

# UP HATHERLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire



## Media and Communications Policy

**Adopted:** 03/03/2026

**Reviewed:** 06/01/2026

**Next Review Due:** 04/01/2028

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### 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Up Hatherley Parish Council (the Council) communicates effectively, consistently, and lawfully with the public, press, and on social media. It provides a framework for councillors, staff, and volunteers to follow when representing the Council.

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### 2. Scope

This policy covers all forms of communication, including:

- Press and media relations
- Website content
- Newsletters, notices, and printed materials
- Social media platforms (Facebook, X, Instagram, etc.)
- Email and digital messaging platforms

It applies to councillors, employees, contractors, and any volunteers acting on behalf of the Council.

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### 3. Principles

All Council communications must be:

- Accurate – based on verified information.
- Respectful – free from offensive, defamatory, or discriminatory language.
- Transparent – open, honest, and accountable.
- Compliant – in line with relevant legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018, GDPR, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Local Government Act 1986 (Code of Recommended Practice on Publicity), and the Equality Act 2010.
- Professional – reflecting the Council's role as a trusted public body.

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Publicity must be lawful, objective, balanced, and non-political. This principle underpins all sections of this policy

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## 4. Roles and Responsibilities

- The Clerk (Proper Officer) is the Council's authorised press and media contact. All official press releases and media responses will be coordinated through the Clerk.
  - Councillors may communicate with residents and the press, but must make clear that they are expressing personal views. They must not present personal opinions as the official view of the Council.
  - Council staff and volunteers/contractors must not make public statements or posts on behalf of the Council unless authorised.
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## 5. Press and Media Relations

- Press enquiries should be directed to the Clerk.
  - Press releases must be approved by the Clerk before publication.
  - All statements will be factual, balanced, and reflect agreed Council decisions.
  - Confidential information and items discussed in closed session must never be disclosed.
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## 6. Website, Publications and Notices

- The Council's website is its primary source of official information. All statutory information required by law will be published here.
  - Newsletters, leaflets, posters, and noticeboards should support, not replace, website content.
  - The Clerk is responsible for ensuring that website content is accurate and compliant with accessibility standards (WCAG 2.2 AA).
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## 7. Social Media

- The Council may operate official social media accounts to share news, promote events, and engage with the community. These accounts are administered by the Clerk.
- Councillors using personal accounts must:
  - Follow the Code of Conduct.

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- Make clear when views are personal.
- Avoid bringing the Council into disrepute.
- Content on Council-run accounts must:
  - Be factual, non-political, and respectful.
  - Direct queries to the Clerk rather than engage in debate.
- Offensive, defamatory, or unlawful comments posted on Council accounts may be removed or reported.

Councillors' use of social media is an extension of their conduct obligations and must align with the Code of Conduct.

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## 8. Conduct and Enforcement

- Breaches by councillors may be referred under the Code of Conduct to the Monitoring Officer.
  - Breaches by staff may result in disciplinary action under the Council's HR policies.
  - Persistent misuse by members of the public may be addressed under the Complaints Policy.
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## 9. Emergencies and Crisis Communications

In an emergency, urgent communications may be issued by the Clerk (in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair if possible). Messages will focus on factual updates, signposting, and reassurance, avoiding speculation or political comment.

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## 10. Monitoring and Review

- The Clerk will monitor the Council's website and social media accounts to ensure compliance.
  - This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if required due to changes in law, technology, or council operations.
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