

Press and Media Relations & Social Media Policy

1. Purpose

- a. The purpose of this policy is to provide instructions and guidance to Members of the Parish Council and the Parish Clerk, on what they individually can and can't do in respect of dealing with the press/media and in using of social media.
- b. This policy is based on the fact that individual Parish Councillors must not, unless in an emergency, represent the Council, or express an opinion on behalf of the Council, either verbally or in writing.
- c. Any expression of council policy or opinion must normally be agreed by full council at a public meeting.
- d. Normally, if agreed by full council, the Clerk (and under circumstances the Chairman or another nominated Councillor) may issue a statement, either verbally or in writing.

2. Press & Media Relations

- a. No Councillor shall communicate with the media or press on behalf of the Parish Council except as defined by this Policy
- b. Communications with the press and media on behalf of the Council will normally be conducted by the Parish Clerk except as defined in this Policy
- c. Except in emergencies, the Parish Clerk will not communicate with the media or press on behalf of the Council without consulting with Councillors by email to obtain a consensus on the matter.
- d. In the absence of the Parish Clerk, the Chairman or vice-Chairman will conduct any communications with the media or press and will follow the same procedures as the Parish Clerk.
- e. An emergency for the purpose of this policy is defined as an unplanned major event impacting upon the Council's responsibilities where there is no time to convene a PC meeting before communicating with the press or media concerning the Council's position.
- f. The Chairman or vice-Chairman may be authorised by the Council to communicate with the media and press for a specific issue, event or time period.
- g. Decisions by the Council are taken collectively and neither the Chairman of the Council nor the Clerk are the "Leader" of the Council in the accepted term of that word. Consequently, it will be the Council's normal position to avoid face to face interviews with the press and media and for the clerk to issue a formal statement which has been agreed, where practicable, by available Councillors even if such agreement is obtained informally.
- h. Where the Chairman (or vice-Chairman in her/his absence) considers that it will not be in the best interest of the Council/Community to decline a request for a specific interview, then the Chairman (or vice-Chairman) will agree to such an interview and act as the Council's spokesperson. The Chairman/vice-Chairman will consult with other Councillors and Clerk before reaching this decision where practical. The Chairman/vice-Chairman will also consult with Councillors on the approach to the interview where practicable. In responding to questions, the spokesperson will restrict answers to already agreed policy/decisions/policy justifications of the Council wherever possible and avoid personal opinion and speculation about a future decision of the Council.
- i. The Chairman or vice-Chairman are authorised to write regular articles for the local free issue magazines, after consulting with Councillors and the Clerk on the themes/topics to be covered, to keep residents appraised of Council activities.
- j. In performing the communications and PR functions under section 2 d, 2 f and 2 i of this policy, councillors must comply with the legislation as set out in section

BERKSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

4 of Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice. In particular:

- i. Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.
- ii. Legal precedent indicates that the leader of a council may be taken as speaking on behalf of the council (whether or not specific powers have been delegated to the leader) if, in the circumstances, the leader could be taken by the public to be authorised to speak for the council. For Berkswell PC that implies the Chairman or vice Chairman or any other councillor deputed to write on behalf of the council.
- iii. Where any councillor writes or speaks in a personal capacity, he/she will ensure that this is made clear as far as is practical

3. **Social Media**

- a. The Parish Council does not have and will not have, any social media accounts in its name
- b. However, the council recognises that social media is an excellent way to supplement its traditional notice boards and web site in disseminating information which is already in the public domain.
- c. The Parish Council recognises the Facebook account "Berkswell Parish" and the Twitter account of "@BerkswellParish" as platforms which are used to circulate Parish related information already in the public domain.
- d. These accounts can be accessed via a link from the Council's web site but they are not maintained by the Parish Council and do not necessarily reflect the policies and views of Berkswell Parish Council.
- e. Any councillor or official of Berkswell Parish Council posting to these accounts must ensure:
 - i. They comply with section 2 j above.
 - ii. That the information has been approved for release or is already in the public domain.
 - iii. If there is any question about posting information the advice of the Clerk must be sought and his advice must be adhered to
 - iv. The individual making the posting must make it clear that they are doing so as an individual (who happens to be a Parish Official) as opposed to using "Councillor" as part of their name. This is important to avoid any risk of misleading the public on the Council's policy or opinion on a given matter.
 - v. Posting should be clearly for the purpose of imparting information and care must be taken when stating an opinion, which must always be referenced as a personal opinion.