Chandler's Ford Parish Council

Communications and Media Policy

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving effective working relationships with both the public and the media.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct for members and the Council's IT and Email Policy.

1 KEYS AIMS

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this accountability relies on effective two-way communication. The media—including press, radio, television, and online platforms—play a vital role in informing the public. To support transparency and public engagement, the Council must foster positive and constructive relationships with the media, working collaboratively to raise awareness of the services and facilities it provides, and to clearly explain the rationale behind its policies and priorities.

It is important that the press have access to the Clerk and 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.

2 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity - www.gov.uk/government/publications/recommended-code-of-practice-for-local-authority-publicity

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

To prevent against infringement of copyright law, no images may be used or shared without permission of the original copyright owner. No photographs of children who appear to be under 18 are to be used without permission from a parent or guardian. Permission is non-transferable from a third party, such as a school.

3 CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

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

3.2 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 was responsible and appropriate action taken.

3.3 No representations will be made in matters which are discussed in closed session, ie where press and public have been excluded under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

3.4 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.

3.5 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

3.6 When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk or Chair of Council are authorised to make contact with the media.

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

3.8 Other Councillors may talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council. When responding as an individual to issues, including planning matters, members must not use their Councillor title or invoke Chandler's Ford Parish Council. Councillors also have an obligation to respect the Council policy once made and not seek to undermine a decision through the news media. It may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that they disagreed with a policy and voted against it, however, this would be recorded within respective published meeting minutes.

3.9 Councillors who serve on other councils (District or County) may engage with the media as a member of those other councils but should not express an opinion on behalf of the Parish Council unless authorised by Clerk or Chair of Council.

3.10 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.

4 ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

4.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.

4.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings where seating and workspace will be made available.

4.3 The media may speak and ask questions within the public participation section at the start of each meeting.

4.4 Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chair of the meeting (see Standing Orders).

5 MEDIA RELEASES

5.1 The purpose of a media release is to promote a potential local 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 a press release may be beneficial.

5.2 All media releases are to be factual, non-political, not written to cause offense and must be in accordance with Council policy.

5.3 The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release, to be approved by the Chair; however they must all 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.

6 ELECTIONS

In line with practice elsewhere in the country, the Council will not quote any Councillor in a news release or involve them in proactive publicity events during the election period, regardless of whether or not they are standing for election. The only exception to this (as laid down in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity) is during an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the control of the Council. In this situation, members holding key civic positions (Mayor, Chair of Council, Chair of Committee) should be able to comment.

7 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a term for internet websites and tools based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction. Examples of popular social media tools include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of the development of such systems with people with similar interest being attracted to share information.

Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wider audience instantaneously on a range of subjects. It also provides an opportunity for communication with the wider community. The Council will make use of approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but will carefully control its use, in order to minimise risk.

Council social media pages

The Clerk or RFO will be responsible for posting on all council owned/run social media pages. If a councillor wishes to post on the council's social media pages, they should contact the Clerk with their proposed text. The decision of the Clerk as to whether to add the social media post is final. Councillors will be consulted if their post is inappropriate or needs revision.

General advice on all social media pages :-

1. Anyone posting on social media must comply with legislation, particularly the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Equality Act 2010.

2. No information can be published that has been received in confidence.

3. At all times, treat others with respect, avoiding personal attacks and disrespectful, rude or offensive comments.

4. Ensure that posts do not bring the Council into disrepute.

5. Staff posting on social media should ensure that the information they are posting is accurate, objective, balanced and informative. Posts should adhere to the council's existing policies and, if sharing a third party's content or link, should ensure the work is credited to the third party concerned.

6. Corporate council content should not contain party political material, nor promote individual councillors.

7. The council may promote community projects/events on their social media pages.

8. Staff will moderate all social media posts, including comments made by members of the public.

9. Any posting to social media, including comments made on behalf of the Council, must not:

    - Use false names or pseudonyms to hide identities.
    - Present personal opinions or comments as those of the council.
    - Present individuals in a way that may cause embarrassment to the council.
    - Post content that is contrary to the decisions of the council.
    - Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
    - Engage in personal attacks, online arguments, and hostile communications.
    - Identify a third person without their express permission.
    - Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental or guardian permission.
    - Post any information that infringes copyright.
    - Post any content likely to be deemed libellous.
    - Post any content that constitutes bullying or harassment.
    - Bring the council into disrepute.
    - Post offensive language.
    - Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.

10. The council may allow members of the public to comment on their social media pages and reserve the right to close comments to the public in circumstances where comments are no longer relevant to the original post or become abusive, offensive, defamatory or discriminatory. The council are not obliged to respond to comments, complaints or questions raised via social media and will never respond to anonymous posts.

11. Any comments deemed by staff to contravene the above rules, may be removed.

Social Media for Staff

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

Staff are encouraged to not post on their personal social media accounts during their working hours. Any images posted that may reflect the working environment or Council offices will be required to be taken down due to GDPR and confidentiality. Equally, posts which may reflect staff behaviour during working hours may be considered to bring the Council into disrepute and disciplinary action may be necessary.

Social Media for Councillors

Councillors are at liberty to set up accounts using any platform available but must include a disclaimer making it clear that any views expressed are personal and not reflective of the council's viewpoint.

Councillors should, at all times, present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, discriminatory or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and offensive language.

Councillors are not permitted to use council logos or other council identification on personal social media pages, including those pages owned by them using their councillor name. Only council owned social media may contain council identification.

This Policy will be reviewed every two years. All new members and employees will be provided with a copy of this policy.

Policy version – C&M2025
Resolved by Policy and Finance Committee – 15 September 2025
Adopted by Full Council – 29 September 2025
Date for next review – September 2027

Appendix

CFPC Communication Methods

Physical Communication

Notice boards – 6 notice boards ; Fryern Pavilion inside, Fryern Pavilion outside, Fryern Recreation Ground, Hiltingbury Sportshall inside, Cox Row, Pennine Way.

- Parish agendas and notices to be displayed within Fryern Pavilion noticeboards inside and outside.
- Exercising of Public Rights Notice and Annual External Audit to be displayed within all noticeboards.

Newsletter – Discover magazine – bi monthly double page spread delivered to residents within SO53 and SO52 postcodes. To include articles relating to Hiltingbury Sportshall.

Posters

- Posters for events to be distributed across CFPC noticeboards and within local businesses.
- Reproduced electronically on website and social media

Highways banners – banner licence purchased annually to permit five roadside banners being displayed in run up to Fryern Funtasia or similar community event.

Websites – www.chandlersford-pc.gov.uk and www.hiltingburysports.co.uk

- Wordpress websites hosted by Smart Marketing UK – tel no 023 8060 1635 claire@smartmarketinguk.com
- Day to day management in house by CFPC officers

Social Media

- Facebook and Instagram
- Accounts in the name of Chandler's Ford Parish Council and Hiltingbury Sports
- Managed and updated by CFPC Officers

Current Branding

Parish Council logo

Letter headed logo with wording

Hiltingbury Sports logo