

SPREYTON PARISH COUNCIL.

Press and Media Policy.

This document sets out Spreyton Parish Councils approved and agreed practices. Any deviation must be made by resolution of the full Council and recorded below.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media including social media platforms.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

KEY AIMS

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. All mediums for communication 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.

The Council may on occasion use social media to:

- Increase community engagement and offer responsive communication
- Improve democratic engagement
- Support emergency and crisis communications
- Share messages which are aligned to the Code of Conduct

It is important that the press have access to the Clerk & Councillors (Cllrs) and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

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THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

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 governments **Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity**. The Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to. All communications posted by the Council must conform with **Data Protection Act 2018**.

CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

The Clerk and Cllrs should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

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 appropriate action will be taken.

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 a solicitor before any response is made.

There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Cllrs that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address telephone number (although some of the Member 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 Clerk before any response is made to the media.

All formal requests for comment regarding Spreyton Parish Council (SPC) policy on any matter should be directed to the Clerk in the first instance. If unavailable, the Chair should be contacted.

When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk or Chair are authorised to make contact with the media. All responses to the press should be drafted by the Chair with the assistance of the Clerk for accuracy regarding SPC current policy on the matter being responded to and its lawfulness.

Responses drafted on any matter may however be directed to another councillor with the assistance of the Clerk and others for accuracy and lawfulness.

In this instance the Chair should be made fully aware of the response and agree to its contents.

Statements made by the Chair and the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion. If SPC does not have an official position on the matter raised, this should be stated as SPC current position.

Other Cllrs can communicate with the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council. Cllrs are at liberty to communicate with the press in their own right as representatives of their wards. However, they must always maintain that they speak as individuals and not on behalf of SPC as per the Code of Conduct.

Cllrs' views posted on social media in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated at a Council meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

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. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.

ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

The **Local Government Act 1972** requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.

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The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

On 6 August 2014, the 1960 Act was amended by the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 (“the 2014 Regulations”). The amended 1960 Act provides that a person may not orally report or comment about a meeting as it takes place if he is present at the meeting of a council or its committees but otherwise may:

- film, photograph or make an audio recording of a meeting;
- use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear proceedings at a meeting as it takes place or later;
- report or comment on the proceedings in writing during or after a meeting or orally report or comment after the meeting.

COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Password & Accounts.

All parish council social media channels must only be used for business of the authority and never for private use.

The clerk will manage the allocation of all social media usernames and passwords, as well as any changes to them. Account details and passwords must not be changed or shared with unauthorised users.

Professionalism & Tone

Anything you write on a council social media channel reflects on the Council but, given the relaxed style of social media, it's important not to appear overly formal.

DO

- Engage with conversations, share news and ask questions
- Post content and respond to questions
- Take difficult conversations out of the public domain and on to a private channel

DO NOT

- Ignore genuine questions or interactions
- Engage in political debate
- Engage in discussions on draft/unratified council policies
- Reveal confidential or sensitive information about the authority or your work
- Delete posts/comments unless necessary (see Moderation)
- Use 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
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity

Responding to Negative Posts

Negative posts can't be avoided but how they are dealt with has implications for the authority's reputation. They should not be ignored, although sometimes no answer is required if it is a rhetorical question, a repetition of an earlier posting or a post designed to provoke. If such posts are public, it is better to acknowledge them in public although, occasionally, it may be necessary to take them onto a private channel.

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Moderation

The Council are under no obligation to moderate posts or comments by the public. However, there are measures which must be taken to ensure our duty of care when using social media which could be viewed by young and vulnerable people.

The council must not be seen to be endorsing comments which are:

- Defamatory, false or misleading
- Insulting, threatening or abusive
- Obscene or of a sexual nature
- Offensive, racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory against any religions or other groups
- Promoting illegal activity
- Intended to deceive

If any comment, by the Council or a user, is suspected as falling into one of these categories then contact the Clerk at Spreytonparishcouncil@gmail.com / 01837 83484 immediately

Photography & Video

- Copyright – the Council must have written permission from the original copyright-holder before using any photo or video. Copyright cannot be transferred from a third party.
- Stock image libraries all have restrictions on usage. The Council must check the licensing agreements.
- Images of young or vulnerable people – the Council must not take or use any images of young or vulnerable people without written permission from their parent or guardian.
- If a young or vulnerable person uploads a picture to a social media profile or page you control, you could be held responsible for not acting upon it if it's later deemed to play a part in an offence.

If you suspect there is an issue with an image, contact the Clerk.

Drone Photography

As drone photography becomes more common-place, you must be aware of the Civil Aviation Authority's legal guidelines for using them if doing so as an unlicensed operator:

- Don't fly within 50m of people or buildings
- Don't fly within 150m of, or over, crowds or built-up areas
- Always keep your drone in sight
- Fly below 120m (400ft) – if you endanger an aircraft, you could be jailed for up to five years

Images or video posted on behalf of the council must not breach these rules. For further guidance, visit www.dronesafe.uk

Risk Mitigation

- Passwords will be controlled and regularly changed by the Clerk.
- Account details and passwords will not be shared with unauthorised users.
- unsuitable content from other users, such as unsavoury comments/unsuitable posts and comments will be removed as soon as we are made aware of any issues (see Moderation)
- Damage to the council's reputation. The Clerk and Chair will liaise to formulate responses and actions to limit damage where required.

All users of social media on behalf of the council must agree to this policy

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PERSONAL USEAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Employees/Cllrs are personally accountable for what they publish on their own social media accounts. However, posts can still affect their professional standing and/or that of the Council.

The posting of inappropriate content could result in a formal investigation under the Councils disciplinary procedure and Code of Conduct if:

- Your profile refers to your position within the council
- You hold a prominent public-facing position within the authority

If you do refer to your position with the council on a personal social media profile, please ensure the following actions:

- Declare somewhere on your page or biography that the views expressed are yours alone
- Do not bring the authority into disrepute
- Do not reveal any potentially confidential or sensitive information about the authority that you may have come across in your work
- Do not use any council-owned images or logos
- Do not make offensive comments about the authority, members, colleagues or members of the public as this is a disciplinary offence

PRESS RELEASES

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 the Clerk and Cllrs to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

The Clerk or any Councillor may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in the section on the [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.