

MICKLEFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA RELATIONS, SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

PURPOSE AND DEFINITIONS

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities for managing communications between the Parish Council and the public/media and provide guidance to Council members and staff. As a part of this purpose the Parish Council will establish a framework for maintaining an effective relationship with the public (including various media) based on a coherent, professional, accurate and reliable presentation of information, in respect of its functions, decisions and actions.

The Parish Council recognises that it is accountable to the local community and that effective communication helps to achieve this. It also recognises that the media are an important way of conveying information and the Parish Council must therefore maintain positive and constructive media relations and work with the media to increase public awareness of the services provided and the reasons for particular policies and priorities. In essence, the Parish Council must work with the media to:

- explain Council policies and services to the local community;
- communicate important public information messages;
- encourage local democracy and enable people to participate in the work of the Council.

This policy covers formal and informal, solicited and unsolicited communications and provision of information including, but not limited to, the following formats:

- A written request (including by email, social media or text) to the Parish Council, or a specific member.
- A spoken request, in person or by telephone, to the Parish Council or a specific member.
- A comment in a media format (including formal hard copy and digital publications as well as social media).

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The laws relevant to media relations can be found in the following legislation: Local Government Act 1972, Local Government Act 1986, Local Government Act 1988, Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Guidance for the Effective Management of Recording at Local Council and Parish Meetings, Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, Data Protection Act 1998.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

In accordance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, the Council should endeavour to ensure that:

- Publicity describing the Council's aims and policies is as objective as possible, concentrating on facts, or explanations, or both.
- Controversial issues or issues with arguments for and against the views of the Council should be handled with particular care and must be presented clearly, fairly and as arguments.

- Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.
- Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.
- Public funds must not be used on publicity that is, or could be misinterpreted as being, party political; or on publicity which could be seen as promoting an individual member, particularly at election times.
- The Parish Council (members and staff) cannot disclose information which is confidential or where such disclosure is prohibited by law.
- All members of the public and media should be treated equally.

EXISTING MEASURES

In compliance with existing legislation, the Parish Council proactively provides access to information, and decision-making in the following ways:

- All meetings of the Council (including Committees) are open to the public, including the media. Exclusion of either can only be done by specific resolution and in accordance with relevant law and the Council's Standing Orders.
- Reporting and recording of meetings is permitted, in accordance with relevant legislation and the Council's Guidance for Reporting/Recording Meetings.
- The Council has a published Publication Scheme that specifies the information that it publishes, the format in which it is available, where it is available and any associated costs.
- Agendas, minutes and various other documents (including the Publication Scheme) are freely available on the Parish Council's website (www.micklefield-pc.gov.uk).
- A free quarterly newsletter that is delivered to households and a regularly updated website provide various up-to-date information.

Also in compliance with existing legislation, the Parish Council reserves the right to withhold certain sensitive information concerning commercial transactions, for example, contracts, land and property purchases and sales and other third party interests.

GENERAL GUIDANCE

These guidelines apply to all public and media relations, regardless of their origin, or who is responsible for a response (i.e. an individual member, the Parish Council, a Committee, or a member of staff). They should be consulted and considered in all situations regarding public and media relations.

- All members have signed the Parish Council's Code of Conduct, the objective of which is to maintain and enhance standards of personal conduct and the integrity of the Council. All contact with the public and media should be conducted on this basis. Members should have particular regard to the long-term reputation of the Council in all dealings with the public and media.
- All public and media comment must accurately reflect the Parish Council's position as adopted and recorded in existing documents e.g. minutes, policies.
- If the Parish Council does not have an adopted position, this must be made clear.
- All decisions of the Council that are made in an open meeting can be quoted and made available.
- Any person representing the Council should have all the necessary facts and understanding and be able to speak with some authority using plain English.
- Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, but facts and arguments should not be oversimplified.

- Comment on matters that are, or are likely to be, subject to legal proceedings should be subject to advice from YLCA/NALC before any press release, media response etc. is made.
- Confidential documents, reports and private correspondence should not be disclosed without prior Parish Council approval. Any leaks will be investigated to establish responsibility and appropriate action taken.
- Members of the Council or of the Council's staff must not disclose information of a confidential nature, including discussions with the press of any matter discussed under confidential items of Council and Committee meetings, or any other private briefing.
- Members of the Council should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of a member of staff at meetings held in public, or before the press.

PERSONAL STATEMENTS AND COMMENTS

Members who wish to express their views in a private capacity are not permitted to use the title of Councillor. Similarly, members of staff are not permitted to use their job title, as both would imply that the individual is expressing the Council's views and policies.

Members who wish to make a personal statement must clearly state that:

- The comment is made by them as an individual and is not necessarily the view of the Parish Council.
- Other members may hold a different view.
- The matter may still need to be discussed and/or resolved by the Council.

Members can make it clear that they voted against a policy or decision, if this took place in an open session, but should not seek to undermine a decision through the media or public comment. Furthermore, members should not make personal comments that could damage the reputation of the Parish Council, have a negative impact on partnership working, or on the credibility of the Parish Council, or on other Council members

PUBLIC AND MEDIA RELATIONS

The Parish Council will be proactive in the development of its relationships with the public and media, by engaging them when appropriate. This will have the benefit of managing the Parish Council's relationships executively, which will safeguard and enhance the Parish Council's reputation and ensure that the message is properly communicated. A proactive approach can be exercised in the following ways:

- By alerting the media to a potential story, provide important public information, or to explain the Parish Council's position on a particular issue.
- Members and officers can look for opportunities where issuing a press release might be beneficial.
- By using a protocol to manage communication (as follows):

PROTOCOL

- A direct approach to the media to seek an interview, issue a statement or press release, or publish an article, may only be made with the authorisation of the Parish Council, or relevant Committee.
- In the case of urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a Council meeting, the Clerk is authorised to publish a statement in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman.
- A press release (or other form of communication) is to be prepared by the Clerk in association with relevant members. In some circumstances, the Chairman or

other qualified member, is permitted to draft the press release, but must keep the Clerk informed.

- In preparing a press release or public statement, due consideration should be made of the general principles and general guidance.
- The Parish Council must approve the final press release or public statement, which will then be issued by, or under the authority of, the Clerk.

The protocol can also be used in the case of reactive public and media relations i.e. when responding to requests for information or comment, where it is appropriate to do so.

Joanne Hebden, Clerk and RFO
Micklefield Parish Council
17th October 2017

DATE APPROVED: 2ND NOVEMBER 2017
DATE REVIEWED: 8TH JUNE 2023
DATE REVIEWED: 6TH JUNE 2024

APPENDIX A – DEFINITIONS

The Council – Micklefield Parish Council

Social Media – any digital format open to the general public, including but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Micklefield Parish Council’s website, third party websites, forums, blogs, Snapchat, Instagram etc.

Electronic Communication – Email, text, social media

Media – any published format (hard copy or digital, formal or informal) or representative of that format

Public – any person or group of people (not limited to local electors, individuals or local groups)