



HAYDON WICK PARISH COUNCIL

PRESS, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 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 other means such as social media, Parish Council website and Parish Council noticeboards is also covered by this policy.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.

2. Aims

- 2.1 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 so 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 Each Parish Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community.

3. The Legal Framework

3.1 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".

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

3.3 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.

3.4 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.

3.5 There are a number of personal privacy issues for Officers and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the 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 Parish Clerk before any response is made to the media.

4. Contact with the Media

- 4.1 When responding to approaches from the media, the Chairman of the Council is the authorised contact with the media in consultation with the Parish Clerk. 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
- 4.2 Statements made must reflect The Council's opinion. If practicable, to assist with accuracy it is preferred that such statements are in writing.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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 Clerk 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.
- 4.6 At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.
- 4.7 All of the above shall apply equally to postings by an individual Councillor on social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook.

5. Attendance of Media at the Council or Committee Meetings

- 5.1 Agendas and minutes of meetings will be supplied to media outlets together with dates of meetings being available on the Council's website.
- 5.2 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas and approved minutes be sent to the media on request.
- 5.3 The media are encouraged to attend Council and Committee meetings.

- 5.4 Filming or taping of Council or Committee is governed by Standing Order 13 which states “Photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of a meeting by any means is permitted subject to following the guidance issued in August 2014 by the Department for Communities and Local Government entitled “Open and accountable local government”.

6. Elections

- 6.1 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.”
- 6.2 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.

7. Press Releases

- 7.1 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.

- 7.2 Any Officer or Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Parish Clerk 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.

8. Urgent Situations

- 8.1 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 Parish Clerk 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.
- 8.2 In the event of the Parish Clerk being unable to contact the Chairman of the Council or relevant Chair of Committee, he/she is authorised to act in their absence.

9. Council Noticeboards and Website

- 9.1 the Council noticeboards are primarily for the display of agenda and other statutory notices relating to the Council's business and also notices from the District and County Council's, 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 Clerk is to be responsible for maintaining the information on the noticeboards and ensuring that the information therein is up to date.
- 9.2 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 Parish Clerk 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.
- 9.3 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.

10. Newsletters and Parish Magazine

- 10.1 Two of the Criteria for granting of "Quality Council" status are that the Council should undertake the following:

- Publish an Annual Report;
 - Provide regular information to residents on Parish Council activities.
- 10.2 The annual report should be published and delivered to accessible households in the Parish once the annual accounts are completed and approved by the full the Council meeting.
- 10.3 The Parish Clerk 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.
- 10.4 In addition, a report summarising recent decisions and progress with ongoing projects, will be submitted for publication. Other articles may be submitted on an “ad hoc” basis relating to items of information or interest to the Parishioners relating to the Parish Council.
- 10.5 Articles for publication may be compiled by any member of the Council but should be submitted to the Clerk to verify that the content is compliant with Council Policy before submission to the Community Engagement Group for review and recommendation for publication.
- 10.6 Production and distribution will be undertaken, using best value to achieve a good quality product and wide distribution throughout the Parish.
- 10.7 The Community Engagement Group will oversee the editing and production of the newsletter.
- 10.8 The Clerk will arrange for the printing and distribution as required with the assistance of Councillors and others in distributing copies.
- 10.9 Members, either individually or in groups, shall not fund, publish or distribute any publication which would bring the Council into disrepute.
- 10.10 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 Clerk 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/Clerk. This policy is not intended to restrict any Councillor from presenting their views during any bona-fide election period.

11. Article Content

- 11.1 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.

- 11.2 The Haydon Wick Newsletter will not publish political party advertisements.
- 11.3 the Council will reserve the right to edit and modify any submission prior to publication without reference to the submitter.