



NORTHILL PARISH COUNCIL

Northill Parish Council Public, Press and Media Policy Including protocol for filming and use of social media.

Introduction

This document aims to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the public, press and media, and provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise during council meetings and generally through Councils working hours.

The document gives weight and expands upon Northill Parish Council Standing Orders Item No.22 and should be read in conjunction with this document.

Key aims

The Council supports the principles of openness and transparency. The media (newspapers and other publications/radio/TV/social media) is crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

It is important that the press have access to the Clerk/ Members and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

Legal framework

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988 and the Openness in Local Government Regulations 2014. The Council must also have regard to the governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

Contact with the media

The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who is responsible and appropriate action taken.



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When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.

Data protection must be complied with. Advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk and Chair are authorized to make contact with the media.

Statements made by the Chair and the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.

There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk/Chair.

Should a Member decide to submit a letter to the media on any subject they should not use the term 'Councillor' or give the impression, directly or implied, that they are writing on behalf of the Council.

Press releases

The purpose of an official press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of an official press release may be beneficial.

All press releases must be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

Newsletter – the Parish Council newsletter will be issued by the Clerk in consultation with an editorial panel consisting of the Chair and two councillors, nominated annually by Full Council at the AGM.

Councillors and Clerk

To ensure meetings are focussed and to allow all members the courtesy for concentrated attention, councillors and the Clerk wishing to record the meeting should place their recording device in front of them on the table in an unobtrusive position and adhere to the general protocol for filming as below.

Protocol for Filming Meetings and Use of Social Media

Adopted with amendments 08.9.2016
Reviewed 30.05.2024
Reviewed 14.04.2025
Reviewed 23.04.2026



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The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request. The Openness in Local Government Regulations 2014 permits any person attending to report on a meeting using any communication method and to permit the publishing, posting or sharing of the persons activities. (Except where the Council has resolved to close the meeting to the public).

Regulations¹ allow the recording, broadcasting and use of social media at Council meetings.² Such rights do not extend to the recorded material being used:

- Out of sequence and context. In a way that misinterprets the proceedings, or infringes the core values of the Council, including editing in a way that may ridicule or show lack of respect towards those being photographed/filmed/recorded.
- In a manner that misinterprets the views of those speaking at the meeting
- Recording must be conducted in a non- disruptive manner³ The designated area is available for anyone who wishes to use it to record or film a meeting. All attendees are reminded that the Parish Council must comply with health and safety legislation and are also asked to be respectful towards other attendees. Accordingly, if equipment raises potential health and safety issues (eg trailing cables) the designated area should be used if possible and all attendees should ensure any recording etc takes place so as not to obstruct, record or film other attendees.
- Equipment may not be plugged in to the mains supply and is used at the owners own risk. The use of flash photography or additional lighting will not be permitted.
- Council will allow 5 minutes prior to and after the close of the meeting to allow any members of the public recording equipment to be set up and removed from the designated area.
- Compliance with data protection – no overlooking of confidential documents
- Courtesy to other attendees – not obstructing view of the Council and those speaking
- Members of the public speaking at or attending the meeting must not be filmed if they have indicated to the Clerk/Chair that they do not wish to be included, although they may still be recorded.

Protocol for using social media

¹ Local Government Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

² Includes committee and subcommittee meetings but not to working group or informal task group meetings or meetings where the press and public are excluded.

³ The Chairman has the right to ask any person to leave or to suspend a meeting if the actions of those in attendance are deemed disruptive, if it is resolved to close the meeting for confidential business, where it is considered that continued recording/filming/photographing/webcasting may infringe the rights or privacy of or intimidate any individual of when the Chairman considers that a defamatory statement has been made.

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Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.

Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details. If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.

All staff and councillors must ensure that they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.

The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator – the Clerk who will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with the social media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk for Council records.