

NITON AND WHITWELL PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA AND PRESS PROTOCOL

October 2023

1. Purpose

- a) Niton and Whitwell Parish Council (“the Council”) is committed to the provision of accurate information to the media about its governance, decisions and activities. The purpose of this Protocol is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Councillors and staff in the provision of this information to the media and to provide guidance on how to promote positively the Council’s activities.
 - (i) This Protocol is subject to the Council’s obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and the Council’s Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. The Council is also obliged to comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local disclosure of which is prohibited by law.
- b) Councillors should be aware of the standards expected as part of their role, which are outlined Authority Publicity 2011, a copy of which can be found on the Council’s website.
- c) In following this Protocol Councillors, employees, and volunteers should also be aware of the following:
 - (i) The requirement to ensure that verbal or written information does not disclose confidential or sensitive information or information the
 - (ii) in the Council’s Code of Conduct.
 - (iii) Employees should not express personal opinions in response to media enquiries.
 - (iv) The implications of defamation and libel laws – more advice on these should be sought from the Council’s legal representative, if required.
 - (v) To avoid publishing anything that could cause any safeguarding issues.
- d) The Council is aware of the positive benefits of proactively promoting the successes and achievements of the Council. Press releases are one mechanism that can be used to promote the Council’s activities, but this can also be undertaken through proactive use of the Council’s website, social media, posters and the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council.
- e) Guidance for dealing with the Media during any pre-election period (sometimes known as ‘purdah’) will be provided by the Isle of Wight Council.

2. Dealing with Enquiries from the Media

- a) There is a large range of local media outlets on the Isle of Wight including print, radio, online, and social media. On rare occasions there may also be enquiries from regional and national media. Contact details for each media outlet will be held by the Parish Clerk. Should there be any doubt about whether a media outlet is genuine the Clerk should be contacted for advice.
- b) The Clerk will co-ordinate all genuine media enquiries received by the Council and will liaise with either the Chair, Vice Chair, or Working Party members as appropriate regarding a response. Any Councillor who is contacted directly by the media and asked to make a comment on behalf of the Council, rather than in their capacity as an individual Councillor, should pass the media enquiry to the Clerk in the first instance.
- c) Neither the Clerk, acting on behalf of the Council, nor Councillors should provide comments to the media in response to leaks or allegations or stories about individual employees and Councillors.
- d) If a journalist/reporter/writer enquires about what was said by individual Councillors during a meeting, he or she will be referred by the Clerk to the Councillor(s) direct. If he or she requires clarification of proceedings at a meeting, their enquiry should be referred to the Clerk.
- e) Councillors or employees or volunteers receiving enquiries from the media regarding legal proceedings or contract matters must seek advice from the Clerk, who will determine how to move forward in consultation with the Chair. This may involve seeking legal advice from the Council's legal advisor.
- f) Press releases issued by partner organisations about joint ventures with the Council should not be issued by the partner organisation without the consent of the Council. This consent will need to be obtained from the Clerk who may consult with the Chair, Vice Chair or Working Party members. The press release should include the Council logo and a quote from the Council as appropriate.

3. Official Council Press Releases

- a) Official Council press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or the Chair in consultation with other Councillors as required. They will be factual, politically neutral, and may include a quote from the relevant Councillor(s), such as the Chair or relevant Working Party member.
- b) If an official press release mentions an organisation other than the Council, then that organisation must be made aware of the contents of the press release no later than the time of its embargo.

- c) Councillors who identify an opportunity to issue a press release in accordance with paragraph 1(d) above should discuss this with the Clerk who will, in consultation with other Councillors as appropriate, decide how to proceed. The benefits to the Council of positive publicity are referred to above and cannot be overstated.
- d) Official press releases will not promote the views of specific political parties.
- e) All official press releases will be placed on the Council's website and promoted on the Council's social media.

4. Councillor Press Releases

- a) It is the prerogative of individual Councillors to make their own statements relating to local issues. Councillors must, however, always make it clear that any views they express either through the media or other methods of communication, whether or not different from Council policy and/or discussion, are their own personal views and not those of the Council. This may be achieved by including a disclaimer of the form, 'Cllr XY writes in a individual capacity. She/he does not write on behalf of Niton and Whitwell Parish Council and the views expressed here are not necessarily the views of Niton and Whitwell Parish Council.' Councillors must always be vigilant about not misrepresenting the Council or harming the long-term reputation of the Council. Councillors who are unsure about any of these matters must refer to the Code of Conduct.
- b) Such individual statements by Councillors must make no reference to any Council employee and must not use the Council logo. References to other Councillors should normally be avoided. The Council address and telephone number cannot be included as points of contact.
- c) Councillors are solely responsible for writing, production, and distribution of all individual press releases and letters to the media.
- d) Councillors must not misuse Council resources or reputation for political or other purposes.
- e) Councillors may include only brief excerpts, links to, and references to official Council press releases in their newsletters or other documents that they release as individual Councillors. Large extracts from or complete Council press releases cannot be reproduced.

