

PRESS & MEDIA POLICY

Adopted July 2026

Review date July 2027

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the Media, and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the Media.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the Media.

Key Aims

- The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media (press, radio, TV, internet) is crucially important in conveying information to the community, so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with the to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies, priorities, and positions.
- It is important that the Press have access to the Clerk and/or Councillors, and to have background information that might assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism, and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts, using other channels of communication, if necessary.

The Legal Framework

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Act (1986). The Council must also have regard to the Government's 'Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority publicity (2011).

Also, the Parish Council's 'Standing Orders'¹ should be adhered to.

Contact with the Media

¹ HPC's Standing Orders are available on the website

The Clerk and Councillors should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the Media.

- Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers, and private correspondence should not be leaked to the Media. If such leaks occur, an investigation will take place to establish who is responsible, and appropriate action will be taken.
- When the Media wishes to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made. Whenever possible, any information given to the Press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.
- There are several personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Councillors that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include
 - The release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Councillors' contact details are in the public domain);
 - Disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness procedures that are affecting service provision.

In all these, and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the Media.

- When responding to approaches from the Media, the Clerk or the HPC Chair are authorised to contact the Media, and statements made by the Chairperson and the Clerk should reflect the Parish Council's opinion.
- There may be occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter (for example, to explain important policies, or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents). Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone, and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.

Attendance of Media at Parish Council meetings

- The Local Government Act (1972) requires that Agenda, reports, and Minutes are sent to the Media upon request.
- The Media is encouraged to attend Parish Council meetings. Seating and workspace will be made available.
- Any filming or taping of Parish Council proceedings must be with prior notice to the Clerk and the Chairperson of the meeting.

Press Releases

The purpose of a Press Release is to make the Media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information, or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Parish Councillors to look for opportunities where the issuing of a Press Release may be beneficial.

The Clerk, or any Parish Councillor may draft a Press Release; however, they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to:

- ensure that the principles outlined in the section entitled 'The Legal Framework (p.1) are adhered to;
- ensure that there is consistency of style across the Council's communications;
- ensure that the use of the Press Release can be monitored.

Facebook

Aim

This policy relates to the creation and management of a Facebook page by the Parish Council, and its aim is to set down rules and regulations to ensure proper use of the page. The Parish Council aims to use the Facebook page to interact in a stronger way with the residents of the Parish by advertising events and other projects of interest.

Management

- The Parish Council's Facebook page is created and managed solely by the Clerk and Deputy or Assistant Clerk. No Parish Councillors have access to the Facebook Page for administration purposes².
- The Page is set up using the Parish Clerk's email address (see below).
- Only information regarding the Parish Council should be entered in the profile/biography. No religious or political views should be expressed there.
- An appropriate image of Halstead will be the profile picture.
- The Facebook account should only link to pages of a local government organisation, or organisations/causes relating the Parish of Halstead.
- Posts on the page should be available for all users of Facebook to see.
- Photos will be open for everyone to view, but photos of any child's face will not be uploaded without permission from the parent or guardian.

² See also Social Media policy, available on the website

- The Parish Clerk will maintain the page, and will remove messages from the wall, such as:
 - Messages containing abusive language;
 - Messages which may cause offence to a specific group of people (e.g. those with a protected characteristic);
 - Messages that contain potentially libellous comments.
- If any messages posted by 'Followers' or 'Friends' on the Timeline (or 'Wall') have points that are relevant and need to be discussed by the Parish Council, then further information may be sought before bringing it to Council.
- Private messages will only be sent in response to anyone sending an initial private message to the Parish Council account. The response from the Clerk will ask the person to send an email with the request for comment.

Changes to the Policy

This policy is a living document and can be altered by the Parish Clerk to allow immediate action should the unexpected arise. Changes to the policy will be highlighted for Councillors at the next meeting of the Parish Council.