

Press and Media Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy has been created to clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff and Councillors involved with dealing with the media and to provide guidance on how to handle media interest. It is important for the council to communicate in a professional and objective manner as failure to do so could risk adverse publicity.

1.2 Media plays a large role in informing residents about what the Council does and how it spends its money. Therefore, it is important that, wherever possible, the Council takes a positive approach to meeting media requests as this will demonstrate the Council is open, accessible, and willing to listen.

2. Media Enquiries

2.1 The Clerk will co-ordinate all media enquiries. In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the Chairman to respond to the enquiry. Staff and Councillors who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves, without seeking authorisation from either Clerk or Chairman.

2.2 The Council should make every effort to respond promptly to requests for information. However, all enquiries or requests for statements can only be responded to after consultation with and authorisation as above.

3. Press Releases and Media Communication

3.1 The Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council. All communications made by the Clerk or in the Clerks absence the Chairman, will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk, they will be referred to the rest of the Council.

3.2 The disclosure and sharing of information should normally be restricted to matters that have been discussed as an Agenda item by the Council.

3.3 There is the obligation to act with integrity and respect for Council policy.

3.4 No information of a confidential nature may be disclosed.

3.5 No matter relating to the conduct or capability of a Councillor at a meeting can be disclosed.

3.6 No employee (other than the Clerk) or Councillor should contact the media on any matter related to the Council unless specifically authorised by the Chairman, or in their absence, Deputy Chairman.

4. Representing the Council

4.1 When in attendance at any public meeting (online or in person) as a representative of High Kelling Parish Council an individual is required to act with integrity at all time and ensure any comments are entirely accurate and reflect the views of the council

4.2 A Councillor should never use the prefix Councillor, Chairman or Deputy Chairman when writing to the press as an individual. Extra care should be taken to ensure any language used does not infer that the author is writing on behalf of the Parish Council. In these circumstances it is advised that the Councillor clearly states that views written are done so as an individual and are not the views of the Council.

4.3 A copy of any written material sent to the press and media by a member (after authorisation), as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Clerk.

4.3 A Councillor must observe High Kelling Parish Council's code of conduct whenever they conduct the business of the authority or acts as a representative of the authority.

5. Local Publications

5.1 The Parish Council will aim to publish in a local magazine an update for residents on Council business. The update will be written by The Chairman (or in their absence Deputy Chairman) and circulated to all Cllrs for approval before publication.

6. Annual Reports

6.1 All Annual Reports must be presented to Full Council before publication.

6.2 Annual Reports must not be published during times of Purdah or prior to an election.

7. Social Media

N.B Social Media refers to socially interactive, networked information and communication technologies whereby personal opinions can be presented for public consumption on the internet. Examples are blogs, wiki's, Facebook, LinkedIn, forums, message boards, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube etc.

7.1 Staff and Councillors must clearly identify whether they are posting as an individual or as a Councillor or staff member when using any of the social media sites.

7.2 Staff must not publish material for any party-political purposes or specifically campaign for a political party.

7.3 Staff must not mix work and personal use where any publication could bring the Council into disrepute.

7.4 Staff must not publish defamatory, illegal, sexual, discriminatory, or offensive material and must always be professional and respectful.

7.5 Staff must only publish material in line with the Council's staff code of conduct, equal opportunities and GDPR policies.

7.6 Staff must not purport to represent the Council's views or opinions or refer to any of the Council's customers or service providers when using social media in a personal capacity.

7.7 Members should be aware of the Council's Code of Conduct and any legal implications if they are posting comments or views on social media about individual Members or Council employees or sharing information about the Council.

7.8 Staff members will be in control of the Council's social media platforms and Cllrs will be encouraged to send items to staff for publishing. Any comments made by the public will be closely monitored and offensive comments removed or hidden from view. Responses to questions raised on social media platforms will be the same as for postal or email inquiries with a response expected to be received within 5 working days.

7.9 At extremely busy times of the year or during extended holidays where the social media platform is unable to be monitored a post will be pinned to the top of the page explaining the situation.

8. Non-Compliance

8.1 Where evidence of misuse is found High Kelling Parish Council may undertake an investigation in accordance with the Council's disciplinary policy.

8.2 Any complaints received regarding the use of social media will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Complaints Procedure.

9. Equal Opportunities

9.1 Different levels of use and access to social media by individuals will vary greatly. For important communications, social media should not be used as the sole method of communication. Content shared by social media may not be equally accessible to all. Wherever possible, staff should ensure that information and resources shared by social media are accessible to the widest possible number of people and/or can be provided in alternative formats (on request).

Agreed by Full Council on 21st January 2025

To be reviewed January 2028