



DOWNSWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 Downswood Parish Council's relationship with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying attitudes, and measuring satisfaction.

1.2 Effective media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between the Parish Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Parish Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.

1.3 The community in this sense includes all residents and elected representatives, businesses, schools, shops, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, groups and associations.

1.4 This document sets out the framework for Parish Council Members and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Parish Council's activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.

2. Civility & Respect

2.1 Civility and respect should be at the heart of public life and good governance is fundamental to ensuring an effective and well-functioning democracy at all levels.

2.2 The intimidation, abuse, bullying and harassment of councillors, clerks, and council staff, in person or on-line, is unacceptable, whether by councillors, clerks, council staff or the public.

2.3 This can prevent councils from functioning effectively, councillors from representing local people, discourage people from getting involved including standing for election and undermine public confidence and trust in democracy.

2.4 Therefore, Downswood Parish Council has signed up to the Civility & Respect pledge, a copy of which can be found on the DPC website.

3. Media Opportunities

3.1 "The Media" is more than the local newspaper. The phrase encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience, and includes broadcast media (radio and television), the internet, and a wide range of printed media (e.g. newspapers, free sheets, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters, the Parish Newsletter).

3.2 Many of the categories in 2.1 have different facets, e.g. a newspaper has feature writers and specialist correspondents in addition to its "news" staff.

2.3 Different media respond more readily to certain factors. For example, newspapers are more likely to print a general interest story if supplied with a photograph, radio items tend to be quite brief with a short 'sound bite', and television producers will want moving pictures to illustrate a story.

4. Making Contact with the Media

4.1 The general principle is that the Parish Clerk will act as the Press Office. Any official contact with the media concerning the Parish Council's policies, the decisions it takes and the services it provides, are to be administered through the Parish Clerk. The Chairman and/or the Chair of the relevant committee will approve all press reports, or comments to the media.

4.2 Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or Chairman in association with other Members as required and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.

4.3 Other Members of the Parish Council who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Chairman and Parish Clerk so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view or give no comment.

Responding to Requests from the Media

4.4 If a member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be

referred to the Parish Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Chairman, in consultation with other Members where necessary, about the format and content of any response.

4.5 Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or to prevent, a member from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views. However, Members should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.

4.7 All press releases and other materials are to be copied and filed for reference.

6. Monitoring

6.1 It is important to monitor the media for items (reports, articles, letters) about the Parish Council in order to know: a) whether press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council are picked up and used effectively. b) what members of the community are saying about the Parish Council.

6.2 Members and employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Parish Council in the media – original articles should be sent to the Parish Clerk.

6.3 Anyone taking part in a radio or television broadcast should only do so on behalf of the Parish Council with the approval of the Chairman or, in the absence of the Chairman, should refer to the Parish Clerk. Arrangements should be made for it to be recorded and a copy sent to the Parish Clerk. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcast's contents should be sent.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1) Purpose of the Social Media Policy

Social Media is any online service, typically accessed through websites and mobile apps, that enables users to create and share content or to participate in direct messaging. Within certain population groups it is common for social media platforms to be used as primary messaging services, are seen as trusted news aggregators, and provide two-way communication with statutory bodies such as Councils.

Downswood Parish Council (DPC) runs social media accounts on a number of platforms in order to communicate with residents, share information and promote DPC initiatives. The purpose of this Social Media Policy is to outline a code of practice for Councillors, or individuals appointed on behalf of the council, when using DPC social media accounts. This is to:

- ensure that the clerk and parish councillors are aware of the standards and processes that are in place and are using appropriate channels of communication
- protect the Parish Council's reputation from inappropriate use of social media
- give a consistent tone and structure to DPC communications as would be expected of a statutory body
- to ensure the security of DPC social media accounts
- to maintain business continuity when individual administrators depart

This policy applies to all DPC accounts on any social media platform.

2) Objectives of DPC Social Media Accounts

Downswood Parish Council maintains social media accounts in order to

1. Communicate with residents
2. Inform people of local activities, disseminate news items and share other items of local interest
3. Respond to questions or comments

Downswood Parish Council only has responsibility for its own legitimate Social Media Platforms and does not own or otherwise moderate others. In-line with the Civility & Respect pledge above, Downswood Parish Council retains the right to remove any content that breaches the standards of this pledge and also report such content to the Police or other enforcement agencies where appropriate.

3) Content Guidelines

In meeting the aims of DPC's social media accounts, activity may include (but not be limited to):

- Distribute DPC meeting agendas, post minutes and advertise dates and locations of meetings
- Advertise DPC events and activities
- Advertise Parish Councillor vacancies and employment opportunities
- Share information from relevant local agencies such as Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, the Police, and local health services • Share information from other related community groups such as Downswood Community Association, local schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities

Conversely, administrators of DPC social media accounts should not:

- present personal opinions as that of DPC when using DPC social media accounts
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to DPC

- make any communication or distribute any content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of DPC
- express views in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by DPC at a Council or Sub-committee meeting that may constitute Predisposition, Pre-determination or Bias
- publish photographs or videos of anyone under the age of 18 without express permission from a parent or legal guardian
- publish personal data of individuals without express permission
- publish any information that infringes the copyright of others
- publish any information that may be deemed libellous
- engage in any activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- use offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender,
- age, religion or belief
- bring DPC into disrepute.

4) Public Discourse

In respect of Objective (3), Respond to questions or comments DPC social media accounts are considered informal communications channels and, whilst in the public domain, should not be used to conduct formal DPC business. DPC social media accounts may therefore be a point of contact for resident queries, however wherever possible responses should be redirected to formal communication channels such as the Clerk's DPC email address. In some circumstances, Councillors may request the item be raised at the next available DPC meeting to enable a full discussion at a public meeting. DPC social media accounts should not be used to engage in debate with residents.

5) Private Messaging

It is considered routine practice to use private messaging services offered by mainstream social media providers and for communication with certain audiences. DPC social media accounts may be used for messaging individuals in this context for the purpose of arranging DPC events or making any other arrangements with individuals on DPC business.

DPC representatives using a messaging service in this context are required to adhere to DPCs obligations under the Freedom of Information Act (2000), and that any decisions of the council should be taken in a public meeting.

6) Account Management

DPC will appoint administrators for all DPC social media accounts, and a record of current administrators be held by the Clerk. All administrators should be over the age of 18.

At the discretion of Councillors, DPC may appoint volunteers to have administrator rights to DPC social media accounts. It is expected that these positions will be unremunerated. The Clerk may also hold

administrative rights to social media accounts by agreement with Councillors.

For business continuity and safeguarding purposes there should be a minimum of two administrators for all DPC social media accounts at any one time, where at least one administrator is a sitting Councillor.

Councillors stepping down from their roles will revoke any administrative rights to DPC social media accounts unless asked to remain an administrator at the specific request of DPC.

Administrator access to accounts should be reviewed on an annual basis and access rights and passwords updated if necessary.

7) Safeguarding

It is possible that some contact through social media accounts may be with people under the age of 18. To ensure that DPC accounts cannot be used to compromise the safety of children and young people:

- DPC will ensure that the minimum two administrators are in place for each social media account
- DPC social media accounts will not be used to send messages of a personal nature to anyone under the age of 18, nor to engage in any personal communications other than to make basic arrangements for DPC events or initiatives. Wherever possible, communications will be redirected through formal channels including the Clerk's DPC email.
- DPC social media accounts will not be used to make contact with anyone under the age of 18 outside of DPC business
- DPC will not publish photographs or videos of anyone under the age of 18 without express permission from a parent or legal guardian

8) Personal Social Media Accounts

For clarity, the code of practice within this document refers to communications sent from DPC accounts and cannot apply to Councillors using their own personal social media accounts.

Councillors, employees or other individuals associated with DPC should avoid using personal accounts for formal DPC communications, and should also remain aware that any comments in public domain including on personal social media accounts that may be deemed to bring DPC into disrepute could be subject to action (in line with whatever behavioural standards policy we might have). Parish Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by DPC at a Council or committee meeting may constitute Pre disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Adopted by Downswood Parish Council: 05/03/2019

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