

SELLING PARISH COUNCIL

Press and Media, Social Media and Email Policy

PRESS AND MEDIA

Selling Parish Council's Standing Orders (section 21) state:

"Requests from the press or other media for an oral or written comment or statement from the council, its councillors or staff shall be handled in accordance with the council's policy in respect of dealing with the press and/or other media."

This policy outlines the procedures and arrangements for the handling the press and what councillors or the clerk should do if approached by the media or if they are involved in a situation that will attract media attention. Selling Parish Council is keen to develop a good rapport and work proactively with the media, whilst ensuring that confidentiality and consent are maintained at all times.

1. On receipt of a request from the press or other media for a statement to the clerk or any councillor, the person receiving the request will advise the body making the request that a statement will be considered and issued shortly.
2. On receipt of a request the journalist or other caller should be asked to make clear who they are working for or what is the exact nature of their enquiry. Further they should be asked what and where any information they elicit will be put.
3. The parish council is under no obligation to provide a statement – and may prefer to make 'no comment'.
4. Only the clerk and/or the chairman will provide the press with a verbal or written statement – ideally this statement would be after liaison with each other as a minimum and may involve input from other councillors also.
5. The exception to (3.) above would be if the chairman of the parish council at a parish council meeting had delegated a specific parish councillor(s) to make the response on behalf of the council.
6. Under no circumstances must anything of a confidential nature be disclosed to the press or other media.
7. The response to the press or other media should be the view of the parish council as a whole, not the view of an individual councillor or the clerk. However, an individual councillor may give a direct quote as long as they attribute that quote to their name and make it clear that is their view and not that of the parish council.
8. No response should be made that is in any way damaging to the interests or reputation of the parish council.
9. The parish council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information from the parish council under the Freedom of Information Act. The parish council will respond to such requests in accordance with the Act as laid out in Selling Parish Council's Freedom of Information policy. The parish council will not release information that is exempted. Exemptions will be:
 - (a) Personal data (see paragraph 10 below):
 - (b) Confidential matters
 - (c) Information likely to endanger the health or safety of a councillor, the clerk or any other individual

10. Data Protection Act – the council recognises that personal data (including photographs relating to a councillor or clerk) are protected under the Data Protection Act and this personal data will not be disclosed to the media without the consent of the person concerned.
11. If a request for information involves a conflict of interest for a councillor or the clerk. In that event, the councillor or clerk must declare their interest and avoid involvement with the matter.
12. The clerk should keep a record of all communications with the press or other media.
13. At parish council meetings – The press or representatives from any other media are welcomed at parish council meetings. However, under Selling Standing Orders 3 (d), if any item or information is deemed personal or sensitive and not for the public domain, then the press/media along with members of the public should leave the meeting when requested to do so at this point.
14. Subject to Standing Order 3 (l) a person who attends a meeting is permitted to report on the meeting whilst the meeting is open to the public. To 'report' means to film, photograph, make an audio recording of the meeting proceedings, use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear the meeting as it takes place or later or to report or to provide oral or written commentary about the meeting so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later to persons not present.
15. A person present at a meeting may not provide an oral report or oral commentary about a meeting as it takes place without permission.
16. Subject to Standing Order 3 (n) states: **The press shall be provided with reasonable facilities for the taking of their report of all or part of a meeting at which they are entitled to be present.**

SOCIAL MEDIA

The aim of this Policy is to set out a 'Code of Practice' to provide guidance to staff and parish councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The policy covers the following:

- Parish Council Website: www.sellingparishcouncil.gov.uk
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/Sellingparishcouncil/
- Parish Council Emails: clerk@sellingparishcouncil.gov.uk / councillor.name@sellingparishcouncil.gov.uk

Who does it apply to?

The principles of the policy apply to parish councillors and council staff. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the parish council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

Use of Social media

The use of social media will not replace existing forms of communication. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

The Policy

1. The parish council appoints the clerk as moderator. The moderator will be responsible for the posting and monitoring of the content, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts which is deemed to be of a defamatory, or libellous nature. Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (i.e. Facebook). The moderator may also remove third-party postings that advertise or promote a business or service. The moderator may assign additional responsibilities to a specific councillor for managing social media posts and or the site administration when the moderator is unavailable or when the moderator deems it is in the best interest of the parish council.
2. Councillors and in particular councillors with portfolios are responsible for providing news and information to the moderator to share information with the community through the parish council social media.
3. The parish council's clerk is appointed "Webmaster" to maintain and update the parish council website.

The Parish Council Website will be used to:

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press pages
- Vacancies
- Share information from partners i.e. police, local businesses
- Announcing new information
- Post or share information from other parish related community groups/clubs/associations
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and other councillors

Facebook will be used to support the website information above.

Selling Parish Council emails will be used to distribute information of council business

Guidance for councillors using the council's social media presence

Individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity. **Councillors are strongly advised to only use their council email address for council business and to adhere to the Members' Code of Conduct.**

4. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.
5. When participating in any online communication:
 - a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
 - b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the parish council. Never make false or misleading statements.
 - c. Parish councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All parish councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of

- the council or bring the council into disrepute or is contrary to the 'Councillor's Code of Conduct' or any other Policies
- d. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud'. Use sentence case format, not capital letter, or write in red to emphasis points.
 - e. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
 - f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
 - g. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
 - h. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the person or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
6. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
 7. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations.
 8. Residents and councillors should note that not all communication require a response.
 - a. There will not necessarily be an immediate response to communications because they may need to be discussed and responses agreed by the parish council.
 - b. The moderator will be responsible for all final published responses.
 - c. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. The poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
 - d. If the moderator feels unable to answer a post, for example of a contentious nature, this shall be referred to the chairman. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the chairman directly.
 - e. Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a parish council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.
 9. The moderator shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
 - a. Spell and grammar check everything
 - b. Correct any errors promptly
 10. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the moderator. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.
 11. Any links placed on the website/Facebook are for ease of finding information they are not an endorsement of any of their services.

EMAIL

Guidance for councillors using the parish council's email.

The council has a main email account clerk@sellingparishcouncil.gov.uk this is monitored during the clerk's working hours. Each councillor also has their own council email address for use on council business. To ensure good practice in sending emails:

1. Only use your parish council email address for parish council business.
2. Only use other councillor's parish council email addresses for parish council business.
3. Reply only to those who need to see them, try not to 'reply to all' if it is obvious from the originator that they only need a reply.
4. Never forward information of a confidential nature.
5. Comments of a personal nature, or that which could be offensive or abusive would constitute unacceptable behaviour; and be contrary to the 'Standing Orders' of the parish council.
6. Emails which constitute harassment and bullying will be contrary to the 'Councillor's Code of Conduct'.

Councillors should be aware these emails can be requested under a 'Freedom of Information Request, or the GDPR legislation in the form of a Subject Access Request. Therefore, care should be taken to ensure that each councillor keeps all parish council communication within its own separate file, which should be password protected to prevent accidental access if the computer is used by more than one person, or lost or stolen.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Libel. If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation they may take a libel action against you. This will also apply if you allow someone else to publish something libellous on your website if you know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

Copyright. Placing images or text on your site from a copyrighted source, such as extracts from publications or photographs without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.

Data protection. Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission.

Obscene material. Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

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