**GREAT WALTHAM PARISH COUNCIL**

**MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY**

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| Review Date | Reviewer | Changes made |
|  |  | Adopted by Great Waltham Parish Council on 16th August 2010. |
| April 2015 | A Micklem | No changes made. |
| July 2016 | M Steel | No Changes made |
| May 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 |
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**1. Introduction**

1.1 Great Waltham Parish 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 Parish Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Parish 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 Parish Council Members and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Parish Council’s activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.

**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, 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.

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.

**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 Chairman will take on that role. Any official contact with the media concerning the Parish Council’s policies, the decisions it takes and the services it provides, are to be initiated through the Parish Clerk.

3.2 Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or Chairman in association with other Members as required, and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.

3.3 Other Members of the Parish Council and employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Parish Clerk so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.

3.4 If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be referred to the Parish Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Parish Clerk and/or Chairman, in consultation with other Members 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 Member 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, members must make it explicitly clear that any views expressed, are their own personal views. It should be noted that when a Member comments on a Parish Council service or issue, there may be a presumption that the Member is acting as a Parish Cllr. Members should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish 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 Parish Council unless specifically authorised by the Parish Clerk and/or Chairman of the Council.

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 Parish 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.)

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 views of the Parish Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.

b) The Parish Clerk should be informed so that facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.

**5. Monitoring**

5.1 It is important to monitor the media for items (reports, articles, about the Parish Council in order to know:

a) whether press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council are picked up and used effectively.

b) what members of the community are saying about the Parish 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.

5.2 Members and employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Parish Council in the media – original press cuttings should be sent to the Parish Clerk. It is not permissible to send photocopies.

5.3 A Member 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.

5.4 If a Member is contacted by the press and an immediate response is warranted (e.g., a clear misrepresentation of the council’s position is presented, or a deadline means that an opportunity to correct misinterpreted factual information would be missed), a Member can respond, but should try to stick to facts and known council policy.