



Lancing Parish Council

Communication, Social Media, Email & Internet Policy

Document Control		
Version Number	V2	
Adopted on	8 May 2019	60.5/May/19
Review Date	2021	

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, as issued by the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The code is statutory guidance and therefore Councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.
- 1.2 Failure to follow this 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 Councillors and officers understand the implications of this code which this policy explains within a local context.

2.0 PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

- 2.1 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
- 2.2 This policy should also be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct and the Council's Communication Strategy.

3.0 APPROACH TO PUBLICITY

- 3.1 The Council welcomes enquiries from the press and media and recognises that a good relationship with the press helps communicate effectively with residents.
- 3.2 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 social media platforms.

4.0 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, Deputy 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 will be posted on the Council's website. An edited version will also be posted via the Council's social media platform, with a link to the full story available.

5.0 REQUESTS FOR INTERVIEW

5.1 Any request for an interview with a Councillor or an 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.

6.0 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.

7.0 SOCIAL MEDIA

7.1 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, all social media releases will be approved by the Clerk (or other nominated officer).

7.2 Only the Clerk (or nominated officer) is permitted to post material on social media in the Council's name and on the Council's behalf.

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 Responses to external postings must be consistent and factual. The primary response is to acknowledge the comment and give reassurance that the matter will be investigated (if appropriate). The secondary response is to advise what action has or will be taken. Requests in respect of Freedom of Information (FOI) will be treated as such and directed to the Council's FOI webpage.

7.5 Council posts will be frequent and relevant, with pictures where possible. The account will have high security settings and be monitored to ensure compliance with legislation

(copyright, data protection etc.). The targeted time frame for responses will be within 48 hours, during office hours.

7.6 Rules for use of social media

- 7.6.1 This policy also outlines the standards the Council requires Councillors and officers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which it will be monitored and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.
- 7.6.2 Misuse of social media can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against a Councillor, officer or the Council.
- 7.6.3 In particular a serious case of uploading, posting, forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
- a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
 - b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
 - c) material which is offensive or obscene
 - d) criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, members, or our employees;
 - e) confidential information about the Council or anyone else
 - f) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the Council); or
 - g) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.
- 7.6.4 Any employee, volunteer or Member who feels that they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Clerk in the first instance.
- 7.6.5 Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk in the first instance.
- 7.6.6 Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- 7.6.7 Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- 7.6.8 When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 7.6.9 Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council.
- 7.6.10 You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.

- 7.6.11 Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 7.6.12 Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- 7.6.13 Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- 7.6.14 Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.
- 7.6.15 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.
- 7.6.16 Any officer failing to follow the guidance set out in this policy could face disciplinary action.

8.0 INTERNET USAGE

- 8.1 Employees are encouraged to use the internet responsibly as part of their official and professional activities.
- 8.2 Information obtained via the internet and published in the name of the Council must be relevant and professional. A disclaimer must be stated where personal views are expressed.
- 8.3 The use of the internet to access and/or distribute any kind of offensive material will not be tolerated and employees may be subject to disciplinary action.
- 8.4 The equipment, services and technology used to access the internet are the property of the Council. The Council reserves the right to monitor internet traffic and monitor and access data that is composed, sent or received through its online connections.

9.0 UNACCEPTABLE USE OF THE INTERNET

- 9.1 Unacceptable use of the internet by employees includes, but is not limited to:
- a) sending or posting discriminatory, harassing or threatening messages or images;
 - b) using computers to perpetrate any form of fraud, and/or software, film or music piracy;
 - c) obtaining, using or disclosing another employee's password without authorisation;
 - d) sharing confidential material or proprietary information outside of the Council;
 - e) hacking into unauthorised websites;
 - f) sending or posting information that is defamatory to the Council, its services, Councillors and/or members of the public;
 - g) introducing malicious software onto Council computers and/or jeopardising the security of the Council's electronic communication systems;
 - h) sending or posting chain letters, solicitations or advertisements not related to Council business or activities;
 - i) passing off personal views as those representing the Council;
 - j) accessing inappropriate internet sites, web pages or chat rooms.

9.2 If an employee is unsure about what constitutes acceptable internet usage, then further guidance and clarification should be sought from the Clerk.

10.0 EMAIL

10.1 Use of email is encouraged as it provides an efficient system of communication.

10.2 Councillors will be issued with a Lancing Parish Council email address in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation as it gives a natural segregation between personal and Councillor business, so it is clear beyond doubt in what capacity a Councillor is acting, gives control to the Council, adds a degree of professionalism and in the event of a FOI request, limits access to personal computers.

10.3 Email should be regarded as written paper documents for the purposes of production, use, retention and disclosure and can be called upon under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Personal information should be kept in accordance with the principles established in the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation.

10.4 Rules on the use of Council Email

10.4.1 The following guidelines for email use should be observed by all employees and Councillors:

- a) use appropriate language to avoid unintentional misunderstandings;
- b) respect the confidentiality of information contained within emails, even if encountered inadvertently;
- c) check with the sender if there is any doubt regarding the authenticity of a message;
- d) do not open any attachment unless certain of the authenticity of the sender;
- e) only copy emails to others where appropriate and necessary;
- f) emails which create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the Council must be sent by officers only, not Councillors;
- g) emails must comply with common codes of courtesy, decency and privacy.

10.4.2 The Council reserves the right to open any email file stored on the Council's computers and email system.

11.0 REPORTING AND SANCTIONS

11.1 If a Councillor receives an email from an employee which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, it should be reported to the Clerk who will consider use of the Council's formal disciplinary procedure or refer the matter to the HR Sub-Committee depending on the severity of the event.

11.2 If an employee receives an email from another employee which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, it should be reported to the Clerk who will consider use of the Council's formal disciplinary procedure or refer the matter to the HR Sub-Committee depending on the severity of the event.

11.3 If an employee receives an email from a Councillor which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, the employee is entitled to consider use of the Council's grievance policy and/or report the issue through the procedures outlined in the Member's Code of Conduct.

12.0 SECURITY

12.1 Only software purchased by the Council shall be installed on the Council's computer system. Software licences shall be retained.

13.0 FURTHER GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS

13.1 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.

13.2 Councillors and officers should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.

13.3 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.