and whilst not exhaustive includes the following: Radio, Television, Internet, Newspapers, Social Media, Magazines, Leaflets, and Posters.
2. If a Councillor receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council this must be referred as speedily as practicable to the Chair and the Clerk. Where this is a matter where no Council Policy has yet been made the matter should be considered by the full council at the next scheduled meeting or, if of sufficient importance, at an extraordinary meeting; before a formal reply is given.
3. The Council should make every effort to respond promptly to requests for information. However all enquiries or requests for statements must never be answered immediately and can only be responded to by the Clerk, after consultation with and authorisation by the Chair and or Vice Chair if an appropriate Council Policy exists, or after discussion with the full council if a Policy or position needs to be agreed.

Wherever possible the Clerk will prepare all written Press Releases or Statements and copies must be retained. The format and content must be prepared in association and agreed with the Chair and or Vice Chair and other members should they be required. The sample principle applies to broadcast (verbal) material.

4. The disclosure and sharing of information should normally be restricted to matters that have been discussed as an Agenda Item by the Parish Council with the exception of requests made under the Freedom of Information Act. In the case of such a request the Clerk should prepare a suggested course of action so that the Council complies fully with the requirements of the Act.. There is the obligation to act with integrity and respect for Council policy once made.

No information of a confidential nature may be disclosed. No matter relating to the conduct or capability of a Councillor at a Meeting can be disclosed.

5. No employee (other than the Clerk) or Councillor should contact the media on any matter related to the Parish Council unless specifically authorised by the Chair, (or in his/her absence), the Vice Chair.

However nothing is contained in these guidelines that seeks to prevent any individual from expressing a personal opinion for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on the internet.

Where personal views expressed differ from council policy this must be made clear. Care must be taken not to misrepresent and or bring the Parish Council into disrepute or undermine any decision made and must take account of the role and responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.

6. When in attendance at any public meeting as a representative of Harling Parish Council an individual is required to act with integrity at all times and ensure that any comments they make are entirely accurate and reflect the views of the council as a whole or, if not, that this is made known.

7. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request. The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

On 6 August 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.

## **1. Parish Council Use of Social Media – Principles**

- i. To publish information about the work of Harling (‘the Parish Council’)
- ii. To avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Parish Council’s work.

## **2. Approved Parish Council Social Media**

The Parish Council has approved the use of Facebook and the Parish Council’s website to promote the work of the Parish Council and to communicate approved messages by the Chairman and/or the Clerk.

Our Parish Council uses the page of Taking Pride in our Village as its Facebook platform

Our website can be found at [www.harlingpc.info](http://www.harlingpc.info)

### **3. Users of Parish Council Social Media**

In accordance with the Council's adopted Communications Policy, the Clerk is the Council's nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases once they have been approved by the Chairman.

The Parish Council has appointed the Clerk to post messages on to the Facebook page.

### **4. Guidance for Parish Councillors on the use of Parish Council Social Media**

- i. Councillors and Officers should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites – e.g. Facebook – and adhere to these at all times.
- ii. No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain (e.g. available on the Parish Council's website, published in Minutes) without the prior approval of the Chairman or Clerk.
- iii. Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.
- iv. Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.
- v. Copyright laws must be respected.
- vi. Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
- vii. Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval – when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
- viii. Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
- ix. Officers and Councillors must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Parish Council, and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.

### **5. Third party Social Media and Individual Councillor Usage**

Councillors and officers 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 [ ] Parish Council. The Council had adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If you use Social Media in your official capacity as a Councillor or Officer, you 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.

#### **Do:**

- Set appropriate privacy settings for any blog or networking site.
- Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such views.

- Be aware that the higher your profile as a Councillor, the more likely it is that you may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network.
- Ensure any Parish Council facilities are used, any posts that you make are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in your official capacity.
- Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as Parish Councillor or Officer.
- Be careful if making ‘political’ points, and avoid being specific or personal about individuals.

**Don’t:**

- Blog in haste.
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face contact.
- Use Parish Council facilities for personal or political purposes.

Reviewed and adopted March 2019

Reviewed February 2021

Clerk