

ALVELEY AND ROMSLEY PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA POLICY

Adopted: 11th January 2022

Next review: July 2022

Introduction

This policy aims to achieve clear, accurate and effective communication and dissemination of information to Council Members, press and media organisations, outside agencies and members of the public.

Purpose

1. Alveley and Romsley Parish Council (“the Council”) is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities.
2. All communication will be conveyed in an open and straightforward manner. The Clerk to the Council is the Proper Officer of the Council and is responsible for all formal communication between the Council, the press/media , and members of the public. In the event of the Clerk being unavailable the Parish Council Chairman will fulfil this role.
3. This policy does not seek to unnecessarily regulate or restrict Parish Councillors in their private dealings.
4. 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”).

Media Policy

The Parish Council is keen to develop a good rapport and working relationship with the media, whilst ensuring that accuracy, confidentiality and consent are maintained at all times.

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 2018, the General Data Protection Regulations 2018, other relevant legislation, and a range of approved policies, including the Council’s Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. These documents are available via the Council’s publication scheme and are published on the Parish Council's website (www.alveleyandromsleypc.org.uk).
2. The Council will not disclose confidential information. The Council will not disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order or legal contract, by legislation, or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the Council's Standing Orders and the Council's approved Code of Conduct, copies of which are available on the Parish Council's website.

Procedure for working with the media

This policy outlines the procedures and arrangements for working with the media (including the press), and what Councillors or the Clerk should do if approached by the media, or if they are involved in a situation that will attract media attention.

1. On receipt of a request from the press or other media for a statement, the person receiving the request (clerk or any councillor) will advise the body making the request that a statement will be considered and issued shortly.
2. On receipt of a request the journalist or other caller should be asked to make clear who they are working for or what is the exact nature of their enquiry. Further, they should be asked where any information they elicit will be published.
3. The Council is under no obligation to provide a statement.
4. Only the Clerk and/or the Chairman will provide the press with a verbal or written statement –ideally this statement would be after liaison with each other as a minimum and may involve input from other Councillors as necessary.
5. The exception to (4.) above would be if the Chairman or the Parish Council at a Council meeting had authorised a specific parish councillor(s) to make the response on behalf of the Council.
6. Under no circumstances must information of a confidential nature be disclosed to the press or other media. In line with data protection and privacy legislation, personal data must not be disclosed to the media without the full consent of the person(s) concerned
7. The response to the press or other media should be the view of the Parish Council as a whole, not the view of an individual Councillor or the Clerk. Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the news media, **if** they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors have an obligation to respect Council policy once made, and while it may be legitimate for a Councillor to indicate that he or she spoke and voted against a specific policy decision (if this took place in an open session), he/ she should not seek to undermine a decision through the media.
8. No response should be made that is in any way damaging to the interests or reputation of the Parish Council.
9. If a request for information involves a conflict of interest for a Councillor or the Clerk, the Councillor or Clerk must declare his or her interest and avoid involvement with the matter.

Meetings

The Guidance for dealing with attendance by the media and members of the public at Parish Council meetings is contained in Section 3 of the Council's Standing Orders.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of an open 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 such as 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) such activities disrupt the proceedings or:
- (ii) The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is involved and an adult responsible for them has not given express permission.

Social Media Policy

The Council's aim is to inform members of the community and the wider local area, through as many communication channels as possible, about what is happening within the Parish and local area and share important news and information. The Parish Council recognises that different demographic groups may be reached through careful use of social media.

Posts on social media supplement the information published on the Council's website and in the Newsletter, so that:

- The Parish Council can remind people of important events and publish breaking news.
- The Parish Council can link to useful information about the Parish and local area published by other people.
- The Parish Council can better communicate with those using mobile devices.

Use of Official Accounts

The Council operates a Facebook account for the promotion of activities and events and as a communication and broadcast tool.

Examples of acceptable corporate content are:

- Public relations
- Consultation documents
- News feed & emergency information
- Event listings
- Key dates
- Short debates & quick comments on hot topics and relevant news (discussion board)
- Polls and information gathering
- Useful links

The following outlines the conditions and limits of their use:

1. An official account on any social media website may only be set-up with consent from the full Council.
2. Once approved, each account will be set up by the Parish Clerk.
3. Only the Parish Clerk and councillors with delegated authority may use these accounts to post online, and access to the account is strictly limited. The Parish Council's social media accounts are managed and monitored by the Parish Clerk. Two councillors will also be nominated to monitor the social media account(s) to ensure frequent monitoring in accordance with this policy and to manage the account when the clerk is on leave.
4. Only the Parish Clerk is allowed to share links to the Council website, the Shropshire Council website, other partner websites, 'Useful links' (e.g. local transport sites), links to other social media pages, local media e.g. Shropshire Star, National organisations, etc.

5. All information published on the internet must comply with the Parish Council's Data Protection (privacy) policies.
6. Social media accounts will primarily be used to promote 'good news' and information, supplementing content already published on the Parish Council's website.
7. Any employee, Councillor or member of the public who becomes aware of social networking activity that would be deemed distasteful should make the Parish Clerk aware as soon as possible.
8. The Parish Council will not normally reply to direct messages on Facebook. The Council, therefore, asks that in these instances contact is made with the Parish Council clerk using the contact form on the website, or direct email.
9. Any posts on official social media accounts should be:
 - Timely and appropriate
 - Mindful of the audience
 - Accurate, without any spelling mistakes or typos
 - Factually correct and without personal opinion
 - Concise and not designed to promote a discussion (with the exception of specific community engagement activity e.g. an opinion poll).
 - In line with data protection

Facebook

The Parish Clerk manages the Council's Facebook page. Facebook pages are used to highlight news, make announcements, engage with the community and share information.

Comments posted on and messages received on the Facebook page are views of individuals and do not represent the views of the Parish Council.

A request for something to be posted on the Parish Council's Facebook page, should be directed to the Parish Clerk.

Social media moderation policy

The Council Facebook page is reactively moderated. The Council cannot accept responsibility for the content of any comment. The Council reserves the right to remove comments received on Facebook that:

- Contain abusive, obscene, indecent, or offensive language, or link to obscene or offensive material
- Contain swear words or other sorts of profanity
- Are completely removed from the topic of conversation or are not relevant to the item posted on the wall
- Contain abusive language and/or inappropriate comments directed towards an individual involved in the thread, other organisations or the page administrator
- Constitute spam or promote or advertise products, except where it is for an event, publication, or similar item that has direct relevance to the subject of discussion. Information about locating and sharing knowledge and expertise is welcomed, but within the specific discussion
- Are designed to cause nuisance to the page administrator or other users

For serious and/or persistent breaches of the moderation policy, we reserve the right to prevent users from posting further comments.

Use of Photos and Video

Only the Parish Clerk has permission to upload photos and videos. The appropriate permissions must be obtained for all imagery

Personal Accounts on Social Media

The Clerk is required to use social networking in a way that does not conflict with the terms of his/her contract of employment. The absence of, or lack of, explicit reference to a specific website or service does not limit the extent of the application of this policy. Where no policy or guidelines exist, the Clerk should use his/her

professional judgment and take the most prudent action possible. If the Parish Council is referred to in a way that is deemed defamatory or confidential information is disclosed, it reserves the right to report the comment and request that it be removed.

Councillors are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view. Councillors should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

Purdah

In the six week run up to an election – local, general or European – councils have to very careful not to do or say anything that could be viewed in any way to support any political party or candidate. The period is known as purdah. The Council will continue to publish important service announcements using social media but will monitor and potentially have to remove responses if they are overtly party political.

Will the Parish Council respond to direct messages posted on social networking sites?

If appropriate, the Clerk will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible to all questions received via social networking sites. All formal requests, comments, enquiries or complaints should be emailed to the Parish Council using the contact form on the website.

The Parish Council may monitor forums and blogs to gain indirect feedback. The Parish Council may post replies on forums or blogs to answer queries or address factual corrections, but would generally take a cautious approach before getting involved in contentious issues.

The Parish Council reserves the right to take any necessary steps to protect members of the Parish community and will delete any comments referencing the Parish Council, which are deemed abusive or offensive in anyway.