

# GREAT WALTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

## Media Relations Policy

Version 7

*This policy document should be reviewed and updated as necessary.*

Version	Review Date	Reviewed By	Summary of Changes
1			Adopted by Great Waltham Parish Council on 16 <sup>th</sup> August 2010.
2	April 2015	A Micklem	No changes made.
3	July 2016	M Steel	No Changes made
4	June 2021	M Steel	Updates to incorporate a wider definition of Social Media, and clarity of when and how a personal view can be given, and how to respond to media if urgent response required
5	December 2021	S. Gilbert	Format changes.
6	April 2022	S. Gilbert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of Definitions.</li> <li>• S.1.5 – approved types of interactions with the media added.</li> <li>• S.2.2 – broader description of media types/strategies.</li> <li>• S.2.4 – Council's usual media interactions added.</li> <li>• S.3.3 – Makes clear that media opportunities must be referred to the Parish Clerk.</li> <li>• Formatting/typographical consistency improvements (generated by inclusion of Definitions).</li> </ul>
7	October 2024	S. Gilbert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S.3.2 – Inclusion of authority (as stated) to make public statements without prior agreement at a meeting.</li> </ul>

## **Definitions**

“Council” – Great Waltham Parish Council.

“Chair” – Chair of Great Waltham Parish Council.

“Councillor(s)” – Members of Great Waltham Parish Council.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The 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.
- 1.2. Effective media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between the Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.
- 1.3. The community in this sense includes all residents and elected representatives, businesses, schools, shops, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, groups and associations.
- 1.4. This document sets out the framework for councillors and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Council’s activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.
- 1.5. All Council and councillor interactions with the media should:
  - 1.5.1. Be helpful and relevant, open and honest, proactive and assertive.
  - 1.5.2. Not disclose confidential matters or criticise policies or personnel.
  - 1.5.3. Not include defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libellous statements or material.
  - 1.5.4. Not include material that includes images of young people without parental permission.

## **2. Media Opportunities**

- 2.1. “The Media” is more than the local newspaper. The phrase encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience, and includes broadcast media (radio and television), social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter) but not limited to these), and a wide range of printed media (e.g. newspapers, free sheets, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters).
- 2.2. Many of the categories in 2.1 have different facets, a newspaper has feature writers and specialist correspondents in addition to its “news” staff. Often organisations have involvement in more than one type of media outlet. In particular, broadcast and printed media organisations frequently broadened their audiences by also having an online presence.

- 2.3. Different media respond more readily to certain factors. For example, newspapers are more likely to print a general interest story if supplied with a photograph, radio items tend to be quite brief with a short 'sound bite' and television producers will want moving pictures to illustrate a story.
- 2.4. The Council's policy is to utilise those media facilities which, at any given time, best allow it to convey messages to its parishioners and the wider public. Routinely, the Council maintains content on the parish website, uses social media and submits regular articles to the Parish News.

### **3. Making Contact with the Media**

- 3.1. The general principle is that the Parish Clerk will act as the Press Officer and in the absence of the Parish Clerk the Chair will take on that role. Any official contact with the media concerning the Council's policies, the decisions it takes and the services it provides, are to be initiated through the Parish Clerk.
- 3.2. While press releases and statements will be discussed at Council meetings and individual councillors can be authorised to make such statements as agreed at the meeting, because the Council is mindful that the immediacy of social media especially can make this process too slow-moving, creating reputational issues for the Council, the Parish Clerk, Chair and Vice-Chair (and other councillors authorised by the Chair on a given issue) have authority to make public statements without prior agreement at a meeting, but must update the next meeting with full details of the statement or intervention made.
- 3.3. Other councillors and employees who identify a media opportunity must refer to the Parish Clerk to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.
- 3.4. If a councillor or employee of the Council receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Council, it should be referred to the Parish Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Parish Clerk and/or Chair, in consultation with other councillors where necessary, about the format and content of any response.
- 3.5. Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a councillor or employee from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on social media. However, in such a case, they must make it explicitly clear that any views expressed, are their own personal views. It should be noted that when a councillor comments on a Council service or issue, it is assumed he/she is acting as councillor. Councillors should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.
- 3.6. Employees (other than the Parish Clerk) should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Council unless specifically authorised by the Parish Clerk and/or Chair.
- 3.7. All press releases and other materials are to be kept for reference.

### **4. Talking to the Media**

- 4.1. In response to a Council press release:

- a) Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Parish Clerk and the author of the press release.
  - b) No-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.) or to correct any misrepresentation of fact.
- 4.2. In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations):
- a) The preferred approach, if time allows, is to refer the matter the Press Officer (Clerk) who will prepare a statement with the agreement of the Chair. Such statement can then be made by the Clerk or by the original receiver of the unsolicited approach.
  - b) In exceptional circumstances when an immediate response is warranted (e.g. a reporter calls the councillor and deadlines require immediate response) and to not respond immediately would reflect poorly on the Parish Council (e.g. a clear misrepresentation of the Council's position is presented, or the opportunity to correct misinterpreted factual information would be missed) a councillor can respond but should try to stick to confirming basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.) or to correct any misrepresentation of fact. In the event that an emergency situation demands a broader response, councillors should align with a known Council policy.
- 4.3. A councillor may be asked to take part in a radio or television broadcast and if time allows, should inform the Clerk and check on Council policy. They should try to arrange for it to be recorded and a copy sent to the Parish Clerk. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcast's contents should be sent.

## **5. Monitoring**

- 5.1. It is important to monitor the media for items (reports, articles, about the Council in order to know:
- a) Whether press releases and statements issued by the Council are picked up and used effectively.
  - b) What members of the community are saying about the Council and its services. Any responses to such comments by the public (e.g. on social media) should be checked with the Clerk first and should stick to facts, clarifications and align with Council policy as previously agreed. It would be preferable if the Clerk was making such responses, but it is recognised that the Clerk may not be active on all social media. In the event that an immediate response would serve the interest of the Council, a councillor would be justified in responding, but must stick to facts of the matter and not stray into personal opinion.
- 5.2. Councillors and employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Council in the media – original press cuttings should be sent to the Parish Clerk.