

Witley & Milford Parish Council
Press, Media and Social Media Policy

Introduction

The purpose of this Policy is to guide both Councillors and staff of the Council in their relations with the Press and Media, including Social Media, in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

This protocol does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press, Media and Social Media.

Above everything else, a Councillor must observe Witley & Milford Parish Council's adopted Code of Members' Conduct whenever they act as a representative of the Council.

Staff

An officer must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committees' agenda or at any other private briefing.

An officer should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of Witley & Milford Parish Council.

The Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Releases and Social Media posts on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Assistant Clerk, in consultation with the Chair.

All communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk, the Clerk should refer the enquirer to the appropriate Committee Chair.

No other officer of the Council or member of staff apart from the above, unless authorised by the Clerk, is permitted to speak or communicate with the Press and Media, or on Social Media, on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

Members of the Council

A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the Press or on Social Media on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committees' agenda or at any other private briefing.

A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of Witley & Milford Parish Council.

When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media, or on Social Media, Members should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. For example: as Chair of the Council, as Chair of a Committee, as a Parish Councillor, as an individual (i.e. letter to press for publication) or as a spokesperson. When speaking to the Press and Media or posting on Social Media in their capacity as a Parish Council representative, Members must only do so in consultation with the Clerk, Chair or if approved by the appropriate Committee.

Never use the prefix "Cllr" when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy.

Take particular care if you are approached on Social Media or by the Press or Media on a controversial

subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure about any particular policy, simply state “no comment” and ask the press to contact the Parish Office.

Councillors have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.

A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer or member of staff at meetings held in public or before the press.

Dealing with the Press

When dealing with the Press, members and officers should be aware of the following:

- Be informed and certain of all your facts.
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Parish Council that you are aware what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy.
- Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.

Issues to be Aware of

Statements made in all innocence can look very different in print or online than they did when they were spoken. It is advantageous to write out a statement or position beforehand.

Meetings of Council and Committees

Copies of Agendas, Minutes and Reports sent to Members for meetings of the Council, or its Committees will be e-mailed to the Press and Media and placed on the council’s web site.

Facilities will be provided at meetings for the Press to take notes of the proceedings.

As provided in the Council’s Standing Orders both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion. Note: The Parish Council is governed by the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, 1960

Press Releases

Press releases made on behalf of the Parish Council may be prepared by the Clerk or appointed councillor however should always be issued by the Clerk.