

CRANFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Section 14 External Communications

1. Policy Statement.

This Policy includes statements and guidance on press and media, filming, and banners and signage. Within Cranfield Parish Council, the importance of good communications with Parishioners and the Public generally is vital to ensure that they understand the work that the Council does on their behalf and the decisions made. It is important that the Council use's all forms of communication and all outlets for communication including the media, social media, and electronic communication as well as more standard forms of communication, such as face-to-face meetings, newsletters, minutes of meetings etc. This Policy provides guidance to all staff and councillors, encouraging prompt and positive action to communicate the Council's work and its view on a variety of issues. It also provides guidance to the Public on what they can expect in terms of the quality and promptness of information.

2. Scope.

- a. Press, Media and Social Media
This Policy describes how councillors and the clerk should act when in contact with the press or media. This includes any use of social and digital media (e.g. Website, Facebook, Twitter,) as well as print and broadcast media.
- b. Filming
From time-to-time, members of the public or councillors may wish to film committee or full Parish Council meetings; this Policy sets out how the Council will deal with these requests. This is permitted under Paragraphs 5 and 24 of the Standing Orders Policy, and associated legislation.
- c. Banners and Signage
The Council occasionally receives requests to place advertising banners or signage on land it owns. These are normally for local fundraising events. This Policy formalises the Council's response to these requests and permits the clerk to manage these requests without always needing to refer to the Council. Banners or signage to be displayed or placed on Council controlled or owned land, proposed by any individual, group or entity, are subject to the requirements of this Policy, and the information set forth in paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 below. Mandatory Conditions for Banner Display must be supplied before permission for a banner display can be considered.
- d. Other Forms of Communication
The Council will use other forms of communication from time to time and this policy gives guidance on these other areas. This includes Public Meetings, One Stop Shops, and The War Memorial etc.

3. Relevant Legislation.

- Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
- Local Government Act 1972 & 1986
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Standing Orders

4. **Press, Media and Social Media**

This Policy does not serve to curb freedom of speech or to enforce detailed rules and regulations. The Policy is intended to provide guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with members of the press and media.

Meetings of the council and committees are open to the public and press unless the Council resolves that their presence is prejudicial to the public interest because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons. Notice of all meetings must be publicised well in advance, e.g. on the village notice board.

In accordance with standing orders and the Council's public participation policy, persons may be required to leave a meeting if their disorderly conduct obstructs the business of the meeting.

Wherever possible all communications with the Press and Media should be made through the clerk. The clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council in consultation with the Chairman. In the absence of the clerk, the Chair, in consultation with the Vice Chair, will handle media communications. In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chairman and/or relevant Committee Chair will be consulted

Communications made by the clerk will relate to the stated business and day-to-day management of actions or adopted policy of the Council. The clerk should not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the clerk, the clerk will inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response within 3 working days, where practical. The clerk should then consult with the Chairman or relevant Councillor(s) on the text of a suitable response, which may in fact be "no comment".

The clerk, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice Chairman/Committee Chairman is authorised to publish press statements on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a Council meeting. Statements made by the clerk or Chair should reflect the opinion of the Council. If the Council does not have an official opinion, for example, when the Council has not yet discussed a matter this should be the stated position.

All formal requests for comment regarding Council policy should be directed to the clerk in the first instance. There are several personal privacy issues that must be handled sensitively and within data protection rules. These include the release of personal information that could identify an individual, such as home address, email or telephone numbers not already in the public domain, disciplinary processes and long-term sickness absences. The use of written communications to prevent misunderstandings should be considered. Correspondence should come from the clerk wherever possible.

Councillors can communicate with the press, but they should make it clear that they are expressing a personal view and not necessarily those of the Council. Councillors should take care not to appear to undermine any decisions taken by the Council. Councillors should always make sure they do not breach the Code of Conduct and take care regarding all other relevant policies, regulations and laws. Press releases help make the media aware of a potential story, provide useful or valuable information or explain the Council's opinion on a specific issue. The clerk and councillors should look for opportunities where issuing a press release may be beneficial.

The clerk or any member may draft a press release. Press releases can be proposed and agreed at Council meetings. Press releases must be issued by the clerk unless this is not possible. The clerk will issue a copy of any press release to the chair for checking prior to issue, and if the chair is not available, to the vice-chair. This is to ensure the requirements of this Policy are met. If the Council resolves that a draft press release should be circulated before publishing, the clerk will send a draft copy to members before it is issued. If there are objections to the draft and these are not resolved, it should be referred back to the next meeting of the Council.

Social Media such as Blogs, Twitter and Facebook etc. are now used by many as a means of communication. However, there are dangers in using Social Media as it is often treated as an informal method of communicating. Cranfield Parish Council has a website and this will be used by the Clerk to communicate items such as Notice of Meetings and Minutes etc. This can be accessed at <https://cranfield.bedsparishes.gov.uk/parish-council/>. The Parish Council has a Facebook page. However, this is not used to any great extent and its continuing use will be kept under review. The Parish Council will not use Blogs, Twitter or other social media sites to communicate with the public/residents unless specifically authorised by the full council.

The use of social media, particularly Facebook and the like by Councillors can pose difficult challenges. Social media is often misused by members of the public and "Trolling" and unreasonable criticism is now a regular problem. It is all too easy for Councillors to get involved or "sucked in" to social media discussions about local issues and for such postings to be misused or spread to the detriment of the Council. Councillors must be wary of using social media and should not use this to discuss Council business in public. If social media is used by a Councillor, this must always make it clear that any posting is a personal view and is not the view of the Council.

5. **Filming.**

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 (2014 SI No. 2095), which came into force on 6 August 2014, require parish councils to allow any person to film, audio-record or take photographs of, and to report on, the proceedings of any part of a meeting which the public are entitled to attend by law. The Regulations do not require parish councils to allow filming, audio recording or photography of any part of a meeting where the public are excluded because of the confidential nature of the business or where publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest. The Regulations apply only to formal meetings of the Council, a committee or a sub-committee and not to informal meetings or meetings of a working party without decision-making powers.

The Parish Council has no objection to quiet and inconspicuous filming, photography, tweeting and blogging using a hand-held device such as a mobile phone or tablet. Oral commentary in the meeting room during a meeting is not permitted by the Regulations and may be disruptive. The Council asks anyone proposing to use a large device to notify the clerk prior to the start of the meeting so that proper facilities can be provided if possible.

The Regulations apply to councillors as well as members of the public. Councillors need to ensure that they are not distracted from the business of the meeting.

Members of the public, who attend a meeting to observe it, are not permitted to take part in the council proceedings. The Council asks that they are not filmed or photographed without their consent. Children or vulnerable adults attending a meeting should not be filmed or photographed.

Anyone acting in a disruptive manner may be asked by the Chair to stop doing so and, if they continue, they may be asked to leave the meeting. This could include; moving to areas outside the areas designated for the public without the consent of the Chair; excessive noise in recording or setting up or re-siting equipment during the meeting; intrusive lighting and use

of flash photography; asking people to repeat statements for the purposes of recording or interrupting the Council meeting in other ways.

Recording equipment may be left running even if the person using it leaves the room. It must be turned off and removed for a part of a meeting where the public are excluded. An officer of the Council may stop the recording or switch off the equipment if this event occurs.

Those filming or recording meetings are reminded that requirements of general law apply to their activities. The requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 may apply to personal information about living individuals. This includes visual images. There may be legal liability for defamatory or offensive statements that are made by people being filmed and are subsequently distributed by the person filming. The Council cannot advise on general law and accepts no liability for any material created by those filming or recording a meeting.

6. Banners and Signage.

For the purpose of this paragraph and other relevant parts of this Policy, banners also refers to any type of signage.

Banners or signs that comply with the requirements of this Policy will be permitted to be mounted on land the Council controls or owns. Banners shall not be of a commercial/ business, or for-profit nature, and have no advertising other than to promote the event sponsor.

Banners will be permitted to be erected up to 14 days in advance of the event they have been granted for.

Banners must be removed within 3 working days of the event being held.

Banners containing language that may be offensive will not be permitted.

Banners shall have no partisan political content.

Banners shall normally only be permitted to promote events within the parish. This condition may be varied at the discretion of the Council.

In the event of a conflict involving the time of placement of two or more banners the Council reserves the right to decide the priority. Banners announcing Council events shall take precedence over any approved request.

The banner must comply with all laws and regulations including, but not limited to, safety and fire laws, Council bylaws and regulations. Should the banner not comply with any of the above referenced laws and regulations, it may be removed immediately by the Council at the expense, if any, to the responsible individual or group.

Any banners deemed unfit due to traffic or pedestrian safety concerns will not be permitted or will be removed by the Council. The applicant will be liable for any expenses incurred.

Should the Council incur expenses and costs associated with property damage or clean up, the applicant shall be liable to the Council for these costs. The applicant shall indemnify and hold the Council harmless for any and all property damage, bodily injury or damages of any kind caused by the banner display. The applicant shall also indemnify the Council for all fees and costs incurred by the Council in defence of any legal action against the Council resulting from damage caused by the banner display.

7. Applying for a Banner.

Upon an enquiry regarding the display of a banner on Council run land the clerk shall supply the applicant with a copy of this Policy and request the information required in paragraph 8 below is supplied. Supplying the clerk with the required information means that the applicant agrees to comply with the requirements of this Policy.

The clerk will inform the applicant of the decision as soon as practical after receipt of the required information.

Banners and applications are approved by the clerk who is delegated the power to approve them if they comply with the conditions of the Policy. The clerk is delegated the power to reject any application which clearly fails to comply with the conditions of this Policy.

In case of doubt, the clerk may refer any request to the Council for a decision. The applicant should be informed of this, due to the resultant delay in receiving an outcome to their request.

Any decision to permit or refuse the erection of a banner is final and no reason for the decision will be given to the applicant.

Before any decision to permit the erection of a banner, the information required in paragraph 8 must be supplied. Any banner approved by the clerk or Council may contain orders, terms or conditions which the applicant must comply with in order to display the banner.

8. Information Required for a Banner.

The following information must be supplied in full to the clerk by the applicant for the request to be considered:

- a. Organisation Name
- b. Event for which banner is displayed
- c. Date(s) of event
- d. Dates requested for banner display
- e. Where/how is the banner to be mounted?
- f. Applicant name / Responsible party
- g. Address / Telephone / Email
- h. Illustration or file attachment of proposed banner design showing all detail, including but not limited to: messaging, logos, sponsor(s), images.

By supplying the information requested, the applicant agrees that they have read and agree to comply with the requirements of this Policy

9. Other Forms of Communication

The Parish Council will use other forms of external communication from time to time. It will use whatever form is most appropriate and effective. Below is a list of these. However, this list is not exhaustive.

Parish Council Notice Boards

These will be used by the Council to set out information it wishes to put into the public domain. It is for the Council to decide what information to put on the notice boards but it will normally include Notice of Parish Council meetings, Agenda's, Notice of vacancies on the council, etc.

War Memorial.

Cranfield War Memorial seeks to remind us and remember those from the village who gave their lives in defence of this country. Their names will be kept engraved on the memorial for all to see. All of these names are Parishioners who lost their lives during the First World War 1914 – 1918 and the Second World War 1939 – 1945 and the memorial is specifically dedicated to them on the front. Two of the quarter angles and one side have the names of those who died.

However, new names can be added providing they comply with the following criteria

- a. That they were in the armed forces at the time and were a casualty of conflict.
- b. That they were serving their country in a recognised war when they died, e.g. Suez, Korean, Bosnia, Gulf War, Afghanistan.
- c. That they were at the time of their death on the Electoral Roll of this Parish.

It is, however, difficult to be prescriptive in this policy about exactly whose names may or may not be added. The rear and rear angles of the memorial could be used without affecting the chief reason for the memorial in dedication of those lost in the first and second world wars. It will therefore be for the Parish Council to decide at the time according to the circumstances.

Pop up Surgery.

From time to time, the Council may decide to hold Pop-up Surgeries in the village. This is an opportunity for Parishioners to meet the Councillors and Vice Versa. It is also an opportunity for Parishioners to raise their views or concerns with Councillors. The use of Pop-up surgeries is not compulsory but should be undertaken say once a year if possible.

Other Public Meetings.

Occasionally the Council may decide to hold a public meeting about a specific topic outside of the usual Council meetings. This will normally be when a controversial or perhaps large change to the village is possible and the Council would like to publicise the issues and get feedback from as many of the Parishioners as possible. Such meetings will be well publicised in advance to ensure as many of the residents attend as possible.

Meeting the Public in and around the village.

Inevitably, Councillors will meet with residents from time to time to discuss local issues and matters, which residents wish to raise. This is a key part of Councillors duties and will generally be useful and informative for both parties. However, Councillors must always be aware that occasionally their words or views can be misrepresented or used improperly. It is therefore advisable that, wherever possible, Councillors should meet residents in pairs. This is particularly important where the matter under discussion is controversial or emotionally charged. Of course, there will be times when an impromptu discussion takes place around the village and it is important that councillors are always ready to listen to residents views and concerns. In such cases listening and taking back such representations to the full council without committing the council in any way is appropriate.

10. Awareness and Implementation.

All councillors and employees must ensure they are aware of this policy as they are responsible for its implementation. A new Clerk must be informed of the existence of this policy upon commencement of their employment. In particular, all Subcommittees must ensure the policy is applied in practice and take lawful affirmative actions as appropriate. The Council should endeavour to raise awareness of this policy with the public and parishioners in general.

References

Cranfield Parish Council, Running the Council, Practice and Procedure.

Department for Communities and Local Government,

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335930/140630_Draft_Openness_Guide_-_F.pdf, on-line, [accessed 09/12/19]

Handforth Parish Council Press & Media Policy, <http://www.handforth.org.uk/Press-and-Media-Policy.pdf> , on-line, [accessed 24/04/18]

Lindfield Parish Council Press and Media Policy,
http://www.lindfieldparishcouncil.gov.uk/_UserFiles/Files/Policies/Press%20and%20media%20policy.pdf, on-line, [accessed 09/12/19]

Parwich Parish Council Press and Media Policy,
<https://www.parwichparishcouncil.org.uk/uploads/press-and-media-policy-2019.pdf>, on-line,
[accessed 09/12/19]

Town of Medway Council Banner Policy,
https://www.townofmedway.org/sites/medwayma/files/uploads/bannerdisplaypolicy-and-application_final.pdf , on-line, [accessed 19/08/17]

Cpalc.org, <http://www.cpalc.org.uk/filming-recording-and-the-distribution-of-town-and-parish-council-meetings-february-2014> [accessed 20/2/2016]

Yatton Council Policy Filming Policy, on-line, <http://www.yatton-pc.gov.uk/Core/Yatton-Parish-Council/UserFiles/Files/filming%20policy.pdf> [accessed 1/2/2016]

CRANFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

CONFIDENTIALITY AND COMMUNICATIONS

The nature of the Parish Council's business is such that employees and councillors may encounter confidential information of a sensitive nature. Such information is strictly confidential and any breach of such confidentiality will be considered as serious misconduct under the disciplinary policy for employees. If a Councillor breaches this policy, it will be dealt with under the council's Code of Conduct.

In the normal course of work and particularly when communicating externally under the terms of this policy, employees will have access to and be entrusted with information relating to the Council, internal systems and data, and information about citizens of Cranfield all of which is confidential. All employees are bound by the normal rules of confidentiality, which is not to disclose to any person information obtained or known from being employees at Cranfield Parish Council. Any breach of confidentiality will be considered a serious breach of discipline and will be dealt with under the conduct and discipline policy. Further information about the Employment Records, Use and Protection of Council Information and the Data Protection Act (GDPR) is dealt with under Policy number 6.

Much of the information held is subject to the Data Protection Act. Any breach of this act by an employee will be dealt with as serious misconduct.

All employees must return all council property, including software, documents and records at the end of their employment.

Any employee who is uncertain of application of the policy in any particular instance must consult the Cranfield Parish Council Chair for advice.