**Godstone Parish Council**

(incorporating the Villages of Godstone, South Godstone and Blindley Heath)

# PRESS, MEDIA & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. **Introduction**
   1. This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, as issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The code is statutory guidance and therefore councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.
   2. Failure to follow the council’s Media and Communications Policy could lead to a breach of the statutory code and the risk of adverse publicity, which could damage the council’s reputation. It is important that all councillor and officers understand the implications of this code which this policy explains within a local context.
   3. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members’ Code of Conduct.

# Approach to publicity

* 1. The council welcomes enquiries form the press and media, and recognises that a good relationship with the press helps communicate effectively with residents.
  2. Equally, the council recognises that taking a proactive approach to communication ensures information is made available to residents in a timely manner, and is accessible via as many media sources as possible including emerging social media platforms.

# Principles of communication

* 1. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity identifies key principles regarding publicity, and the council will ensure any publicity:
     + Is lawful
     + Is cost effective
     + Is objective
     + Is even-handed
     + Is appropriate
     + Has regard to equality and diversity
     + Is issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

# Official council press releases

* 1. The council recognises that the use of press releases is a key technique for publicising council activities, decisions and achievements.
  2. An official council press release is made on behalf of the council as a whole. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for a councillor (normally the Chairman, Deputy Chairman or committee Chairman) to draft the press release, but the Clerk (or other nominated officer) will be responsible for checking and subsequently issuing any official council press release.
  3. All press releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the council, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate councillor. Releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual councillors, identify a councillor’s political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.
  4. Press releases will be issued to local newspapers and copies will be made available on the council’s website.

# Requests for interview

* 1. Any request for an interview with a councillor or officer should be referred to the Clerk (or other nominated officer) in the first instance. The Clerk, in liaison with the Chairman, will determine the most appropriate councillor or officer to be put forward for interview.
  2. Where a councillor is authorised to speak on behalf of the council, it is their responsibility to ensure they are clear on the corporate position of the council, and that their responses to questions accurately reflect this.
  3. Where an officer is authorised to speak on behalf of the council, they must never give their opinion on specific council policy and must remember their role is to provide expertise and factual knowledge in support of the council’s agreed policies.
  4. If a councillor has not been specifically authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, a councillor who is asked for a comment should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as such.

# Publicity during elections

* 1. There are specific rules governing publicity when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself (purdah), all proactive publicity about candidates is halted.
  2. During the purdah period, all council publicity shall be managed by the Clerk (or other nominated officer), and any quotes provided in support of press releases will be given by authorised officers.

# General guidance for councillors and officers

* 1. Councillors and officers must ensure they do not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press or other media on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on council or committee agendas or at any other private briefing.
  2. Councillors and officers should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the council.
  3. Councillors should not use the prefix ‘Councillor’ when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating council policy, which is not necessarily consistent with your personal opinion.
  4. Any councillor failing to follow the guidelines set out in this policy may find themselves in breach of the Members’ Code of Conduct and subject to a complaint to the Monitoring Officer.
  5. Any officer failing to follow the guidance set out in this policy could face disciplinary action.
  6. Councillors/ council staff must not post disparaging or defamatory statements about the council or its stakeholders; they should make it clear in social media postings that they are speaking on their own behalf (unless they are posting as part of their job role); They must not post comments about sensitive community topics, such as planning applications. If they see content on social media that disparages or reflects poorly on the council, they should refrain from replying, but instead refer this to the Clerk or Chair of the council. They must not post anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, an individual. These rules apply as much to personal social media as they do to the council’s accounts.