

Media Policy

INTRODUCTION

St. Albans 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.

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.

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.

THE MEDIA

The term 'media' encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wider audience, and includes broadcast media, the Internet, and a wide range of printed media, including local newspapers, magazines, local broadcasters and posters.

The general principle is that the Parish Council Office will act as the Press Office. Any official contact with the media concerning the Parish Council's policies, decisions and services is to be initiated through this office.

Press releases and statements will be prepared by the clerk in consultation with the chair and other members as required and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.

Members who are approached by the media should refer to the Council Office to ensure consistency. Members can, as long as they make it clear that it is a personal opinion, state their view on a matter. 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. The requirement of the Data Protection Act 1998 must be adhered to at all times.

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request and the media are encouraged to attend council meetings and the council should make appropriate space available. The Openness of LG Bodies Regulation 2014 became law on 6 August 2014, allowing filming, photography and/or recording of council proceedings by the public or press. The chairman of the meeting should ask if any person intends to do any of these so that councillors are aware. This should be a constant agenda item on all council or committee meetings. No oral report or running verbal commentary is permitted during the meeting.

NOTICE BOARDS AND WEBSITE

Public notice is required of Parish Council meetings and its committee meetings. The LGA1972 requires that at least 3 clear working days' notice be given and that the notice must be fixed in some conspicuous place in the locality (notice boards).

The Parish Council's website should be updated regularly by the council office with copies of minutes, agendas and policies, information useful to residents and information that is required by law.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND NETWORKING

Social media is a collective term for ways to create and publish on the Internet and other forms of social communication such as Facebook or Twitter. It is clear the social networking sites can enhance debate and add positively to local issues when used correctly.

St. Albans Parish Council operates a Facebook page. It is to be a service advertised to members of the public. Most of the activity will be 'following' to gather information and to re-post items of information to residents of St. Albans. It is expected that this will develop over time. The page is administrated by the Clerk.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY COUNCILLORS

When using social media councillors should not represent their personal views as being the view or the policies of the council, nor should they represent their views as being those of other councillors unless those councillors' have given their express permission.

Councillors should refrain from personal criticism in social media of other councillors and individuals or organisations with whom the Parish Council has dealings (in accordance with the Nolan principles of conduct in public life).

CORRESPONDENCE

All written/electronic Parish Council communications shall be issued by, or by arrangement of the Clerk. In the event of the Clerk's prolonged absence the Chair shall make arrangements for an alternative.

When councillors correspond with other authorities, service providers contractors about anything to do with council business, they shall copy in the clerk's email address so a record can be kept of any correspondence undertaken on behalf of the parish council.

ADDENDUM TO MEDIA POLICY (ADOPTED 25/02/2020 SAPC 20-031D)

All correspondence with the Council must identify the author and clearly express their concerns to enable the parish council to address the issues raised as quickly as possible. Anonymous complaints will not be processed or replied to. The Clerk determines whether a correspondence should be considered anonymous or not. However, confidential issues will be dealt with using the required discretion.