Media Policy

Thurston Parish Council

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INTRODUCTION

Thurston Parish Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions.

The Council may communicate with those whose work involves gathering material for editorial publication in print, broadcast and electronic form (e.g. researchers, journalists, reporters, photographers, editors of newspapers and magazines, camera or sound operators and crew of TV and radio programmes).

Where information is not available via the Council's publication scheme the Council shall endeavour to assist the media with enquiries about the Council's functions, decisions and actions.

This policy explains how the Council, its councillors and staff will work with all forms of media to meet the above objectives.

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS

This policy is subject to the Council's statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Council's Standing Orders. Relevant standing orders referenced to or explained in this policy are available via the Council's publication scheme.

The Council, its councillors and staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law. Some but not all of the relevant obligations that councillors are subject to are contained in the Council's code of conduct, a copy of which is available via the Council's publication scheme.

MEETINGS

The meetings of the Council, its committees and sub-committees are open to the public unless they resolve that their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution or if standing orders for certain sub-committees do not permit attendance of the public. In accordance with its standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council, its committees, sub-committees and joint committees if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.

Where meetings include time for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's standing orders and public participation protocol.

The Council's Standing Orders allows the filming, photographing, or making an audio recording of a meeting; or use of any other means for enacting persons not present to see or hear proceedings at a meeting as it takes place or later; or reporting or commenting on the proceedings in writing during or after a meeting or orally report or comment after the meeting, provided that it does not disrupt the conduct of meetings or impedes other members of the public being able to see, hear or film etc the proceedings.

As a courtesy to the public, and to assist anyone planning to film etc., the Parish Council asks that anyone wishing to film etc, contact the Council, in advance of the meeting to enable the Clerk to discuss and assist with any specific requirements.

There is no actual requirement to notify the Council in advance, but it should be noted that the Chair of the meeting will have absolute discretion to terminate or suspend any of these activities if, in their opinion, continuing to do so would prejudice proceedings at the meeting.

It is expected that those who are recording proceedings will not edit the film/recordings/photographs in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings or infringe the core values of the Council. This includes refraining from editing an image or views expressed in a way that may ridicule or show lack of respect towards those being photographed/filmed/recorded.

In advance of meetings of the Council, its committees, sub-committees and joint committees, newspapers, news agencies or organisations that collects news for sound and TV broadcast are entitled, on payment of postage or other necessary charges, to copies of the agenda and necessary supporting papers.

The accredited representatives of the newspapers, news agencies or organisations that collect news for sound and TV broadcast shall be given reasonable facilities for taking their report of a meeting. This is confirmed in the Council's Standing Orders.

INTERVIEWS, STATEMENTS AND ARTICLES

No individual Councillor or staff, in their official capacity, is empowered to provide a verbal or written statement to the media unless the Council has delegated the authority to them so to do. All requests for comments shall be directed to the Clerk or the Chair.

The media shall in the first instance contact the Council's Clerk if they want to

i. interview councillors about its business decisions and action or
ii. obtain a verbal or written statement from the Council about its business decisions and actions. If the Clerk is not available, the media shall contact the Council's Chair. Any verbal or written statement given by the Council's Clerk to the media represents the corporate position and views of the Council.

An interview by the media with councillors or staff in their official capacity about the Council's business, decisions and actions requires the Council's written consent. In any such interview, the media cannot ask about the personal views of the councillors or staff in their private capacity.

Councillors cannot communicate their personal views about the Council's business, decisions and actions, other than the views they hold in their official capacity. Councillors and staff are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council, or to damage the reputation of others in the Council or the Council itself.

The Council's Clerk may contact the media if the Council wants to give an interview, provide a verbal or written statement to the media or publish an article using the media about its business, decisions and actions.

Councillors and staff, other than the Clerk, cannot in their official capacity, provide verbal and written statements to the media, or write articles for publication using the media about the Council's business decisions and actions without the Council's prior written consent.

Councillors and staff cannot communicate their personal views about the Council's business decisions and actions, other than the views they hold in their official capacity. Councillors and staff are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council, or to damage the reputation of others in the Council or the Council itself.

If Councillors or staff, in their private capacity, provide verbal or written statements or interviews to the media or write articles for publication using the media about the Council's business decisions and actions, any personal views must be expressed in their private capacity. Personal views held in their official capacity cannot be communicated. Councillors are not permitted to use their title 'Councillor' and staff are not permitted to use their job title.

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Councillors or staff must avoid making any social media communications that could damage the Council's official business or reputation, even indirectly.

All staff should be aware that even if they do not expressly name the council as their employer on social media, this policy will still apply if a connection with their employment can be reasonably made.

Councillors or staff must not use social media or website to defame or disparage the Council or its staff or any third party; to harass or unlawfully discriminate against Councillors or third parties; to make false or misleading statements; or to impersonate Councillors or third parties.

Councillors or staff must not express opinions on the Council's behalf via social media, unless expressly authorised to do so by the Council or its Proper Officer. You may be required to undergo training in order to obtain such authorisation.

In establishing a website, the Council must ensure that users can find the website; that users are clear as to who owns the website and what it is designed to achieve.

Council must ensure that contact points (whether email, forms-based or telephone) must be staffed and enquiries answered within reasonable timescales.

Council must ensure that links are up to date so users can rely on the website being available.

If Councillors are blogging or tweeting personally, and not in the role as a Councillor, they must ensure that they do not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Parish Council.

Whilst Councillors may use a blog to draw attention to a particular local issue and call the council to account, as you would in a public meeting, blog entries ridiculing or attacking officers, or making serious accusations about their personal competence of integrity could amount to disrespect, even bullying, in some circumstances.

DISCLAIMERS

The web site will carry a disclaimer. This may protect the Parish Council from legal action arising out of the material on the site, or even the material that links to elsewhere. It needs to be accessible from every screen in the site, for example, the disclaimer notice in the web site will be accessible from the footer menu on every screen.

Since the Parish Council may not be able to ensure that the site is always up-to-date and accurate, a disclaimer is very important. It helps to protect it, as it publishes information to people operating under different legal systems. It also helps to educate and warn users. As a part of the disclaimer the Parish Council should indicate the dates over which any information is reliable.