

Communication Policy – (Sept 2024)

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1. Introduction

Radcliffe on Trent Parish Council ("the Council") is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. Where information is not available via the Council's publication scheme, the council's Clerk will provide the information in accordance with FOI timescales or the availability of information if sooner.

1. The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of social media, on-line news agencies and off line publications ("the media").
2. This policy explains how the Council may work with both the public and the media and residents to meet the above objectives in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.
3. It is the cornerstone of the Council to keep stakeholders fully engaged within a comprehensive range of channels as it continually evolves to the manner of where and how people communicate.
4. The ROT community is more likely to engage with a council where it is clear that residents' views are taken into account and where they feel they can influence decisions. This means that the production of quality communications highlighting the strategic development work of

the Council, as well as the delivery of proactive, reactive, influenced and robust action are essential factors in continuing to make ROT a great place to live or work.

5. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communication. The aim of this Policy is to ensure that the Council's communications should be a two-way process:
 - to give people the information to understand accurately what the Council does, and
 - to get information from residents and stakeholders so that the Council can understand local needs.
6. The Council's effective communications will:
 - raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence levels
 - raise awareness of services, actions and interventions provided by the Council
 - raise the profile of Radcliffe on Trent as a parish
 - support Councillors in their role as community leaders
 - make the best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people or older residents within the Parish
 - proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the image or integrity of the Council – adopting a can-do and will-do mantra in accordance with the Council's legal and moral obligations.

2. Legal requirements and restrictions

1. 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, other legislation which may apply and 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.
2. The Council cannot disclose confidential information, which is prohibited by 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.
3. The communication of Council information may be viewed in four main mediums: print, electronic, media relations and public relations.
4. The Parish Council respects Freedom of Speech, without fear or favour and this Policy is not intended to restrain this.

3. Responding to Media Enquiries

1. **General Approach**
The Parish Council acknowledges the vital role the media plays in disseminating information to the public. In recognition of this, the Council is committed to responding to media enquiries promptly and with due consideration to deadlines, which are essential for effective communication.
2. **Importance of Media Relations**
Maintaining positive and constructive relationships with the media is crucial for the Parish Council. The media serves as a conduit for information to the community and holds the Council accountable for its decisions and actions. It is therefore essential that the Council provides access to its officers and members for background information to support accurate reporting.
3. All requests for interviews, information, or photographs from the media should be initially directed to the Clerk. If the Clerk is unavailable, the request should be referred to the Chair. The Clerk will coordinate the Council's response, and where possible, the Chair will provide the response. In the Chair's absence, the Vice-Chair or the relevant Committee Chair will take on this responsibility.
4. **Issuing Official Statements**
Any official statement from the Parish Council must be issued on an official document featuring the Council's logo. Statements must reflect the officially minuted opinion of the Parish Council, when applicable. Press releases must be issued on a document bearing the Parish Council's logo, include an appropriate title, be dated and contain the details of the person to contact for further information.
5. The Council's Clerk may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information, a statement or other material about the Council. The Clerk, or any person contacting the media on behalf of the Council must ensure that the information they provide is factual, auditable and referenced.
6. The Council's Clerk must in all instances gain written consent of any persons that appear in photographs or MP4 video clips, before they are released into any public domain, including how any such files are stored or removed from the Councils' files for a period of not more than 6 years, but reviewable every 2 years from the date of the permissions given. Permission statements must be stored alongside the media granted and safeguarded in line with relevant GDPR policies.
7. The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the Council or the Chair of the relevant committee, as may be agreed previously by the Council.
8. Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Clerk or an officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting

4. Councillors' Media Interactions

1. Councillors may be directly approached by the media. When responding, councillors should clearly state that the views expressed are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Parish Council. Councillors should avoid implying they are speaking on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so. Unless a Councillor can refer back to a council decision when reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
2. This policy does not seek to regulate Councillors in their private capacity.
3. The Council's communications with the media must seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council only. Any view of the Council **MUST** be a gathered view of at least, but not restricted to 50% of the overall number of Councillors sitting – i.e. if there are 14 Councillors currently on the Council, then to truly represent the Council's view on pertinent matters, 7 Councillors must be of the same viewpoint to represent the Council's viewpoint overall. This aspiration can be overridden in matters of urgency but any Councillor expressing a view to any media agency must have consulted at least one other Councillor prior to any statement given (written or verbal).
4. **Media Requests Regarding Councillors' Private Lives**
The Parish Council recognises that Councillors have roles outside of their duties as elected officials. If approached by the media regarding matters unrelated to their Council responsibilities, Councillors must clarify that they are not speaking in their capacity as a Councillor or on behalf of the Parish Council. Any Councillor expressing their opinion must make absolutely clear that this is their personal view and is therefore not necessarily shared by ROTPC.
5. **Photograph Requests**
Requests to photograph Councillors or staff in relation to Council business require the consent of the individual. In the case of staff, approval from their line manager is also required. The Clerk must keep a record of all released documents and permissions in relation to any release.
6. **Out-of-Hours Media Contact**
The Parish Council does not offer an out-of-hours media relations service. However, councillors may be contacted outside normal office hours, as their contact details are publicly available. In urgent situations where the timing of the media request is critical, the Chair and Clerk should be contacted to determine if immediate liaison with the media is necessary.
7. **Commenting on Allegations**
The Parish Council will not respond to anonymous allegations or those concerning individual Councillors or staff. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a Council agenda item.
8. **Transparency and Accountability**

The Parish Council is committed to openness and accountability. If there is a valid reason why a specific enquiry cannot be answered, this will be clearly communicated by the Clerk within 5 days.

9. **Proactive Media Management**
Members and staff are required to notify the Clerk as soon as they become aware of any issue—positive or negative—that might attract media interest. It is important to do this proactively, rather than waiting for media contact.

5. Public Consultation

1. The Council's aim by effective communication is that residents will:
 - know what services the Council provides and the quality of service they can expect
 - feel confident and satisfied about the services delivered and their costs
 - understand how to get involved with, or influence, the work of the Council
2. The Council's audiences are wide and varied but will typically include:
 - Residents of Radcliffe on Trent, their families and other stakeholders
 - Parish Council staff
 - Hard-to-reach groups, including young people
 - The media, including but not restricted to local newspapers, local TV stations and relevant Social Media Groups / Forums
 - Rushcliffe Borough Council & Nottinghamshire County Council
 - Voluntary groups and organisations within the village
 - The village business community
 - MP's, County Councillors, Borough Councillors and neighbouring Parish Councillors
 - Other public sector organisations (police, health, fire)
 - Visitors and those who work within the Parish
3. As far as possible and without prejudice, the council shall seek a general opinion of residents insofar that any sensitive or topical issue can be reported back in a conducive and proactive approach, restricting any backlash or negative viral opinion of the Council. The Council is committed to consulting local taxpayers, service users, local businesses and its own staff and members to identify ways in which it can improve the services it provides. Consultation is a key part in a communications strategy as it is a two-way exchange of views between local people and the Council. This will help the Council to make decisions and allow them to tell people about why it provides services in the way it does. The Council's consultation is by way of questionnaires, public meetings, public exhibitions and members' interaction with the public. However, occasional surveys can be carried out online via Facebook.

6. Meetings

1. 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.
2. Where a meeting of the Council or its committees includes an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions within the allocated public period but may ask the Chair to also be heard during an Agenda item if appropriate. Public participation is regulated by the Council's Standing Orders.
3. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of any meeting of the Council and its committees, which includes using a mobile phone or tablet and the recording in support of any stakeholder disability alongside using for any TV/radio broadcast; providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or to be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless such activities disrupt the proceedings or (iii) either of the following two paragraphs apply. Where there is an Agenda item, where the public are not permitted to be in attendance, this part of any Council meeting shall not be recorded without the express permission of those in attendance or by order of supporting the Disability Act 2016 (2010)
4. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting where a child or vulnerable adult is at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given prior permission. As far as possible, reference to the vulnerability of any attendee should be addressed with sensitivity within the opening of any such meeting.
5. Oral reporting or commentary during a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted unless this in support of the Disability Act 2016 (2010)
6. Subject to the obligations on Councillors not to disclose the information above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, Councillors are free to communicate their own position and views, inasmuch that that any view expressed publicly does not bring the Council or its Councillors into disrepute.

7. Parish Council Correspondence

1. The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed.
2. The Clerk or other appropriate Officer should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
3. No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
4. All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper save for where correspondence by way of e-mail is appropriate in the circumstance.
5. Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).
6. The Clerk of the Council has their own Council email address. The account is monitored from 10 am to 3 pm, Monday to Friday, and the Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as possible or within 5 working days.
7. An 'out of office' message will be used when appropriate but will contain the Clerks appointed representative with appropriate authority or guidance to handle all incoming emails. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on the text of any relevant emails to Councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk. All emails requiring data to be passed on will be followed up with a Data consent form for completion before any action is taken. The Clerk must provide details and a full report at each Full Council of all relevant incoming and outgoing correspondence to enable Councillors to be fully aware of public opinion, media interest and administrative workload.

8. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

1. Agendas should be clear and concise. They should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
2. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.
3. Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

9. Councillor communications with external parties

1. All communication with external parties should be via the Clerk unless the Council has resolved otherwise at a previous meeting (i.e. in exceptional circumstances such as a Councillor with a specialist skill).
2. Any Member or appropriate Officer authorised to contact other parties on behalf of the Council shall be named in the minutes.
3. As the Clerk would normally be tasked with sending Council correspondence to all other bodies, where a Councillor is authorised to communicate directly on behalf of the Council, it must be made clear that any such correspondence is written in their official capacity and has been previously authorised by the Parish Council.
4. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

10. Communications with Parish Council Staff

1. Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so. (For further details consult the Councillor-Officer Protocol adopted in August 2023.)
2. Telephone calls should be relevant to the work of the Parish Council and conducted in an appropriate and professional manner.
3. E-mails:
Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk or any other officer; reasons for urgency should be stated;
Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;
E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk.
All council correspondence by email, whether from a member or an officer, should be sent using the official council email address provided.
Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

11. Meetings with the Clerk or other officers:

Wherever possible an appointment should be made;

Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;

Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate Council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

Meetings should be conducted in an appropriate and professional manner.

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