

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY
(incorporating a Social Media Policy in Appendix A)

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, as issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The code is statutory guidance and therefore councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.

1.2 Failure to follow the council's Media and Communications Policy could lead to a breach of the statutory code and the risk of adverse publicity, which could damage the council's reputation. It is important that all councillor and officers understand the implications of this code which this policy explains within a local context.

1.3 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct.

2. Approach to publicity

2.1 The council welcomes enquiries from the press and media and recognises that a good relationship with the press helps communicate effectively with residents.

2.2 Equally, the council recognises that taking a proactive approach to communication ensures information is made available to residents in a timely manner and is accessible via as many media sources as possible including emerging social media platforms.

3. Principles of communication

3.1 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity identifies key principles regarding publicity, and the council will ensure any publicity:

- Is lawful
- Is cost effective
- Is objective
- Is even-handed
- Is appropriate
- Has regard to equality and diversity
- Is issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

4. Official council press releases

- 4.1 The council recognises that the use of press releases is a key technique for publicising council activities, decisions and achievements.
- 4.2 An official council press release is made on behalf of the council as a whole. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for a councillor (normally the Chairman, Vice Chairman or committee Chairman) to draft the press release, but the Clerk (or other nominated officer) will be responsible for checking and subsequently issuing any official council press release.
- 4.3 All press releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the council, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate councillor. Releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual councillors, identify a councillor's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.
- 4.4 Press releases will be issued to local newspapers and copies will be made available on the council's website. An edited version may be available via the council's social media platforms, with a link to the full story available.

5. Requests for interview

- 5.1 Any request for an interview with a councillor or officer should be referred to the Clerk (or other nominated officer) in the first instance. The Clerk, in liaison with the Chairman, will determine the most appropriate councillor or officer to be put forward for interview.
- 5.2 Where a councillor is authorised to speak on behalf of the council, it is their responsibility to ensure they are clear on the corporate position of the council, and that their responses to questions accurately reflect this.
- 5.3 Where an officer is authorised to speak on behalf of the council, they must never give their opinion on specific council policy and must remember their role is to provide expertise and factual knowledge in support of the council's agreed policies.
- 5.4 If a councillor has not been specifically authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, a councillor who is asked for a comment should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as such.

6. Publicity during elections

- 6.1 There are specific rules governing publicity when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself (purdah), all proactive publicity about candidates is halted.
- 6.2 During the purdah period, all council publicity shall be managed by the Clerk (or other nominated officer), and any quotes provided in support of press releases will be given by authorised officers.

7. Social media

- 7.1 The council recognises that for some residents, accessing information via social media platforms is their preferred method. While there are too many social media sites to include all of them, the council will endeavour to use those which are most widely used, and regularly review the type and number of social media sites used.
- 7.2 Social media sites will be used to support other communications issued by the council and will help provide a consistent message across all media formats. To help achieve this, only personnel approved by the Council may make social media releases on a Council account and any release relating to official Council business will be approved by either the Clerk, Chairman (or Vice Chairman in the Chairman's absence).
- 7.3 Where officers use social media in a professional capacity to represent the council, the council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual officer.
- 7.4 Officers using the Council's social media accounts must respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws, and be aware of the risks of action for defamation. Officers must not use insulting or offensive language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace or elsewhere.
- 7.5 Further details on use of Social Media are contained in Appendix A

8. General guidance for councillors and officers

- a. Councillors and officers must ensure they do not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press or other media on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on council or committee agendas or at any other private briefing.
- b. Councillors and officers should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the council.
- c. Councillors should not use the prefix 'Councillor' when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating council policy, which is not necessarily consistent with your personal opinion.
- d. Any councillor failing to follow the guidelines set out in this policy may find themselves in breach of the Members' Code of Conduct and subject to a complaint to the Monitoring Officer.
- e. Any officer failing to follow the guidance set out in this policy could face disciplinary action.

APPENDIX A

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and is designed to be effective, lawful and avoid compromising Parish Council information or computer systems and/or networks. It supplements and should be read in conjunction with the Media and Communications Policy as well as other policies and procedures adopted by the Parish Council such as Bullying and Harassment, Data Protection and Members Code of Conduct.

This policy applies to

- all Parish Councillors, Parish Council employees (including the Parish Clerk) and co-opted members of Committees and Working Parties
- use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, podcasts, forums, message boards and other relevant social media websites and Apps.

Hereafter the following references shall have the following meanings

- "Council" should be interpreted to mean Claygate Parish Council

1. General

1.1 Comply with the Media and Communications Policy at all times.

1.2 Social media must be used sensibly and responsibly and ensure that its use will not:

- (i) adversely affect the Council or its business
- (ii) be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility
- (iii) violate any Council policies

1.3 The following rules will apply to online social media network participation and sets out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of the Council.

- (i) Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy including disclaimers - see 1.3 (xiii).
- (ii) Be civil, respectful, tasteful and relevant. Derogatory comments are never permissible.
- (iii) Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make face-to-face.
- (iv) Never give out personal details unless they are already publicly available from the Council website or official Council publications. This includes Councillors, the Clerk, Council contacts or volunteers who attend Committee Meetings or Working Party Meetings or who carry out work on behalf of the Council.
- (v) Use of the Council's online Social Media accounts must always reflect the Council's position/decision on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion. If unsure, say nothing.
- (vi) Communications on official Council business must be approved by the Clerk (or other nominated officer).
- (vii) Comply with other Council policies when using social media including the Council's Code of Conduct policy and Communications Working Party Statement of Intent. In particular, you must not breach Council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.
- (viii) Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in accordance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR Regulations.

- (ix) Do not post images that contain people without getting written permission first. Written parental permission is required for young people.
- (x) Do not breach copyright of any third party material. If in doubt, say nothing.
- (xi) Do not promote the views of any political party.
- (xii) If you find information on any Council social media site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law.
- (xiii) When using social media for personal purposes you must make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view by including a standard disclaimer such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions".
- (xiv) Be careful on the Council's computer and other devices not to fall for phishing scams that arrive via email and provide a link for you to click.

- 1.4 Serious breaches of this policy by Councillors will be dealt with under the Council's Complaints Procedure.
- 1.5 Serious breaches of this policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and, if appropriate, further action will be taken.
- 1.6 During the period between the close of Nominations for a Parish Council election and Polling Day (purdah), only the Parish Clerk will post material to social media.

2. Responsibilities

- 2.1 The Council is responsible for agreeing which Social Media accounts will be set up.
- 2.2 The designated "owner" of the Council's Social Media accounts will be either the Parish Clerk or a Councillor authorised by the Chair of Communications Working Party.
- 2.3 Councillors appointed by the Council may assist with the dissemination of information via the agreed Social Media accounts. However, all must ensure they follow the Council's Social Media policy.
- 2.4 No account details for a Council Social Media account may be changed without the written permission of the designated "owner" of the account.

3. Twitter

- 3.1 The official Twitter account should be reviewed regularly by an Administrator/Moderator appointed by the designated "owner" of the account including security settings.
- 3.2 Only personnel approved by the Council should be able to make a "tweet" or "retweet".
- 3.3 Statements on official Council business or policies must be approved by the Parish Clerk, Chair or Vice Chair of the Council.
- 3.4 In general, the Council's Twitter account should only follow reputable individuals or organisations.
- 3.5 Any abusive, libellous or offensive postings will be blocked/removed by the Moderator without notice or comment. Such postings should be reported to Twitter and must be reported to the Council for Council records. Criticism of the Council shall not be sufficient grounds for blocking/removing a posting.
- 3.6 Should abusive postings become a serious problem, the Administrator will consult with the Clerk and Chair of the Parish Council to review whether a "follower" should be blocked.

3.7 Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection on any Council owned device used to access Twitter to avoid infections of spyware and adware.

4. **Facebook**

4.1 The official Council Facebook page should be reviewed regularly by an Administrator/Moderator appointed by the designated “owner” of the account.

4.2 The security settings should be set such that only personnel approved by the Council are allowed full access to the site.

4.3 Only personnel approved by the Council should be able to make a posting or comment.

4.4 Statements on official Council business or policies must be approved by the Parish Clerk, Chair or Vice Chair of the Council.

4.5 In general, the Council’s Facebook account should only follow reputable individuals or organisations.

4.6 Any abusive, libellous or offensive postings will be blocked/removed by the Moderator without notice or comment. Such postings should be reported to Facebook and must be reported to the Council for Council records. Criticism of the Council shall not be sufficient grounds for blocking/removing a posting.

4.7 Should abusive postings become a serious problem, the Administrator/Moderator will consult with the Clerk and Chair of the Parish Council to review whether to change the settings so that postings have to be reviewed by the Administrator/Moderator before becoming visible to the public.

4.8 To reduce security risks, do not install any external applications that work with the social networking site. For example, calendar programs and games.

4.9 Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection on any Council owned device used to access Facebook to avoid infections of spyware and adware.

5. **Other Council Social Media Accounts**

5.1 This policy will be reviewed and updated whenever any other Social Media accounts are intended to be used.

6. **Personal Social Media Accounts**

6.1 Individual Councillors should ensure they comply with this policy.

6.2 Councillors need to be mindful that people classified as “friends” on Facebook or “followers” on Twitter have the ability to share your information with others. As a result, it may not be possible to completely remove a comment, information or picture from public view.

6.3 Councillors must ensure that they comply with the following rules when making comments about Council related matters.

(i) Do not imply you are speaking for the Council. See Item 1.3 (xiii)

(ii) Do not imply you have made up your mind about any topic on an agenda for discussion by the Council or any of its Committees or Working Parties.

(iii) Do not disclose confidential Council matters or criticise Council policies or personnel.

(iv) Do not make use of the Council e-mail address, logos or other Council identification.

- (v) Avoid posting personal comments that include a link to the Council website or Council Social Media accounts.

6.4 Guidelines for the use of online social media network sites by Councillors who propose to use their personal site for any purpose that can be deemed to relate to Council matters are:

- (i) Be careful to conduct yourself online so as to uphold a professional image for the Parish Council.
- (ii) Post only what you want the world to see as it may continue to be available even after it is removed from the site.
- (iii) Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions or characterizations.
- (iv) Consider whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Claygate Parish Council at risk.

6.5 You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of personal social media.

7. Guidance for Councillors - social media and meetings

7.1 Extra guidelines for Councillors to consider for the use of social media during meetings are as follows:

- (i) Handheld devices and laptops are permitted for use during meetings. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings, not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part.
- (ii) Any tweets/blogs during Council meetings should refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting. Tweeting/blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting.
- (iii) Councillors have a responsibility to take Council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to insult or tease other members. Claygate residents expect debate and to be informed about Council business, not witness petty arguments.
- (iv) Councillors that break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory) will be personally responsible.

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