



COVINGHAM  
PARISH COUNCIL

Social Media, Press and Media Policy

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# **1. Summary & Scope of the Policy**

## **Purpose:**

To guide councillors, employees, and volunteers in communicating professionally and lawfully via press, media, and digital platforms, while upholding the reputation and integrity of Covingham Parish Council.

## **Key Points:**

- Applies to all Councillors, employees, and volunteers.
- Only the Council Chairperson, in consultation with the Clerk, may speak to the media on behalf of the Council.
- Councillors may express personal opinions but must clarify they are not speaking on behalf of the Council.
- Communications must comply with the Local Government Acts and Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- The Media may attend Council meetings, as per legislation.
- Strict communications guidelines apply during pre-election periods.
- Press releases must be approved by the Clerk.
- Website and social media posts must be factual, neutral, and managed by the Clerk
- Newsletters and magazines must be neutral, party-politics free, and approved by the Clerk.
- Only authorised and properly consented photos/videos may be used.

All parties are expected to comply with this policy.

Breaches will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct or Disciplinary Procedures.

# **2. Introduction**

This policy outlines how Covingham Parish Council will communicate with the media and public. It defines roles and sets clear expectations for handling communications via the press, website, social media, and printed publications.

The intention of this policy is not to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the public and media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the public and media.

Parish Councils have an overarching role to play in their area, which no other body can provide. In performing a community leadership role, Parish Councils can articulate and represent the views and needs of the local community more effectively. This will involve listening to the local community and communicating what it is doing through a variety of mediums. If the community

knows and understands what the Parish Council is doing for them, research has proved that its reputation will be higher.

The Council supports open, honest, and effective communication and values its relationship with local media and the local community.

### **3. Aims**

- Ensure open, two-way communication between the Council and the public.
- Promote the Council's services, activities, and decisions clearly and accurately.
- Maintain a constructive relationship with local media.
- Uphold transparency and accountability in public communications.
- Protect the Council from reputational harm.

### **4. The Legal Framework**

All communication must comply with:

- Local Government Acts 1986 & 1988
- The Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011)

The Council must:

- Present differing views on controversial issues fairly.
- Avoid political bias in any official publication.
- Never use public funds to promote political parties or opinions.

Confidential information must not be leaked. Legal advice must be sought before commenting on ongoing legal matters.

### **5. Contact with the Media**

- The Council Chair is the official spokesperson, in consultation with the Clerk.
- Councillors may speak to the media in a personal capacity but must clarify they are not speaking for the Council.
- All press enquiries must go through the Clerk.
- Personal correspondence should never imply Council endorsement unless authorised.

## **6. Attendance of Media at Council or Committee Meetings**

- Media may attend Council meetings under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 and the Local Government Act 1972.
- Meeting agendas and minutes will be publicly available and sent to media on request. • Audio or video recording must comply with the Council's Standing Orders and Reporting of Meetings Policy.

## **7. During pre-election periods (purdah):**

- The Council will avoid publishing content that could appear politically biased.
- Individual members will not be quoted or used in promotional material.
- Only essential and factual public information will be shared.

## **8. Press Releases**

- All press releases must be issued or authorised by the Clerk or in the absence of the Clerk, the Council Chairperson or Vice Chair.
- Councillors and the Clerk may suggest topics for press releases.
- Press releases must be factual, politically neutral, and consistent with Council policy.

## **9. Urgent Situations**

- In urgent situations, the Clerk may issue press statements with agreement from the Council Chairperson or Vice Chair, after consultation with relevant councillors.

## **10. Council Noticeboards and Website**

- Used for agendas, minutes, notices, and community information.
- Maintained by the Clerk and Council Chairperson.
- Business advertising is not permitted.

## **11. Newsletters (The Handy Mag)**

- Content must be factual and neutral.
- Approved by the Clerk
- No party-political references allowed.
- Employee and Councillor names will not be used unless necessary.

## 12 Social Media

This policy covers the use of social media platforms including, but not limited to:

- Council websites
- Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social networking sites
- YouTube, Instagram, and other video/podcast sites
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Council emails

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, minutes, and meeting dates.
- Advertise events and activities.
- Announce new Council information.
- Promote website news stories.
- Advertise vacancies.
- Share information from trusted partners like authorities, police, libraries etc.
- Post content from local community groups, schools, clubs etc.

When using social media, employees, volunteers, and councillors must:

- Be responsible and respectful.
- Disclose their identity and Council affiliation.
- Never make false or misleading statements
- Keep personal opinions separate from Council's views.
- Use a respectful and informative tone, avoid condescending language.
- Be mindful that individual comments can reflect on the Council.
- Refrain from posting controversial, inflammatory, or offensive remarks.
- Avoid personal attacks or hostile communications.
- Obtain permission before posting photographs/videos of individuals.
- Respect privacy of others
- Not violate any laws or regulations

o Inappropriate comments containing foul language, abuse, discrimination etc. will be removed immediately.

o Repeated offenders will be blocked.

o Concerns about denigrating content should be reported to the Clerk/Council Chairperson/Vice Chair.

o Social media sites will be monitored regularly to remove any inappropriate comments/posts.

o During the pre-election purdah period, overtly political social media responses will be monitored and removed.

Councillors and staff must not:

- Hide their identity using 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.

- Publish photographs or videos of minors without written parental permission on a Parish Council social media site or website.
- Post any information that infringes the copyright of others.
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous.
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.
- Bring the Parish Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity.
- Publish personal data of individuals without permission as this is a breach of Data Protection legislation, and is an offence.
- Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies will result in action being taken.

## **13. Content Management**

The Council's use of social media is for official Council content only, not for political use. Examples of acceptable content are:

- Consultation documents
- News feeds & emergency information
- Event listings
- Key dates
- Short debates/comments on hot topics relevant to the Council
- Polls and information gathering
- Useful links

## **14. Guidance for Council Social Media Usage**

- Use clear, polite, and plain English.
  - Refer complex issues to a meeting or the Clerk.
  - Do not name individuals without permission including contact details for individuals. •
- Avoid debates or arguments online.
- Direct residents to the appropriate Council contact.
  - Posts will not feature individual councillor, staff, volunteer or supplier names unless prior agreement from the individual has been given.
  - All sign posting for further information will be generic and not feature individual names, just email addresses and job titles.
  - Must not upload post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
  - Must not disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information.
  - If you are unsure whether information to be shared falls within one of these categories, this should be discussed beforehand with the Clerk.

## 15. Pictures & Images

- Only use authorised and consented images.
- Avoid AI-generated or altered photos.
- Respect privacy and use Council devices where possible.

## 16. Parish Councillor Quick Guide

- Only the Council Chairperson may speak to media on behalf of the Council unless delegated to the Clerk or other councillor.
- Councillors must clarify when speaking personally.
- All press releases go through the Clerk for approval.
- Keep social media respectful, accurate, and non-political.
- Don't post confidential or offensive material.

The policy aims to enable transparent and professional communications while preventing misuse or bringing the Council into disrepute.

## 17. Social Media Quick Guide

### **DO:**

Represent the Council professionally.  
Use respectful, factual language  
Identify yourself and your role  
Share approved Council content  
Get permission for photos/videos  
Report inappropriate posts

### **DON'T:**

Post political or personal opinions as "Council" policy or facts.  
Share offensive or defamatory content  
Engage in arguments  
Use fake names or accounts  
Breach confidentiality or copyright on behalf of yourself or others.

Councillors and employees must always act responsibly when engaging with the public or media. Communications must be accurate, respectful, and lawful, upholding the integrity and transparency of Covingham Parish Council.