



# WHITE COLNE PARISH COUNCIL

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## Press & Media Policy

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to guide both Councillors and staff of the Council in their relations with the media and press organisations, in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.
- 1.2 This policy does not seek to be either prescriptive nor comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the media and press.
- 1.3 Above everything else, a Councillor must observe White Colne Parish Council's adopted Code of Conduct whenever they conduct the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which they have been elected or appointed, or acts as a representative of the authority.

### 2. Staff

- 2.1 An officer of the Council must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's Agenda or at any other private briefing.
- 2.2 An officer of the Council should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of White Colne Parish Council.
- 2.3 Both the Chairperson and the Parish Clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Council, are authorised to receive communications from the media and press and to issue Press Releases on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Chairperson and Clerk, a member of the Council may handle media and press communications.
- 2.4 All communications made by the Parish Clerk 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 Parish Clerk, the Clerk should refer the enquirer to the Chairperson.
- 2.5 No other officer of the Council nor member of staff apart from the above, unless authorised by the Parish Clerk, is permitted to speak or communicate with the media and press on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

### **3. Members of the Council**

- 3.1 A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the media or press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's Agenda or at any other private briefing.
- 3.2 A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of White Colne Parish Council.
- 3.3 When speaking or providing written material to the media or press, members should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. For example: as Chairperson of the Council; as a Parish Councillor; as an individual (such as a letter to the press for publication); as a spokesperson or as Press Officer for a political party.
- 3.4 The prefix "Cllr" should never be used when writing to the media or press as an individual as it implies a statement of Council policy.
- 3.5 Take particular care when approached by the media or press for comment on a potentially controversial subject, and do not be led into making statements. Do not comment upon policy unless there is certainty as to its provenance. Contact the Parish Council Office for clarification.
- 3.6 Councillors should be aware that case law states the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This can mean that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the media or press, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business.
- 3.7 Councillors have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that they disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the media or press.
- 3.8 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer or member of staff at meetings held in public or before the media or press.

### **4. Dealing with media and press**

- 4.1 When dealing with media or press verbally, members and officers should be aware of the following:
  - Be informed and certain of the facts
  - Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Parish Council that you are aware of Council Policy and that comments reflect that policy
  - Remain calm
  - Ensure that comments and views expressed will not bring the Council, its Councillors, or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous

### **5. Issues to be aware of**

- 5.1 Councillors and officers unused to dealing with media or press may be surprised when statements made in all innocence appear very different when in print than they did when spoken. It is advantageous to prepare a written statement or position beforehand.

## **6. Press Releases**

- 6.1 All Press Releases made on behalf of the Parish Council will be prepared by the Chairperson and/or Parish Clerk.
- 6.2 The Parish Clerk, in consultation with the Chairperson, has delegated authority to publish Press Releases on any urgent matters.

## **7. Social Media**

- 7.1 Social media is defined as websites and applications such as, but not exclusively, facebook and Instagram, that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.
- 7.2 The Parish Council engages in social media via its website. However, the increased use of mobile devices means that residents, particularly younger residents, use their phones rather than their laptops to keep abreast of current events. The size of these devices means that viewing a whole website is more difficult. As such, information passed in short bursts can form an effective way of rapidly informing a wide audience.
- 7.3. The Parish Council's social media policy defines the goals for social media activity, ensures that the Clerk and Councillors are aware of the standards and processes that are in place and are using the most appropriate channels, and protects the Parish Council's reputation from inappropriate use of social media.
- 7.4 The Parish Council's social media policy sets out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to White Colne Parish Councillors, the Clerk, and others who engage with the Parish Council using social media. In the main, Parish Councillors and the Clerk have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites.
- 7.5 Social media does not, and is not intended to, replace existing forms of communication e.g. Newsletters, Noticeboards etc. The current Code of Conduct applies to social media activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Individual Parish Councillors and Parish employees are responsible for what they post in a Parish Council capacity.
- 7.6 Social media may be used to:
- Advertise Parish Council events and activities
  - Announce new information from the Parish Council
  - Promote links to news stories on the White Colne Parish Council website
  - Advertise Parish Council vacancies
  - Share information from trusted partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health, Weather, Utilities etc.
  - Post or share information from other Parish community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
  - Consult with the community on parish issues
- 7.7 Social media will NOT be used to engage in debate. In the event of a comment or query the Parish Council will respond requesting the author of the comments to make contact via email to the Clerk
- 7.8 When using social media Parish Councillors and the Clerk must be mindful of the information they post in a Parish Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

- 7.9 Parish Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Parish Council at a Council Meeting constitute pre-disposition, predetermination or bias, and may require the individual to declare an interest at subsequent Council meetings.
- 7.10 The Parish Council social media 'Webmaster' and Moderator shall be the Clerk.
- 7.11 Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media that denigrates Parish Councillors, the Clerk, or residents should report the content to the Clerk to the Council.
- 7.12 Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative and must comply with the Parish Council Code of Conduct.
- 7.13 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.
  - 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.

## **8. Policy**

- 8.1 This document has been prepared as a guidance note for officers, staff, and elected members of White Colne Parish Council. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with media and press. The policy has been prepared to ensure consistency in the Council's dealing with media and press, and details who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council. It has been drafted to ensure that the views and policy of the Council are presented accurately.
- 8.2 Officers, staff, and elected members of the Council are encouraged to read and abide by the "Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity" published by the DCLG.
- 8.3 The overriding principle of this policy is that all elements of the media and press will be treated equally.

**Adopted: May 2025; Minute ref: 022/25**

**Next review: May 2026**