



Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge

## **MEDIA POLICY**

### **Introduction**

Speldhurst 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.

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.

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.

### **The Media**

The term "media" encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience, and includes broadcast media, the internet and a wide range of printed media, including local newspapers, magazines, local broadsheets, and posters.

The general principle is that the Parish Council office will act as the Press Office. Any official contact with the media concerning Parish Council's policies, decisions and services is to be initiated through this office.

Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and other Councillors as required and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.

All Members who are approached by the media should refer them to the Council Office to ensure consistency. Members can, as long as they make it clear that it is a personal opinion, state their view on a matter. However, 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. The requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and 2018 GDPR Act, must be adhered to at all times.

The Local Government Act (LGA) 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request and the media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and the Council should make appropriate space available. The Openness of LG Bodies Regulations 2014 became law on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2014, allowing filming, photographing and/or recording of Council proceedings by the public or press. The Chairman of the meeting should ask if any person intends to do any of these so that Councillors are aware. This should be a constant agenda item on all Council or Committee meetings. No oral report or running verbal commentary is permitted during the meeting.

### **Notice Boards and Website**

Public notice is required of Parish Council meetings and its committee meetings. The LGA 1972 requires that at least three clear working days' notice be given and that the notice must be affixed in some conspicuous place in the locality (notice boards).

The Parish Council's website should be updated regularly by the Council Office with copies of minutes, agendas, policies and information useful to residents. It is, however, not a legal requirement that this is done except for information that is required by law (e.g. the Annual Return).

### **Social Media and Networking**

Social media is a collective term for ways to create and publish on the internet and other forms of social communication such as Facebook or Twitter. It is clear that social networking sites can enhance debate and add positively to local issues when used correctly.

Speldhurst Parish Council uses Twitter (@clerkspc) and from November 2018, uses FaceBook, this is advertised to the public. Most of the activity is 'following' to gather information and to re-post items useful to residents. It is expected that this will develop over time.

### **Use of Social Media by Councillors**

When using social media Councillors should not represent their personal views as being either the views or the policies of the Parish Council, nor should they represent their views as being those of other Councillors unless with those Councillors' express permission.

Councillors should refrain from personal criticism in social media of other Councillors and individuals or organisations with whom the Parish Council has dealings (in accordance with the Nolan principles of conduct in public life)