



Oulton Broad Parish Council and Nicholas Everitt Park Trust Press and Media Policy

Introduction

This policy applies on those occasions when the Parish Council, as a body corporate, issues a press release or information to factually clarify/correct comments published in the media or is asked for a statement, a comment or information from the media.

Media is defined as any activity “reporting” on the Parish Council.

This policy does not, and is not intended to, apply when individual Councillors are contacted directly by the media for a personal comment/statement nor when individual Councillors contact the media with a personal statement. In such cases it should be made clear that it is the individual’s own opinion/comment, not that of the Parish Council.

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to the Clerk and the Council regarding procedures and protocol to follow when dealing with the press and public. This includes use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media and the management of the Council’s website, as well as the more traditional ways of communicating.

There are many benefits to using a variety of ways to communicate with our public. We are committed to traditional ways of communication with newsletters, questionnaires and through our website. Our Social Media platform provides additional channels for audiences to interact with the Parish Council, provide feedback, seek help and suggest ways we can improve our services. The Council uses Facebook as its Social Media site.

Policy Statement

Oulton Broad Parish Council wishes to be open and transparent in the way it considers information and takes decisions. As a Parish Council, we will therefore proactively seek opportunities to publish information about our activities with the intention of raising awareness about what the Parish Council is doing.

Procedures

The Clerk is permitted to issue routine communications with the media on behalf of the Council on routine matters and in emergencies as the Proper Officer and accountable staff member.

Other matters, where reasonably possible, will be dealt with in line with the policy below

When the Chair is unavailable the Vice Chair will take on any of the specified tasks and responsibilities.

Any relevant publicity will comply with the latest version of the Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity.

Press and Public.

In the interests of openness and transparency, members of the public and press may film, record, photograph or use social media in order to report on the proceedings of a meeting of the Council or its committees when they are open to the public. This does not extend to live verbal commentary. Filming and photography are permitted from the area designated in the meeting room. No flash photography or additional lighting should be used without prior consent. Anyone wishing to report on the meeting must notify the Clerk or Chairman so that they can be afforded reasonable facilities. People under the age of 18 or other members of the public not wishing to be filmed or photographed should notify the Clerk or Chairman and should sit in the area designated for this purpose. Improper conduct or any disruptive behaviour could result in expulsion from the meeting.

Requests from the Media

All staff should make the Clerk aware of all approaches from the media for interviews, statements, or information. The Clerk (or other member of staff in the absence of the Clerk) and Chair should ensure that the other is advised of any approaches made to them.

Any request from the media will be discussed by the Clerk and Chair and the decision will be made who will be the most appropriate person to make the response on behalf of the Parish Council.

In cases where the response is being made by someone other than the Clerk or Chair, prior to its release, the Chair and Clerk should be made aware of and agree at least the broad content of any response.

Response to Media Articles, published letters, on-line comments, tweets, Facebook postings etc

Every situation must be carefully assessed, and, in many cases, a corporate response will not be appropriate.

All councillors and staff seeing an article / item which affects the Council's interests and/or which might require a corporate response should inform the Chair and the Clerk.

In assessing whether or not a corporate response is appropriate the following will be considered:

Is the article / item in question factually accurate?

Is the article / item expressing a personal view – and if so is that clearly stated?

Would further discussion on the subject be constructive?

Any potential corporate response will be discussed by the Clerk and the Chair for a decision on the most appropriate person to make the response on behalf of the Parish Council.

Prior to its release the Chair and Clerk should be made aware of the broad content of any corporate response where they were not involved in its preparation.

Media Release

The Clerk, Chair and Committee Chairs will identify issues and stories that have the potential to be interest to the public.

The Clerk will draft corporate media releases consulting with the Chair and Committee Chairs or any individual Councillor as appropriate.

An information copy of the final corporate media release will be sent to the Chair and any Councillor who is quoted in the text.

Corporate media releases will be sent to relevant media outlets by the Clerk, considering the likely level of interest (local or national).

A copy of the corporate media release will be posted on the Parish Council's website.

A copy of the corporate media release will be sent to Councillors and staff.

In all cases, where quotation are included from Councillors in the Press release, the Clerk will obtain approval from the Councillor. Press Release will detail the name and contact details of the Clerk. No Press Release should be issued containing the Clerk's or Councillor's personal opinion.

Media Training

Opportunities will be made for councillors and the Clerk to attend training in dealing with the media.

The Parish Council's website

This is managed by the Clerk. The Clerk will, in a timely way, upload the information as required by law such as minutes and agendas, financial and governance information. Additional information uploaded will include news items supported by photographs.

Facebook

Social media posts will be clear and use language accessible and suitable for the platform on which they appear. Language will be informal in tone, but reflect the Parish Council as a credible public body. Updates will be timely, addressing current topics of interest and contributing to the public discussion on activities and issues. Updates will be informative to members of the public and other statutory and non-statutory bodies with links to our website. Where possible and appropriate, the Parish Council will post media such as photos.

Operation of Facebook

The Parish Council will not respond to all comments posted on Facebook, but will always aims to provide a response when maintaining or protecting its reputation. Facebook will be monitored during weekday office hours and will be non-political. Political posts will be removed and the PC will not engage on issues of party politics at any time. The Parish

Council cannot ensure comments will be viewed during evenings, weekends or during public holidays, or staff holiday times.

The social media posts are managed by two Councillors and the Clerk. The views expressed by these people on the social media account will be interpreted as those of the Parish Council. These people must be mindful when using social media, particularly when commenting on contentious issues, and must speak on behalf of the Parish Council, rather than personal opinion. No comments will be made to posts received. Posts which contain personal and inflammatory remarks will be removed.

Councillors are responsible for what they post in connection with the Council. Councillors are strongly advised to adhere to the Council's Code of Conduct and follow the principles of the Data Protection Act, as incorporated into the Council's Data protection policy.

Inappropriate language or anything that might contravene libel, defamation, copyright or data protection laws will be removed.

Online social media sites may occasionally be unavailable and the Parish Council accepts no responsibility for lack of service.

Feedback and ideas are welcomed from all sections of the community and the Parish Council will endeavour to join the conversation where possible. However, it may not be possible to reply individually to all messages.

Members of the public can expect that any social media presence developed and managed by the Council will include some or all of the following:

- Alerts such as news, publications, events, publicity campaigns, Council/Committee meetings and new content on our other digital channels
- Invitations to provide feedback on specific issues on which we are consulting
- Information about or from partners or other local groups about what they're doing
- Occasional live coverage of events
- Information about local emergency situations, where these are severe and disruptive to the community, where possible

The Parish Council may follow or subscribe to social media accounts from other users. This does not imply endorsement of any kind.

Decision Making

In relation to the Parish Council's Standing Orders, this policy is the relevant Media Policy.

Any decision about the content of corporate media releases or information to be supplied to the media or any response to any media item will be taken by the Clerk, following consultation with the Chair where appropriate. (This delegation complies with the legislative restriction that an individual Councillor cannot decide on behalf of the Council.)