

Pontesbury Parish Council

Communication/Press & Media Policy

www.pontesburyparishcouncil.org.uk

AIMs: To establish clear, easy to use channels of communication between Pontesbury Parish Council and the community it serves and to develop a good rapport and work proactively with the media.

To provide information on important matters in an appropriate manner so as to facilitate and encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups

The Parish Council seeks to ensure that confidentiality and consent are maintained at all times.

Introduction

1.1 This policy outlines the procedures and arrangements for communicating with the public and handling the press, and what Councillors or the Clerk should do if approached for information or by the media or if they are involved in a situation that will attract media attention.

1.2 Pontesbury Parish Council is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. Where this information is not available via the Council's website please contact the Parish Council Clerk.

1.3 This policy does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity.

1.4 The Council will, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering information for publication in any form including the internet.

2 Legal Requirements

2.1 The Access to Local Government Meetings and Documents (England) Local Audit and Accountability Act, requires Local Councils to be open and transparent; this includes:

- Access to and recording of meetings,
- Access to minutes and reports,
- Access to council policies, procedures and financial information.

2.2 All of the above are available on the Parish Council website, or in hard copy from the Parish Council Clerk

2.3 Requests for information about the parish council will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act and the new GDPR Regulations.

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Adopted 9 JULY 2018

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2.4 The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information that is prohibited from publication by law, a court order, by legislation, the Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law.

2.5 Under the code of conduct Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information.

3 Meetings (Dates of meetings and agendas can be found on Parish Council noticeboards and website)

3.1 Members of the public/press are welcome to attend council meetings and there will be a 15 minute discussion time for press and public at the beginning of each meeting.

3.2 Press and public can if they wish record or broadcast the meeting, unless:

- The council has resolved to exclude the press or public to discuss items of a confidential nature (e.g. personnel matters)
- The recording of broadcasting would disrupt the meeting

3.3 The photographing of a child or vulnerable adult is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.

3.4 Reasonable facilities for the reporting of meetings will be provided if needed if prior notice is given.

3.5 Under Pontesbury Parish Council's Standing Orders, if any item is deemed personal or sensitive and not for public domain, then press/media along with members of the public will be asked to leave the meeting.

4 Enquiries from Press / Media

4.1 The Parish Council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information from the Parish Council under the Freedom of Information Act. The Council will respond to such requests in accordance with the Act as laid out in Pontesbury Parish Council's Freedom of Information policy.

The Council will not release information that is exempted. Exemptions will be:

- Personal data (see 2.3/2.4 above)
- Confidential matters
- Information likely to endanger the health or safety of a Councillor or Clerk or any other individual.

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4.2 Upon receipt of a request, the person receiving a request will refer the matter to the Clerk, or Chair in the Clerk's absence, having ascertained who the caller is working for and the exact nature of their enquiry. They should also be asked what and where any information given will be used. The person taking the request will say that a statement will be considered and issued shortly.

4.3 The Council is under no obligation to make a statement – and may prefer to make 'no comment'.

4.4 Clerk will respond to any request after consultation with the Chair and ideally other Councillors. The exception to point 4.4 is if the Parish Council had delegated a specific Parish Councillor to make the response on behalf of the Council.

4.5 The response to the press or media should be the view of the Parish Council as a whole and not the view of an individual Cllr or the Clerk. If the views of a Councillor are different to the Council's corporate view they will make this clear and that they are not speaking on behalf of the Council.

4.6 In the event that a request for information involves a conflict of interest for a Councillor or the Clerk the Councillor or Clerk must declare his or her interest and avoid involvement with the matter.

4.7. No response should be made that is in any way damaging to the interests or reputation of the Parish Council. Press releases are a positive way of promoting the work of the Council. All press statements should be authorised by the Clerk & Chairman.

4.8 The Clerk should keep a record of all communications with the Press or other media.

6 Social Media (currently not used)

6.1 Only authorised persons (clerk/nominated councillors) are permitted to post material on a social media website in the council's name and on its behalf.

6.2 Councillors using social media must make it clear that they are expressing their own views and not those of the Council as a corporate body.

7 Noticeboards

7.1 The following items will be displayed permanently;

- Parish Councillors with contact telephone numbers
- Parish Council meeting dates for the year

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7.2 Notice of the annual audited accounts will be displayed when appropriate

7.3 Agendas for Parish Council meetings will be displayed at least 3 days in advance of the meeting concerned.

7.4 Notices for parishioners will be displayed as and when appropriate.

8 Parish Magazine

8.1 Appropriate notices will be published as and when required.

9 Parish Council Website

9.1 The following items will be permanently available;

- Parish Councillors names
- Parish Council meeting dates for the year
- The approved Parish Council Minutes
- Parish Council policies and procedures
- Parish Council accounts and audit information

The Parish Clerk will ensure that all Parish Council information included on the website is regularly updated.

10 Correspondence

10.1 All correspondence relating to the parish should be addressed to the Parish Clerk in the first instance. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the relevant person or organisation as soon as practicably possible.

10.2 If a parishioner wishes a matter to be formally discussed at a Parish Council meeting, then the Parish Clerk must be notified at least 10 days prior to the meeting to enable the matter to be included on the agenda.

11 Annual Parish Meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting is held so that parishioners can have the opportunity to listen to the progress of the Parish Council over the last year and have the opportunity to debate local issues and celebrate local events and activities.

This Policy will be reviewed annually and recommendations for changes to it should be approved by Full Council.

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