

OTTERBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL POLICY FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PRESS AND MEDIA

Introduction

This policy does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media.

Policy

1. Any communications with the Press and Media will be with the consent of the Parish Clerk and/or Chair of the Council.
2. The Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press statements on behalf of the Council. In his/her absence enquirers will be referred to the Chair.
3. All communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council.
4. Enquiries relating to matters not yet considered by Council should be referred to the Chair.

Members of the Council

5. All Councillors must observe the Code of Conduct in force whenever conducting the business of the Council, or acting as a representative of the Council.
6. A Councillor must not discuss with the Press any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's Agenda or at any other private briefing.
7. When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media, Members must make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. For example: -
 - as Clerk or Chair of the Council
 - as a private individual (i.e. letter to press for publication) but not necessarily representing the views of the Council.
8. Councillors should be mindful of the decisions made by the Council and should not issue any verbal or written statement which undermines them, even if they voted against that decision.
9. When writing to the Press as an individual, never imply you are stating Council policy eg by use of the prefix Cllr or Councillor as a title.

Dealing with the Press

10. If the Press or Media approach you for comment on a controversial subject, it is usually safer to state “no comment” and ask the press to contact the Clerk.
11. When dealing with the Press verbally, members should remain calm. Be aware that statements made in innocence can look very different in print, than they did when spoken.
12. Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are not defamatory.

Meetings of Council and Committees

13. Copies of Agenda, Minutes and Reports sent to Members for meetings of the Council are available to the public and therefore the Press and Media and placed on the Council’s web site. See Publication Scheme.
14. At meetings, members of the Press are permitted to take notes of the proceedings, unless excluded by resolution of the Council, usually when matters of a confidential nature are being discussed and must follow the Protocol as adopted by the Council.

Press Releases

15. All Press releases made on behalf of the Council will be prepared by the Clerk following any meetings of the Council.
16. The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair is also authorised to publish Press releases on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a Council meeting.

OTTERBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL
PROTOCOL FOR REPORTING AT MEETINGS
Annex to Standing Order No: 3 (I)

Introduction

- 1 This Protocol provides guidance to members of the public or press who wish to photograph or record proceedings at any of Otterbourne Parish Council's public meetings.
- 2 The Council supports the principles of openness and transparency in the way it conducts its meetings. Sound recording, photographing, filming, and use of social media at meetings which are held in public is permitted:
 - (a) subject to the provisions of this Protocol; and
 - (b) provided that the Chair is satisfied that it will not be disruptive or distracting to the good order and conduct of the meeting.
- 3 No restrictions will be placed on anyone using social media at a public meeting subject to the limitations regarding photography and audio/visual recording set out in this Protocol.
- 4 Meetings which take the form of hearings or which discuss sensitive employment or contractual information such as the Personnel Sub-Committee, may not be suitable for recording due to the nature of some of the evidence given at the meeting. It will be at the Chair's discretion to determine whether the recording of a particular meeting will be permitted.
- 5 Failure to follow the provisions within this Protocol may result in the Chair refusing to allow the proceedings to be photographed or recorded.
- 6 For the purposes of this Protocol 'recording' includes sound recording, photographing, filming, and use of social media. Social media includes, but is not limited to Twitter, Facebook and blogs.

Before the Meeting

- 7 Those wishing to record proceedings at a meeting are required to contact the Clerk as early as possible before the start of the meeting so that arrangements can be discussed and the agreement of the Chair be sought.
- 8 The name, organisation (if applicable) and contact details of the person wishing to record proceedings are required and should be provided before the meeting to the Clerk.

At the Meeting

9. Notices will be displayed in the meeting room advising that proceedings may be recorded, and the Chair will make an announcement to this effect at the beginning of the meeting if a request has been received.
10. Members of the public attending a meeting to ask a question will be deemed to have given consent to being photographed or recorded.
11. Members of the public seated in the public seating area who actively object, should not be photographed, filmed or recorded as long as this does not undermine the broader transparency of the meeting.
12. Photography or filming must take place from a fixed position in the meeting room approved by the Chair, to ensure that the view of Councillors, officers, public and press, is not obstructed.
13. The use of flash photography or additional lighting will only be permitted if agreed in advance with the Clerk and the Chair.
14. Photography or audio/visual recording will be stopped if the Chair feels it is disrupting or inhibiting the meeting in any way.
15. If someone refuses to stop recording when requested to do so the Chair will ask the person to leave the meeting. If the person refuses to leave, the Chair will adjourn the meeting or make other appropriate arrangements for the meeting to continue without disruption.
16. Anyone asked to leave a meeting because they have refused to comply with the Chair's request to do so, may be refused permission to record future meetings.

After the Meeting

17. Photographs and audio/visual recordings must not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes refraining from editing the views being expressed in a way that may ridicule or show lack of respect towards those being photographed or recorded.
18. If someone fails to comply with this Protocol the Chair may refuse to allow this person to record any future meetings.
19. The responsibility for how any photographs or audio/visual recording is used rests with the person who made the recording and not the Council.

Adopted: Otterbourne Parish Council meeting 21 May 2024.