



# **PRESS, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

NB: Page numbers to be updated following acceptance of track changes

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## **1. Scope of the Policy**

All employees, Councillors and volunteers are expected to always comply with this policy to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council.

Breach of this policy by employees and Councillors may be dealt with under the adopted Code of Conduct or Disciplinary Procedure and in serious cases may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal in the case of employees.

## **2. Introduction**

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Haydon Wick Parish Council (the Council) for working with the press and media (known as “the media”) and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media. Communication via social media platforms, Parish Council website and Parish Council noticeboards is also covered by this policy.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena.

Parish Councils have an overarching role to play in their area, which no other body can provide. In performing a community leadership role, Parish Councils can articulate and represent the views and needs of the local community more effectively. This will involve listening to the local community and communicating what it is doing through a variety of mediums. If the community knows and understands what the Parish Council is doing for them, research has proved that its reputation will be higher. The role Parish Councils play as community leaders places them at the heart of communications in their locality and the effective use of the tools at their disposal will ensure the messages are strong, clear and well understood.

## **3. Aims**

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community.

The Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Officers and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public is properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

Each Parish Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community.

If a Parish Councillor has twin or triple hatted role it is important that the lines are not blurred between the role of the Parish Councillor and being a Borough Councillor. The role of Parish Councillor should not be used to promote Borough Council activities or vice versa.

#### **4. The Legal Framework**

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (March 2011). The following is applicable to this policy:

- "Where local authority publicity addresses matters of political controversy it should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner";
- "No local authority may publish or assist anyone, financially or otherwise, to publish, by any means, any material which in whole or part appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party." (Arnold-Baker, page 200, paragraph 20.4);
- "In deciding whether material falls under the ban, regard must be had to whether it refers to a political party or promotes or opposes a point of view identifiable as the view of one political party, and, if part of a campaign, the apparent purpose of the campaign, and also to the provisions of the Secretary of State's Code of Practice on Publicity." (Arnold-Baker, page 200, paragraph 20.4);
- "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".

Officers and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and take appropriate action in accordance with the Standing Orders and Code of Conduct adopted by the Council.

When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.

There are a number of personal privacy issues for Officers and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the Council's policies on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. These issues include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Chief Officer before any response is made to the media.

#### **5. Contact with the Media**

When responding to approaches from the media, the Chairman of the Council is the authorised contact with the media in consultation with the Chief Officer. However, if the subject of an enquiry relates to the work of a Committee, this role may be delegated to the Chair of that Committee. All media must contact goes through the Chief Officer in the first instance.

Statements made must reflect The Council's opinion. If practicable, to assist with accuracy it is preferred that such statements are in writing and make it clear that it is "In my position as Councillor X, Y, Z".

Councillors in their private capacity can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone, to the point and not be drawn out.

Letters, Newsletters, or publications, either representing the views of council or presenting data in such a way that a reasonable parishioner "in the street" may assume it represents the views of council, should only be issued by the Chief Officer following agreement by Haydon Wick Parish Council or relevant committee. If individual members choose to publish letters, newsletters or publications in order to express their own personal opinion on Haydon Wick Parish Council policy, members must make it clear in a prominent manner that these are views of individual councillors and not the views of Haydon Wick Parish Council.

At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

All of the above shall apply equally to postings by an individual Councillor on social media outlets such as Instagram, X and Facebook.

## **6. Attendance of Media at the Council or Committee Meetings**

Agendas and minutes of meetings will be supplied to media outlets together with dates of meetings being available on the Council's website.

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas and approved minutes be sent to the media on request and subject to the Public Bodies (Admissions) to Meetings Act 1960 as amended by the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

Filming or taping of Council or Committee is governed by the Standing Orders and the Council's Reporting of Meetings Policy.

## **7. Elections**

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (March 2011) contains guidance for providing publicity for Members and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that the Council resources should not be used on publicising individual Members unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council. These extracts from the Code illustrate the main points:

"During the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, local authorities should not publish any publicity on controversial issues or report views or proposals in such a way that identifies them with any individual members or groups of members;"

Local authorities should not publish publicity relating to individuals involved directly in the election during this period unless expressly authorised by or under statute. It is permissible for local authorities to publish factual information, which identifies the names, wards and parties of candidates at elections;”

“Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums.”

In line with practice elsewhere in the country, the Council will not quote any Councillor in a news release or involve them in proactive publicity events during the election period, regardless of whether or not they are standing for election. The only exception to this (as laid down in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity) is during an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a level response to an important event outside the control of the Council. In this situation, Members holding key civic positions should be able to comment.

## **8. Press Releases**

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 on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of all Officers and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

Any Officer or Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by (or have authority from) the Chief Officer following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

## **9. Urgent Situations**

In the case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a Council or Committee meeting, this may be issued by the Chief Officer with the agreement of the Chairman of the Council or Chair of the relevant Committee following circulation of a draft version to other Members for comment.

In the event of the Chief Officer being unable to contact the Chairman of the Council or relevant Chair of Committee, he/she is authorised to act in their absence.

## **10. Council Noticeboards and Website**

The Council noticeboards are primarily for the display of agenda and other statutory notices relating to the Council’s business and notices from the Borough Council, Central Government and other statutory bodies. Subject to the availability of space, notices from local or national not for profit organisations considered as being of interest to the Parishioners may also be displayed. The Chief Officer is to be responsible for maintaining the information on the noticeboards and ensuring that the information therein is up to date.

The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news, together with agenda of forthcoming meetings and archive minutes from Council meetings, also notices from Swindon Borough Council, Wiltshire County Council, Central Government and other statutory bodies. The Chief Officer is responsible for keeping the information on the

site up to date. Information from local or national not for profit organisations considered as being of interest to the Parishioners may also be displayed.

Businesses requesting that the Council display information on their behalf should be referred to the Editor of the Parish Magazine with the suggestion that an advertisement may be placed.

## **11. Newsletters and Parish Magazine**

Two of the Criteria for granting a “Local Council Award” status stipulate that a Council should undertake the following:

- Publish an Annual Report;
- Regular news bulletins throughout the year online even if they are also distributed in hard copy

The Chief Officer shall provide the Parish Magazine with the dates of forthcoming Parish Council meetings in time for their press deadline this to ensure that the information appears in the relevant edition.

Articles for publication may be compiled by any member of the Council but should be submitted to the Chief Officer to verify that the content is compliant with Council Policy.

Production and distribution will be undertaken, using best value to achieve a good quality product and wide distribution throughout the Parish.

The Community Development Committee / Haydon Wick Living/Comms Working Party oversees the production of the newsletter.

The Chief Officer will arrange for the printing and distribution as required with the assistance of Councillors and others in distributing copies.

Members, either individually or in groups, shall not fund, publish or distribute any publication which would bring the Council into disrepute.

Members, either individually or in groups, shall not establish internet sites or email addresses, with the intention of encouraging parishioners to believe that it represents Haydon Wick Parish Council and that the correct route is to register issues with the Chief Officer first. Following such registration, members are free to progress matters through the relevant committee or directly with other agencies, with the approval of the committee/Chief Officer. This policy is not intended to restrict any Councillor from presenting their views during any bona-fide election period.

## **12. Newsletter Article Content**

All article contents within the newsletter may not make reference to or use any party-political name, logo, e-mail and website addresses. All articles must be factual and non-partisan.

The Haydon Wick Newsletter will not publish political party advertisements.

The Council will reserve the right to edit and modify any submission prior to publication without reference to the submitter.

### 13. Email Signatures

All employees, Councilors and volunteers must follow the procedure outlined below when sending and receiving emails on behalf of the Parish Council:

Only agreed email signatures may be used. The recommended template is:

Councillor Name (Arial, 11)

Title i.e. Chair of Planning & Highways (Arial 10)

Tel: (Arial 10)

W: [www.haydonwick.gov.uk](http://www.haydonwick.gov.uk) (Arial 10, with active link)

@HaydonWickParishCouncil (Arial 10)

- All email footers will include the Privacy Policy statement adopted by the Council
- All messages must use appropriate business language.
- The circulating of offensive, indecent or obscene material or anything which breaches the Equal Opportunities Policy is strictly prohibited.
- Confidential material should not be disclosed
- Only attachments from a trusted source may be downloaded
- Ensure that the address of the recipient is correct before sending emails
- Ensure that a 'reply to all' is appropriate
- Ensure that essential files are saved before deleting the message in which they were received.
- Emails which create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the Council must be sent by officers only, not Councillors.

### 14. Articles, Letters to External Bodies

Frequently the Council is required to produce documents and/or content for external bodies, the "Living" magazine is considered within this grouping. In these instances, Councillors should adhere to the following guidelines.

- a) Documents are written in the third person, i.e. We, Us, Our as in We are going to..., Our intention is..., X thanked us... of course these can be replaced by Haydon Wick Parish Council e.g. Haydon Wick Parish Council is going to do, etc. There MAY be justification in using I, Me, My, when referring to a Councillor's quote, but this should be the exception rather than the rule. An alternative is to write without including a personal pronoun.
- b) Documents should reflect the view of the Council, not the view of individual Councillor.
- c) Documents created for submission should be peer reviewed at a minimum by a committee. If there are time constraints authority should be delegated to Chairman & Vice Chairman of the Council, or Chair & Vice Chair of standing committees. Full Council may vote to give delegated authority to another named grouping of Councillors.
- d) Documents being submitted to a third party should be submitted by the Chief Officer, or in their absence the Deputy Chief Officer. Full Council may vote to give delegated authority to another named individual.

- e) Where appropriate a document may require the use of the official council header, where this is the case the Office will format the document using a header with a standard font and text size. This comment also applies to letters a Councillor may wish to send, they should be submitted to the Office for correct formation and subsequent postage.
- f) To promote the image of the Council as a professional body, care should be taken with spelling, grammar, punctuation, and overall presentation.
- g) Content should be kept to the point and be relevant.
- h) Consideration should be given to capitalisation e.g., the Parish Council & a parish council.
- i) Consideration should be given to abbreviations, in the first use in a document the item should be stated in full e.g., Haydon Wick Parish Council then subsequently HWPC or National Association of Local Councils then subsequently NALC. Do not assume that everybody knows what an abbreviation stands for. It could be considered good practice on the first use in a document to write the name in full, then the associated abbreviation in brackets after it, e.g., Haydon Wick Parish Council (HWPC).
- j) Consideration should be given to the use of contractions, “do not” as opposed to “don’t”. It would be considered professional to use the full form not the contraction.
- k) Be careful of their, there & they’re and other similar word groupings.
- l) Be careful of the use of an apostrophe and “s” as an indication of possession
- m) Avoid the use of colloquialisms.
- n) Think of your audience and write appropriately.

## **15. Pictures and Images**

Pictures and images can enhance a message, but consideration should be given as to whether they are appropriate to the statement being made. Permission must be obtained before publishing photographs or videos of individuals.

## **16. Social Media**

This policy covers the use of social media platforms including, but not limited to:

- Council websites
- Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social networking sites
- YouTube, Instagram, and other video/podcast sites
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Council emails

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, minutes, and meeting dates.
- Advertise events and activities.
- Announce new Council information.
- Promote website news stories.
- Advertise vacancies.
- Share information from trusted partners like authorities, police, libraries etc.
- Post content from community groups, schools, clubs etc.

- Refer resident queries to the Clerk/Chief Officer (but not engage in debates)

When using social media, staff, volunteers, and councillors must:

- Be responsible and respectful.
- Disclose their identity and Council affiliation.
- Never make false or misleading statements
- Keep personal opinions separate from Council's views.
- Use a respectful and informative tone, avoid condescending language.
- Be mindful that individual comments can reflect on the Council.
- Refrain from posting controversial, inflammatory, or offensive remarks.
- Avoid personal attacks or hostile communications.
- Obtain permission before posting photographs/videos of individuals.
- Respect privacy of others
- Not violate any laws or regulations

The Chief Officer, Deputy Clerk and Marketing & Events Co-ordinator shall be the social media 'Webmasters' and Moderators.

Inappropriate comments containing foul language, abuse, discrimination etc. will be removed immediately. Repeated offenders will be blocked. Concerns about denigrating content should be reported to the Chief Officer/Clerk.

The Marketing & Events Co-ordinator will regularly monitor and police the social media sites to remove any inappropriate behaviour.

Permitted links on Council social media include the Council website, partner sites like museums/theatre's, useful external links, co-hosted event pages, and relevant Facebook pages.

During the pre-election purdah period, overtly political social media responses will be monitored and removed.

Parish Councillors and staff must not:

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.
- Present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Parish Council.
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council.
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without written parental permission on a Parish Council.
- Post any information that infringes the copyright of others.
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous.
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.
- Bring the Parish Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity.
- Publish personal data of individuals without permission as this is a breach of Data Protection legislation, GDPR and is an offence.
- Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

- Upload post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- Disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether information to be shared falls within one of these categories, this should be discussed beforehand with the Chief Officer.

## **Content Management**

The Council's use of social media is for official Council content only, not for political use.

Examples of acceptable content are:

- Consultation documents
- News feeds & emergency information
- Event listings
- Key dates
- Short debates/comments on hot topics relevant to the Council
- Polls and information gathering
- Useful links

## **Guidance for Council Social Media Usage**

- Use plain English in sentence case format, not all capitals or red text
- Individual staff, volunteers and councillors are responsible for what they post
- Check security settings regularly
- Responses may not be required for every communication, some may need to go on a meeting agenda

# Parish Councillor Quick Guide

## Policy Summary:

The policy aims to define roles and establish a framework for effective working relationships with the media and using communications channels like social media and the parish website/noticeboards.

Key points:

- Employees, councillors, and volunteers must comply with the policy to protect the council's privacy, confidentiality, and interests.
- The Council Chairman is the authorised media contact, in consultation with the Chief Officer/Clerk. For committee-related issues, the Committee Chair may act as the contact.
- Media statements must reflect the Council's opinion, not personal views unless clearly stated.
- The media can attend Council/Committee meetings per legal requirements.
- During elections, the Council will not quote councillors in publicity, with limited exceptions.
- Press releases must go through the Chief Officer after Council/Committee agreement.
- The website, noticeboards, newsletters/magazines are for Council business, statutory notices and approved non-profit content.
- Social media usage guidelines are provided for appropriate, respectful, and factual communications representing the Council's views.
- Content management protocols are defined for social media, websites, email signatures, letters/documents to external bodies, use of images/photos, and writing style standards.

The policy aims to enable transparent and professional communications while preventing misuse or bringing the Council into disrepute.

## Social Media Quick Guide:

Social media is increasingly important for elected members to engage with parishioners and have conversations online. This guide provides advice on using social media effectively and responsibly as a councillor:

- Be mindful that standards of conduct apply online as you are representing the council. Avoid defamation, disclose your affiliation, and don't share confidential information.
- Use social media to listen to public opinion, campaign, explain policies, assist with casework, connect with networks, and communicate during emergencies.
- Post regularly but not excessively. Share updates, events, photos/videos. Engage by responding to questions and critiques graciously.
- Ignore trolls/abusive comments. Don't get drawn into unproductive arguments online.
- Use social media management tools to schedule posts. Respond promptly when possible.

- Follow the council's social media policy on appropriate content, roles/responsibilities, and dealing with inappropriate comments.
- The policy will be reviewed regularly to adapt to changes in social media.

The key is using social media responsibly to enhance community engagement and public service as a councillor.





## Version control

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|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>HWPC<br/>Press, Media and<br/>Communications<br/>Policy</b> | Georgina Morgan-Denn<br>Chief Officer to<br>Council | Amended 29th Jan<br>2015 Full Council<br><br>Amended 28th July<br>2015<br>Communications<br>Committee<br><br>Amended 20th May<br>2017 Full Council<br><br>Amended 23 <sup>rd</sup><br>March 2021 Full<br>Council Min Ref: FC<br>235.1<br><br>Adopted by Full<br>Council 16 <sup>th</sup> May<br>2023 Min Ref FC<br>028<br><br>To be reviewed by<br>Full Council 7 <sup>th</sup> May<br>2024 | Next review due:<br><br>23.03.2023<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>Annually<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>Annually |
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