

WIGGENHALL ST GERMANS PARISH COUNCIL

PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

Adopted May 2020

Reviewed Jan 2024

Wiggenhall St Germans 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 Press and 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 Chairman and or Vice Chairman 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 Chairman and or Vice Chairman and other members should they be required. The same 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 and resolutions 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. The Chairman is the proper person to represent the Parish Council; no employee or councillor (other than the Clerk) should contact the media on any matter related to the Parish Council unless specifically authorised by the Chairman, (or in his/her absence), the Vice Chairman.

Only the Clerk or Chairman of the Council is/are permitted to post material on a social media website in the Council's name.

6. Nothing is contained in these guidelines that seeks to prevent any individual from expressing a personal opinion for example by writing to a newspaper, posting an item on the internet nor verbally in formal or informal conversation. However, where personal views expressed differ from council resolutions or policies 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. Contravention of this Policy in this respect and ergo the Code of Conduct may lead to a disciplinary hearing in the case of an employee or referral to the Borough Monitoring Officer in the case of a Councillor. Where statements lead to litigation the employee/councillor will likely not be covered by council's indemnity nor legal insurance if they have not acted in accordance with this policy.

7. When in attendance at any public meeting as a representative of Wiggshall St Germans 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.

8. Use of social media in a private capacity whilst holding public office requires that they are legal and follow standards required in the code of conduct remain accordance with this policy and other council policies, the following general rules must be adhered to:

8.1. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.

8.2. Any employee, volunteer or Member who feels that they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Clerk or Chairman of the Council.

8.3. Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If unsure whether the information to be shared falls within one of these categories, this should be discussed with the Clerk or Chairman of the Council.

8.4. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless that third party has given its consent.

8.5. Before including a link to a third-party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit the link.

8.6. When making use of any social media platform, the terms of use must be read and complied with.

8.7. Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact the contribution might make to peoples' perceptions of the Council.

8.8. Be personally responsible for content published into social media tools.

8.9. Don't escalate heated discussions. Try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.

8.10. Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.

8.11. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.

8.12. Avoid publishing contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people who were not intended to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.