



ALDHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION POLICY

Introduction

1. Aldham 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 Freedom of Information - Publication Scheme, please contact the parish clerk.
2. The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet ("the media").
3. This policy explains how the Council may work with the media to meet the above objectives in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

Legal requirements and restrictions

4. This policy is subject to the Council's obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Openness of Local Government Bodies regulations 2014 together with the Council's standing orders and financial regulations. The Council's financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council's publication scheme.
5. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council's publication scheme.

Meetings

6. A meeting of the Council and its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution. In accordance with the Council's standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council and its committees, if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.
7. Where a meeting of the Council and its committees include an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's standing orders.
8. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes e.g. using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites e.g. X(formerly Twitter), Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless
 - (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present
 - (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings
 - (iii) paragraphs 9 and 10 below apply
9. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.
10. Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted.

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11. The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, provide reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.
12. The Council's standing orders will confirm if attendance by the public, their participation, photographing, recording, filming or other reporting is permitted at a meeting of a sub-committee.

Other communications with the media

13. This policy does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity.
14. The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. If the views of councillors are different to the Council's corporate position and views, they will make this clear.
15. The Parish Clerk may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information, a statement or other material about the Council.
16. Subject to the obligations on councillors not to disclose information referred to in paragraph 5 above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their position and views.

Aldham Parish Council (The Council) uses the following methods in communication –

- Hard copy letters
- Telephone
- Website (aldhamparishcouncil.org.uk)
- Emails
- A Facebook Group (Aldham Grapevine community page)
- Aldham Grapevine Magazine

The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

This policy outlines the standards required when communicating generally using any of the above methods and the relevant sections cover all employees, volunteers and Councillors. It also sets out the manner of communication expected from third parties when communicating with the Council and how such communications will be dealt with.

17. Criteria for Council Communication

The overarching criteria for all Council communication is that it will :

- a) Be civil, tasteful and relevant
- b) Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- c) Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Council does not own the copyright
- d) Social media and website postings will not contain any personal information unless express consent of the individual has been obtained
- e) Social media in particular will not be used for any political advertising

18. Expectations of communications from those communicating with the Council.

The Council expects all those communicating with it to do so in accordance with the following criteria:

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- a) Be considerate and respectful. Vulgarity, threats or abusive language will not be tolerated. It is understood that a third party may have a strong opinion on an issue, but personal attacks insults or threatening language towards anyone, including the Council members or staff is not acceptable
- b) Communication should not be obscene, racist or defamatory towards employees, Councillors or the Parish Council as a whole

19. Obligations regarding use of Social Media by Employees, Councillors and Volunteers

The following obligations apply to all employees of the Council, Councillors and to those who volunteer on behalf of the Council.

Posting on behalf of the Parish Council

- a) Material in the Council's name and posted on its behalf can only be posted on social media by the Clerk or a Councillor who is approved to do so. When such postings are made the criteria listed below should be complied with.

Obligations regarding the use of social media by Councillors

- b) Social media postings should not bring the Parish Council into disrepute.
- c) When posting as either Parish Council representative or as themselves on social media, Clerk/Councillors should comply with the criteria below:
 - i. Do not post, upload, or forward anything that is abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content and do not upload links to such content.
 - ii. Never disclose Parish Council information which is commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk or the Parish Council Chair.
 - iii. Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council. You should not post anything that will bring the Council into disrepute
 - iv. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
 - v. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations in relation to the Parish Council.
 - vi. Don't discuss Council employees without their prior approval.
 - vii. never publish anyone else's contact details without their express consent.

20. Employee Obligations

- a) A serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
 - i. pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature)
 - ii. a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation
 - iii. material which is offensive, obscene
 - iv. criminal, discriminatory, derogatory statements or material or statements or material which may undermine or cause embarrassment to the council, Councillors, or our employees
 - v. confidential information about the council or anyone else
 - vi. any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council)

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- vii. material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person
- b) Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary procedure.
- c) Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary procedure involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

21. Parish Council email obligations

The Clerk to the council has a council email address (clerk@aldhamparishcouncil.org.uk)

The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and the aim is to reply to all questions sent within a reasonable timescale. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to Councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Although individual Councillors may communicate directly with parishioners where the contents of an email refer to matters relating to Parish Council business, they should be copied to the Clerk in view of Freedom of Information Act obligations.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

22. Councillors' obligations

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the GDPR Data Protection obligations in all their work on behalf of the Council. As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

This policy is reviewed annually.