

Feock Parish Council

Social Media & Press Policy for Councillors



Press Policy

1. Introduction

Feock Parish Council welcomes enquiries from the Press and Media and recognises its relationship with the Press helps communication with residents. The Council seeks to be as transparent as possible, cooperating at all times with the Press and using the opportunities of the Media to publicise events being organised.

The Press are permitted to attend all meetings of the Council and its committees, unless excluded under the Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960. They are not, however, invited to attend informal Council meetings which are fact finding sessions only and are not scheduled official Council meetings.

2. Purpose

The aim of the policy is to ensure that Feock Parish Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner and reflects the corporate view of the Council.

3. Scope

The Press Policy includes:-

- Official Council Press Releases
- Councillor Press correspondence
- Freedom of Information Requests
- Press Protocol

4. Policy

a) Official Council Press Releases

i) Official Council Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Parish Clerk in consultation with other Members as required;

ii) The Parish Clerk will act as the Council's Press Officer. Any official contact with the Media concerning the Council's policies, the decisions it makes and services it provides are to be initiated through the Parish Clerk;

iii) Members who identify a Media opportunity should discuss this with the Parish Clerk who will, in consultation with other Members as appropriate, decide how this will be followed up;

iv) If a Member or an employee receives an approach or enquiry from the Media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be referred to the Parish Clerk.

b) Councillor Press Correspondence

i) Individual Councillors can make their own statements relating to local issues and this policy is not designed to prevent any Member expressing a personal opinion through the Media. *Members must make it clear however, that any view expressed which differs from Council Policy are their own personal views and should be recorded as such;*

ii) Such releases, political or non-political, should bear no reference whatsoever to the Council or any Officer and must not use the Council logo. Neither the Council address, telephone number nor website should be included as a point of contact;

iii) Where a journalist wishes to confirm what was said by an individual Councillor during a Council meeting, they will be referred to the Parish Clerk.

c) Freedom of Information Requests

i) All requests received under the Freedom of Information Act must be referred to the Parish Clerk who will arrange for the request to be satisfied in accordance with the legislation.

ii) Members should be aware that any Council-related information that they hold on personal devices can be the subject of a FoI request.

d) Press Protocol

i) The Parish Clerk is responsible for issuing official Press releases on behalf of the Parish Council;

ii) Official Press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation, if any, of a Member(s) quoted in the release;

iii) When the Media seeks information on an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice will be obtained from the Council's solicitor before any response is made;

iv) All Press releases and other materials are filed for reference by the Parish Clerk.

v) During an election year, from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day following the election (Purdah), Officers will not normally issue Press releases;

Social Media Policy

5. Introduction

Social media is the term for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

For the purposes of this Policy, the term “social media” covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, and any similar sites which develop after the creation of this policy. It also includes comments in relation to online newspaper articles.

6. Purpose

The widespread availability and use of social media networking applications bring opportunities to communicate and engage with members of the community in new ways. This Policy relates to Councillor use of social media, whether inside or outside of official capacities.

The Parish Clerk is responsible for any social media sites set up for the Council as a corporate body. *It is recommended that in the case of Facebook and similar sites, Councillors wishing to keep their personal life and official capacities separate should create separate accounts.*

It is important that the Council utilises these technologies effectively whilst being fully aware of its legal responsibilities and ensuring the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected.

7. Scope

The Social Media Policy includes:-

- User Responsibilities
- Safety
- Information Protection
- Best Practice
- Elections
- Breaches of this Policy

8. Policy

a) User Responsibilities

i) In any biography where the Councillor is identified as a Councillor, the account should state that the views are those of the Councillor in question and may not represent the views of the Council. Use of the Council’s crest on a personal account or website should only occur with the written permission of the Parish Clerk.

ii) The Council crest should not be used on sites or applications which are unrelated to or not representative of the Council’s official position. If in doubt, contact the Parish Clerk.

iii) Where possible, a Councillor should make clear who they are in the profile of any account and whether they are an authorised representative of the Council. In exceptional circumstances, such as a potential threat to personal safety, the Parish Clerk must be consulted.

iv) When commenting online on any matter relating to the Council, Councillors should identify themselves as a Councillor and make it clear whether or not they are representing the views of the Council. Councillors must not make anonymous posts nor use a pseudonym to hide their identity.

v) Councillors are personally responsible for the content that they publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may amount to libel.

vi) Councillors must treat others with respect and not make disrespectful, rude or offensive comments.

vii) Councillors must comply with the Council's Equality Policy.

b) Safety

i) Councillors must be aware of their own safety when placing information on the internet and should not publish something that could leave them vulnerable.

ii) Any Councillor receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the Parish Clerk and/or the Police.

iii) Councillors' social media accounts should be password protected and not shared.

c) Information Protection

i) Councillors must not disclose information, make comments or engage in activity on behalf of the Council ***unless they are authorised to do so.***

ii) Councillors must handle personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

iii) Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important that Councillors ensure that they are confident of the nature of the information they publish. Comments posted online are permanently available and can be used by the Media such as newspapers.

iv) Councillors must not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal nor release confidential reports/papers.

v) Copyright laws apply online. Councillors must not use images to which they do not hold the copyright. Information shared should be attributed to the source.

d) Best Practice

i) Social media must not be used to publish content which may result in action for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes, but is not limited to, material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.

ii) Social media accounts set up as a Councillor must not be used to promote personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns, whether or not related to the function of the Council.

iii) Use of social media must not breach the Council's misconduct, equality or bullying & harassment policies.

e) Elections

i) The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature – and this includes web advertising. Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk

ii) Councillor social media accounts may need to be closed down for a defined period before local council elections in order to comply with legislation (Purdah).

f) Breach of this Policy

i) Failure to comply with this Policy will be deemed as a breach of the Members Code of Conduct and will be reported to the Monitoring Officer.

ii) Other violations, such as breaching the Data Protection Act 1988 could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved.

iii) The Council reserves the right to request the closure of any applications or removal of any content published by Councillors deemed inappropriate, or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council, or put it at risk of legal action.