



Laverstock & Ford Parish Council
COMMUNICATIONS & PR POLICY 001

Purpose/Principles	The purpose of this policy is to facilitate the best possible professional practice from the Parish Council and its staff.
Scope	Employees, Councillors, Members of the public
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Policy owner:	Communications & Community Engagement Committee
Supersedes:	Social Media Policy
Relevant Documents	<p>COMMUNICATIONS Guidance for Councillors & Staff</p> <p>MEDIA CONSENT FORM (attached as annexe A.)</p> <p>General Data Protection Policy</p> <p>LFPC Safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures.</p> <p>Councillors Code of Conduct: https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/local-government-association-model-councillor-code-conduct-2020</p> <p>Wiltshire Councils Code of Conduct https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/complaints-members-code-of-conduct</p>

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Summary

This Policy provides guidance to Councillors on the use of Communications, both for business and personal purposes and sets clear expectations of conduct.

The Council's communications work will:

- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence levels
- raise awareness of services provided by the Council
- raise the profile of Laverstock & Ford as a parish
- support elected members in their role as community leaders
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups
- such as young people
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine
- the image or integrity of the Council
- The Council's vision for its communications work is that residents will:
 - know what services the Council provides and the quality of service they can expect
 - feel confident and satisfied with the services and their costs
 - understand how to get involved with, or influence, the work of the Council

In addition, visitors to the parish will:

- see the Parish as a thriving destination in which to live, work and play

Councillors and staff are responsible for their own compliance with this Policy and for ensuring it is consistently applied to protect the privacy, confidentiality, reputation, and interests of the Parish Council.

1. Introduction

Laverstock & Ford Parish Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders and to do this it is vital that a communications & public relations policy and procedure is developed.

1.1 General Communications

This procedure should be read in conjunction with the Parish Council's standing orders and code of conduct. The Council's Standing order states:

'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.'

1.2 Responsibility

The Parish Council recognises its responsibility to help communicate accurate and timely information to the Press and public in a professional manner. Proper co-ordination will ensure that messages put out by the Parish Council are consistent and accurate.

1.3 Accountability

The Parish Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communication. The overall aim is that Council communications should be a two-way process:

- to give people the information to understand accurately what the Council does, so that they can make informed decisions; and
- to get information from residents and stakeholders so that the Council can understand their needs.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of the Parish Council's Communications and PR Policy and Procedure is to ensure its members and staff effectively communicate this information to promote the openness and transparency of the Council.

1.5 Distinction

The Parish Council also recognises the distinction between communication from 'the Parish Council', and communication from individuals as 'councillors'.

1.6 The communication of information

Information may be viewed in four main mediums; print, electronic/digital, media relations, and public relations. However, communication with the Press and public takes place every day on a very basic level, i.e. desk enquiries, social media enquiries, speaking to residents in the street.

1.7 Freedom of Speech

The Parish Council respects freedom of speech and this procedure is not intended to restrain this.

1.8 Code of Recommended Practice

Local councils and their representatives are governed by national legislation and codes of practice. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. Communications activity must adhere to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011, which provides guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity. This code is statutory guidance and therefore councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.

1.9 Data Protection

Councillors and staff will be compliant with current general data protection rules.

2. Handling General Requests & Media Enquiries

- 2.1 All staff and councillors are responsible for communicating basic and routine information to the Press and public in relation to their specific job duties or role within the Council and its committees.
- 2.2 Requests for information outside of the remit of an individual's responsibilities should be referred to the Clerk, Chair or Vice-Chair.

3. Responding to media enquiries

- 3.1 The Parish Council respects the media's role in delivering information to the public and responses will be given in recognition of deadlines, which are crucial to effective media relations.
- 3.2 The media are crucially important in conveying information to the community, so the Parish Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations at all times.
- 3.3. The media work on behalf of the local community to hold the Parish Council to account for its policies and actions, and it is therefore important that they have access to the officers and members in order to provide background information to help them in this role.

- 3.4 Requests for interviews, information or photographs from the media should be referred initially to the Clerk or Communications & Community Engagement Officer (CCEO), or in their absence, to the Chair.
- 3.5 Any response will be collated in conjunction with the Clerk & CCEO. Where possible, responses will be given by the Chair, and in their absence the Vice-Chair and then the relevant Committee chair.
- 3.6 Official statements from the Parish Council must be issued on a document bearing the Council's logo, include an appropriate title, be dated and contain the details of the person to contact for further information.
- 3.7 Statements made must reflect the minuted opinion of the Parish Council, where applicable.
- 3.8 Councillors may be approached directly by the media and can provide responses, making it clear that the views given are their own and not necessarily those of the Parish Council. Members should not claim to be commenting on behalf of the Parish Council.
- 3.9 The Parish Council recognises that councillors have private lives and may be approached by the media in relation to their roles outside of the Council. In this instance, members must make it clear that they are not commenting as an elected councillor or on behalf of the Parish Council.
- 3.10 Requests to take photographs of councillors or staff in relation to Council business must be agreed by the individual and in the case of staff, by their line manager.
- 3.11 There is no out-of-hours media relations service, although councillors can be contacted outside of normal office hours as their contact details are available in the public domain. In extreme circumstances, e.g. if the circumstances of the request will have an impact before the timescale allowed by the next available working hours, the Chair and Clerk (CCEO) should be contacted to liaise with the media if necessary.
- 3.12 The Parish Council should not pass comment on anonymous allegations or allegations about individual councillors or staff.
- 3.13 The Parish Council is open and accountable and should always explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.
- 3.14 Members and staff must alert the Clerk as soon as a potentially positive or negative issue which may attract media interest becomes known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media

4. Issuing news releases

- 4.1 As well as responding to media requests, the Parish Council will pro-actively issue news releases and distribute them to the relevant media.
- 4.2 Press releases must be issued on a document bearing the Parish Council's logo, include an appropriate title, be dated and contain the details of the person to contact for further information.
- 4.3 Press releases wherever possible will include a quote from a councillor.
- 4.4 Releases will not publicise the activities of individual councillors or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.
- 4.5 Photographs may be issued with the news releases and captions must be included in the release. If photographs include councillors or staff, prior consent will be sought.
- 4.6 Press releases will be sent by email to the relevant media, displayed on the Parish Council website, on the Council's noticeboards and on the Council's social media sites.
- 4.7 The CCEO will be responsible for developing news releases in conjunction with the Clerk and relevant councillor.
- 4.8 Letters to the editor of a newspaper do not qualify as press releases and caution is advised when submitting a letter of this kind. If submitted by a councillor, it should state that they are acting as an individual and not as a councillor. It may be appropriate for the Parish Council to submit a letter on occasions, such as correcting factual errors. These letters should be factual and brief and should be signed by the Chair or the Clerk only.
- 4.9 Other ways to correct inaccurate reporting about the Parish Council include issuing a separate news release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, a personal letter to the editor, or legal advice and any such action should be agreed in advance with the Clerk and/or the Chair.
- 4.10 Officers and members have a responsibility to identify newsworthy items and seek opportunities where it may be beneficial to issue a press release.

5. Media attendance at Parish Council meetings

- 5.1 Local media outlets will be provided on request with the agendas, reports and minutes of meetings, prior to them taking place, as required by the Local Government Act 1972.
- 5.2 The Press will be provided with reasonable facilities, i.e. seating and a desk, at meetings or part of a meeting at which they are entitled to be present, as outlined in standing order 3.m.
- 5.3 The photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of meetings by the media is outlined in standing order 3.(k)

6. Parish Council website

- 6.1 The Council's website www.laverstockford-pc.gov.uk should provide an informative online resource for residents and visitors, giving information about the Council, the parish, councillors and staff, services provided by the Council, dates of meetings, the local community, news, links to useful websites, minutes and agendas, and a search facility.
- 6.2 Information on the website should be accurate and kept up-to-date.
- 6.3. Press releases and Council notices should be displayed in the news section of the website.

7. Parish Council Newsletter

- 7.1 The Council will produce a bi-monthly newsletter for the local Parish News, providing residents with a summary of the minutes of most recent Full Council Meeting and keeping them up to date with Parish Council activities and plans, providing interesting and informative news about the Council, its members and any community issues which are linked to the Council.
- 7.2 The Newsletter will be produced by the CCEO. Ideas for inclusion in the article can be submitted to the CCEO by councillors and staff.

8. Council noticeboards

- 8.1 Priority is given on the Council's noticeboards to official Council documents, such as agendas, public notices, election information and legal issues affecting the Council.
- 8.2 Where possible, the Council will display posters and information for community related issues.

9. Carry out regular consultation

- 9.1 The Council is committed to consulting local taxpayers, service users, local businesses and its own staff and members to identify ways in which it can improve the services it provides. The Communications & Community Engagement Committee will be responsible for developing strategies to achieve this objective.
- 9.2 Consultation is a key part in a communications strategy as it is a two-way exchange of views between local people and the Council. This will help the Council to make decisions and allow to tell people about why it provides services in the way it does.

9.3 To date and currently, most of the Council's consultation is by way of questionnaires, public meetings, public exhibitions and members' interaction with the public. However, occasional surveys are carried out online via social media.

10. Publicity in Election Periods

In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, the Council is subject to rules which impact on how it can communicate with the public.

10.2 During this period, Council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way which identifies them with individual members or groups of members. This ensures that no individual councillor gains an unfair advantage by appearing in an official publicity.

10.3 In these circumstances, where a quote is required, the relevant officer may be quoted.

11. Social Media

11.1 digital and social media and electronic communication

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication provides the Parish Council with the opportunity to communicate with people immediately, in real time and in a way which improves further the communications between the Council and residents, businesses and organisations it works with and serves.

11.2. communication channels

The Council has a website, Facebook page, and uses email to communicate with residents and others. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.

11.3. Facebook

The Council Facebook page account aims to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the parish and promote the community in a positive way and all councillors and staff must have this aim in mind when posting information. Councillors should monitor this page and report any concerns to the CCEO and the Clerk.

12. Criteria for the use of social media

12.1 Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information;
- If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Clerk to the Council or the administrators of the page.
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

12.2 General guidelines for public participation

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, it asks that the public adhere to the following guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page or social media sites for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.
- The site is not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, it will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. It should not include personal/private information in social media posts to the Council.

12.3 Social Media messages

Sending a message/post via Facebook or Twitter will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and it will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels.

Instead, it is expected that users make direct contact with the Council's Clerk and/or members of the Council by pressing the contact button on the Facebook page which is linked directly to the Council's 'contact us' page on its website, or by emailing the Clerk on parishclerk@laverstock-ford.co.uk

12.4 Removal of content

The Council retains the right to remove comments or content which includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements.
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be either to ignore, inform the sender of its policy or to send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given the limited resources available.

Any information posted on the Facebook/social media pages not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook/social media page.

The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

13. Parish Council email

13.1 The Clerk of the Council has their own Council email address. The account is monitored from 9.30 - 1pm four days a week and the Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as possible. An 'out of office' message will be used when appropriate.

13.2 The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on the text of any relevant emails to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk or CCEO. All emails requiring data to be passed on will be

followed up with a Data consent form for completion before any action is taken.

- 13.3 Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners and to copy these to the Clerk. In accordance with the Council's GDPR policies and privacy notice, councillors should not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

14. SMS (texting) and Video Conferencing

(For example Skype/Zoom/Teams). This policy and procedure will apply to all members and the Clerk when using SMS and video conferencing modes of communication.

14.1 Use of Mobile Phones

Councillors will transfer and delete any sensitive or confidential information relating to parish council business from their phone to secure storage, before deleting from their phone.

14.2 Personal Mobile phone data

Councillors and staff will clear their phones of any such data on a regular basis. Whilst it is unavoidable that personal mobiles and home phones are used in relation to parish council business and dealing with members of the public and contractors. Councillors and staff will make reasonable attempts to ensure confidentiality where appropriate and to keep their mobile phones safe, and password protected. (See also 1.9 Data Protection)

15. Evaluation

The Council via the Communications and Community Engagement Committee will develop a process for evaluating its communications and engagement to enable it to understand whether the activities it undertakes are effective.

16. USE OF IMAGES / DIGITAL MEDIA

(see also Laverstock & Ford Parish Council's Child Protection & Safeguarding policy)
MEDIA CONSENT FORM ATTACHED AS ANNEX A.

16.1 Sharing Images

We have a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and young people and to take, share and use images of children safely.

- sharing photographs and films of our activities can help us celebrate the successes and achievements of our children and young people, provide a record of our activities and raise awareness of our organisation
- the welfare of the children and young people taking part in our activities is paramount
- children, their parents and carers have a right to decide whether their images are taken and how these may be used, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation
- consent to take images of children is only meaningful when children, their parents and carers understand how the images will be used and stored, and are fully aware of the potential risks associated with the use and distribution of these images
- there are potential risks associated with sharing images of children online.

16.2 We will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

We will ensure everyone involved in our organisation knows the procedures to follow to keep children safe by following guidance in our Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy.

16.3 Storing images

We will store photographs and videos of children securely, in accordance with our safeguarding policy and data protection law.

17. What happens if it goes wrong?

If a Councillor's activities are considered to breach this Policy, the Parish Council may require that Councillor to remove content that, in the reasonable opinion of the Parish Council, breaches this Policy.

If a member of the public considers a Councillor's activities have breached this Policy, they are encouraged to speak directly to the Councillor to seek remedy. Alternatively, they may report their concern directly to the Clerk for investigation parishclerk@laverstock-ford.co.uk

Code of Conduct Complaints may be made to Wiltshire Council's Monitoring Officer. See link for details: <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/complaints-making-a-complaint>



Councillors and staff should be able to undertake their role without being intimidated, abused, bullied or threatened by anyone, including the general public. The Parish Council will not tolerate any form of bullying, cyber-bullying or online harassment towards its Councillors or staff, which constitute a criminal offence, including:-

- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- The Malicious Communications Act 1988
- The Communications Act 2003 (s127)
- The Defamation Act 2013
- Data Protection Guide for Councillors (wilts.gov.uk)

This Communications Policy was approved and adopted by a Meeting of the Council held on January 16 2023

Signed:

Date:

Trudi Dean. (Parish Clerk)

Signed:

Cllr Nick Baker (Chair)

Date:

Adoption and Review History :

Adopted at Parish Council Meeting on Jan 16 2023

NEXT REVIEW DUE: SEPTEMBER 2024

Supporting reference material:

See also nspcc.org.uk/learning learning@nspcc.org.uk 0116 234 7246

ANNEX A. MEDIA CONSENT FORM January 2023

Photography, filming, publicity and data storage consent form

Please complete this form to give consent for us to take images, moving footage, audio, comments and other personal data to then be stored and used.

This form covers consent for use of the above for internal and external communication and storage of the data within this form. All data (images, film, comments, personal info on this form), will be stored by Laverstock & Ford Parish Council. The data may be shared with 3rd party organisations in order to fulfil the communication work necessary, e.g. providing images to design/ print agencies.

Section A) About You

Full Name: Address:

Telephone:

Email:

DOB:
(if under 16)

Section B) About the project/event or campaign

Description of project / campaign:

Location:

Date:

Section C) Your consent

I give consent to Laverstock & Ford Parish Council to publish, republish, or otherwise transmit still and moving images, audio and my name for the purposes of:

- Publicity and promotional materials, including advertising material and printed publications
- Presentation and exhibition materials
- Websites, social media channels and digital communications. materials, including advertising material and printed publications.
- News media and their associated websites, social media channels, print publications, television and radio

Please tick or cross boxes where applicable

I understand the Council will keep all its images in accordance with data protection law and delete the images that have not been used for any publicity or marketing after 2 years. I also understand that the still / moving images / audio used for publicity or marketing purposes are in the public domain and therefore could potentially be reproduced, altered, or re-used by anyone in the world outside of the City Council's control. I know I have the right to withdraw consent at any time by emailing communications@laverstock-ford.co.uk but understand that withdrawing consent may not affect the material that has already been used.

Section D) Your signature:

Section E) Signing on behalf of a person aged under 16 years

I am the person identified in Section A and in the photograph(s), filming and or recording. I understand the above request and give informed consent.

Signed

Date

I am the parent/guardian (delete as appropriate) of the person identified in Section A and in the photograph(s), filming and/ recording. I understand the above request and give informed consent for this person's image/ data to be used

Signature of parent/ guardian:

Print name:

Date:

Signature of child (where age appropriate):

Print name:

Date: