

LITTLE MISSENDEN PARISH COUNCIL
COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA POLICY

October 2018

THE PRINCIPLES FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS

DO:

1. Be objective and even-handed
2. Be clear and concise
3. Remain positive and constructive
4. Have regard for equality and diversity
5. Have regard for the long-term reputation of the Council
6. Abide by the members' Code of Conduct
7. Ensure you are well-informed of the facts
8. Respect the rights and reputation of members of the public, Council staff and other members
9. Write assuming that all communication – from private email to posts on social media – are an enduring and public record

DO NOT:

1. Speak on behalf of the Council unless you have the authority. Instead, make it clear that any views you express are your personal views
2. Slander or libel anyone
3. Discuss any confidential or sensitive information about the Council, its members or staff. Do not reveal personal data about anyone without their express permission
4. Be party-political (Local Government Act 1986 s.2)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define roles and responsibilities within Little Missenden Parish Council and give guidelines on external communications, contact with the media and effective use of social 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 and indicates how any risks or pitfalls can be minimised or mitigated.

2. KEY OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 **Transparent** – the Council is accountable to the local community and should be open about the decisions we make and how we are governed.
- 2.2 **Constructive** – the Council's efforts and communications should focus on how we can improve the local area for the benefit of its parishioners.
- 2.3 **Proactive** – the Council should anticipate the information that beneficiaries will want to know and communicate this to them in the right way at the right time.

- 2.4 **Empowering** – by providing the community with the information they need to know, the Council can help them to help themselves.
- 2.5 **Engaging** – our use of the media is central to gauging the priorities and wishes of the local community and service users, which in turn helps shape those services.

3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 In addition to general legislation and common law, law and guidance specific to local authority communications includes:

- 3.1a Local Government Act 1986 s.2
- 3.1b Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity
- 3.1c The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014
- 3.1d Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
- 3.1e Local Government Transparency Code 2015

4. ATTENDANCE OF THE PUBLIC AND MEDIA AT MEETINGS

- 4.1 The public and press are welcome and encouraged to attend all meetings of the Council and its Committees.
- 4.2 The Council may, however, temporarily exclude the public or the press or both by a resolution, governed by the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s.1(2). This provision should be used sparingly and only where essential.
- 4.3 Any Council meetings may be audio or video recorded, live streamed and photographs may be taken, except where the public and press have been excluded, in accordance with item 4.2 above.
- 4.4 Upon request, agendas, reports and minutes (less any confidential papers) will be made available to the media or members of the public free of charge.

5. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

- 5.1 It is important that the media has access to officers and members and to background information to assist them in giving accurate accounts to the public. To balance this, the Council reserves the right to defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public is properly informed of all relevant facts.
- 5.2 Members, the Clerk, employees and other officers should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all dealings with the media.
- 5.3 Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers, private correspondence or personal information about Council employees must not be shared with the media or discussed on public platforms.
- 5.4 When responding to approaches from the media the Clerk is authorised to make responses on behalf of the Council.
- 5.5 Councillors may talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions and comments given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council, unless previously agreed with the Clerk or approved by the Council.

6. PRESS RELEASES

- 6.1 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 and policy 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.
- 6.2 The Clerk or any member may draft a press release in line with Council policy and position. However, they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that:
- 6.2a the principles and statutory requirements are adhered to
 - 6.2b there is consistency of style across the Council, and
 - 6.2.c the use of the press release can be monitored

7. WEBSITE

- 7.1 The Council's website will be the first point of contact for most residents, visitors, businesses, local groups and funders. It should be regularly updated and all information on the site should be accurate and as accessible as possible.
- 7.2 The Clerk will retain editorial control of the website. However, councillors may contribute material to the Clerk such as news articles etc.

8. SOCIAL MEDIA

- 8.1 For the purposes of this policy **social media** covers sites and applications including, but not restricted to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, discussion forums, wikis and any sites which may emerge after the creation of this policy where the Council could be represented.
- 8.2 The Council acknowledges social media as a useful communication tool. However, clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that its use does not expose breaches of data protection legislation.
- 8.3 Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly in line with this guidance. Social media sites are in the public domain and officers must ensure the reliability and be confident of the nature of the information published. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without consent, used in different contexts or further distributed.
- 8.4 From time to time the Council may have to respond to negative or inaccurate issues and may become involved in drawn out conversations on social media. Members, employees and officers must alert the Clerk as soon as practicable so that the situation can be managed effectively and efficiently to minimise negative, inaccurate or inappropriate publicity.
- 8.5 Councillors posting personally on social media must ensure they abide by the principles set out at the beginning of this policy. Councillors should also be wary of entering into controversial, heated or lengthy debates via social media.
- 8.6 Social media must not be used for party-political purposes or specific party-political campaigning.

9. URGENT SITUATIONS

- 9.1 In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the Clerk, the Asst Clerk may issue official press communications on behalf of the Council, in discussion with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Council. The Council may also authorise official communications. No individual councillor may issue official communications on behalf of the Council but may only speak as an individual.

10. EMAILS

10.1 All councillors are given dedicated email accounts which must be used for all Council business

10.2 Any email correspondence relating to official business of the Council may be subject to a Freedom of Information request, regardless of whether it is held in the dedicated councillor's email account or their private account. You can find out more information here:

[https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1147/official information held in private email accounts.pdf](https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1147/official_information_held_in_private_email_accounts.pdf)

10.3 With this in mind, councillors should ensure that any emails sent regarding Council business adhere to the principles set out at the start of the policy.

Please see following addendum for further links of interest.

This Policy was agreed at a Full Council Meeting held on 15th October 2015

Clerk to the Council

ADDENDUM FOR REFERENCES WITHIN THE COMMUNICATION & MEDIA POLICY DOCUMENT

Local Government Act 1986 s.2

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/10/section/2>

Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8534/1727384.pdf

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2014/9780111113554>

Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/8-9/67/body>

Local Government Transparency Code 2015:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-transparency-code-2015>

FOIA ref email correspondence:

https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1147/official_information_held_in_private_email_accounts.pdf