

Old Catton Parish Council

Press 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 to manage the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the press.

This policy is not intended to curb freedom of speech or enforce strict regulation, but to provide guidance on responsible and effective engagement with the media.

2. Key Aims

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions. Effective two-way communication, including through the press and media, is essential. Positive and constructive media relations help:

- Convey accurate information about Council services and decisions;
- Increase public understanding of Council activities;
- Maintain transparency and trust.

The Council also has a duty to correct misinformation and defend itself from unfounded criticism where necessary.

3. Legal Framework

All communications must comply with:

- The Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988;
- The Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity;
- The Council's adopted Standing Orders;
- The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

4. Contact with the Media

- The Clerk and Chair are authorised to speak to the media on behalf of the Council.
- Other Councillors may speak to the media in a personal capacity but must clearly state that any views expressed are personal and not those of the Council.
- Information shared with the press should be provided in writing where possible, to avoid misinterpretation.
- Confidential documents (including exempt minutes and private correspondence) must never be leaked. Breaches may result in investigation and action.

In cases where media enquiries relate to potential or ongoing legal matters, advice should be sought from the Council's solicitor before responding.

5. Personal Privacy and Sensitive Information

- Personal information about Councillors, staff, or members of the public should not be disclosed without consent.
- Sensitive matters (e.g. long-term absences, disciplinary issues) must be referred to the Clerk before any public response is made.

6. Crisis Communications

In the event of a crisis or emergency:

- The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair, will coordinate all media communications.
- A holding statement may be issued promptly to acknowledge the situation and reassure the public that further information will follow.
- Only designated individuals may speak to the media to ensure consistent and accurate messaging.
- Social media activity during a crisis must also comply with the Council's Social Media Policy.

7. Press Releases

- Press releases may be drafted by the Clerk or any Councillor but must be reviewed and issued only by the Clerk.
- Releases must reflect the corporate view of the Council, not individual opinions.
- Press releases should be accurate, timely, and use a consistent tone and format.

8. Attendance of Media at Council Meetings

- In accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, agendas, minutes, and reports will be made available to the media on request.
- Members of the media are welcome at public Council meetings. Workspace will be provided where possible.
- Filming or recording of meetings must follow the Council's Standing Orders and must be arranged with prior notice to the Clerk and Chair.

9. Social Media and Online Media

Social media platforms and online content (e.g. blogs, podcasts, video content) are covered by the Council's separate Social Media Policy, which should be read in conjunction with this document.

10. Changes to the Policy

This is a living document. The Clerk may make interim amendments to this policy to address unforeseen issues or urgent developments, subject to reporting such changes at the next Council meeting.

This policy will be reviewed at least every three years, or earlier if required due to changes in legislation or Council operations.

Adopted: 8th September 2025