



## PRESS, MEDIA AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

### 1. Communications with the media

- 1.1. No Councillor shall communicate with the media or press on behalf of the Parish Council except as defined by this Policy.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. 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.
- 1.4. In the absence of the Parish Clerk, the Chairman or Vice-Chair will conduct any communications with the media or press and will follow the same procedures as the Parish Clerk.
- 1.5. 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.
- 1.6. The Chairman or Vice-Chair may be authorised by the Council to communicate with the media and press for a specific issue, event or time period.
- 1.7. 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.
- 1.8. Where the Chairman (or Vice-Chair in her/his absence) considers that it will not be in the best interest of the Council or the community to decline a request for a specific interview, then the Chairman (or Vice-Chair) will agree to such an interview and act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 1.9. The Chairman/Vice-Chair will consult with other Councillors and Clerk before reaching this decision where practical. The Chairman/Vice-Chair 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.
- 1.10. The Chairman or Vice-Chair 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.



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- 1.11. In performing the communications and PR functions under sections 1.4 to 1.9 of this policy, councillors must comply with the legislation as set out in section 4 of Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. In particular: *Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both.*  
The Parish Council will 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.
- 1.12. In performing the communications and PR functions under sections 1.4 to 1.9 of this policy, councillors must be aware that 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 Balsall Parish Council that implies the Chairman or Vice-Chair or any other councillor deputed to write on behalf of the council.
- 1.13. Where any councillor writes or speaks in a personal capacity he/she will ensure that this is made clear as far as is practical.

## 2. Internal Communications

- 2.10. Communications between Councillors and with employees will always be conducted in accordance with the principles of the Code of Conduct.
- 2.11. The Information Commissioner advises that communications by Councillors and held on private email accounts concerning council business are subject to FOI requests in accordance with the FOI Act. Similarly, information held on a personal computer, mobile device including texts and paper (or in the cloud) concerning council business is also subject to an FOI request. The Commissioner advises that *"the occasions when this will be necessary are expected to be rare"*. Consequently,
- 2.11.1 Any email exchange that involves the Clerk can subject to an FOI request and will be released unless it is covered by a legal exemption.
- 2.11.2 Political matters are not the subject to the FOI Act for release. However, political matters never involve the Clerk, who is not political.
- 2.11.3 Where the Clerk believes that information pertaining to the "business of the council" is held on a private computer and is not held by the Clerk, then the Clerk can lawfully ask the holder of the private computer to release that information to the Clerk.
- 2.11.4 If asked to conduct a search for information, a Councillor shall conduct such a search and advise the Clerk of the actions and time taken in the search to enable the Council to demonstrate that reasonable action was taken.
- 2.11.5 It is a criminal offence to delete information held after it has been the subject to an FOI request.

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This policy is cross-referenced to the following Balsall Parish Council's adopted policies and procedures:  
Members Code of Conduct  
Standing Orders s22a  
Freedom of Information Act Policy and Procedure

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Review due: July 2021

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