

## Millbrook Parish Council Media policy

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Millbrook Parish Council (“the Council”) is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. Where this information is not available via the Council’s publication scheme, please contact the Council’s clerk or in the Clerk’s absence the Chair of the Council.
- 1.2 The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet (“the media”).
- 1.3 This policy explains how the Council may work with the media to meet the above objectives in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

### **2. Legal requirements and restrictions**

- 2.1 This policy 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, other legislation which may apply and the Council’s standing orders and financial regulations. The Council’s financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council’s publication scheme.
- 2.2 The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council’s standing orders, under contract or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council’s publication scheme.

### **3. Meetings**

- 3.1 A meeting of the Council and its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution. In accordance with the Council’s standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council and its committees, if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.



- 3.2 Where a meeting of the Council and its committees includes an opportunity for public participation, media representatives may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's standing orders.
- 3.3 The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes e.g. using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings or (ii) paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 below apply.
- 3.4 Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted.
- 3.5 The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, provide reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.
- 3.6 The Council's standing orders will confirm if attendance by the public, their participation, photographing, recording, filming or other reporting is permitted at a meeting of a sub-committee.

#### **4. Other communications with the media**

- 4.1 This policy does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity. However, councillors are subject to the Council's code of conduct when using social media and should consider the content of their communications carefully and apply this test – if you would be reluctant to say it face-to-face or in an official email, then it is probably inappropriate to say online. (<https://local.gov.uk/councillors-and-social-media>)
- 4.2 The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. If the views of individual councillors are different to the Council's corporate position and views, they will make this clear in any individual communication with the media .
- 4.3 The Council's Clerk, or in their absence, the Chair or Vice Chair may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information, a statement or other material about the Council.
- 4.4 Subject to the obligations on councillors not to disclose information referred to in paragraph 2(ii) above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their position and views.



- 4.5 The Council operates a Facebook page, which keeps members of the public informed on what is happening in Millbrook and provides information from Cornwall Council, community groups and other external sources.

Whilst differing opinions are expected and welcome the Parish Council will not tolerate abusive language or malicious comments on this page. Any such content will be moderated, and persistent offenders will be excluded from further posts.

The page is usually but not exclusively monitored during office hours. Whilst postings that might be of local interest, which may originate from local and partnership organisations may sometimes be shared outside normal working hours, and on occasion the Clerk may post statements on behalf of the Chairman or the Council, comments will not be responded to.

The views and opinions expressed on the Facebook page are personal and do not necessarily represent Millbrook Parish Council's adopted policies or procedures.

All official communication is dealt with by email to [theclerk@millbrook-pc.gov.uk](mailto:theclerk@millbrook-pc.gov.uk), or by submitting the contact form on our website <https://millbrook-pc.gov.uk/contact/>.

- 4.6 The Parish Council website contains Council documents, which include policies and procedures and Parish Council meeting agendas and minutes. Information is regularly posted on the website containing Council news, community news, updates, useful resources, information on local services.

## **5. Rules for employees, members and volunteers using social media**

- 5.1 The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees, volunteers and members joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
- 5.2 Employees including clerks, RFO's, Executive Officers, part-time, fixed-term and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), volunteers and members should make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. The rules detailed below must be followed:
- (i) Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
  - (ii) Any employee, volunteer or member who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Chair of the Council or Chair of the Staffing Committee



- (iii) Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Chair of the Council or Chair of the Staffing Committee
- (iv) Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- (iv) Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- (v) When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- (vi) Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council.
- (vii) You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- (viii) Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- (ix) Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- (x) Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- (xi) Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

### 5.3 Monitoring use of social media websites:

- (i) Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under the Council's disciplinary procedure.
- (ii) Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.
- (iii) In particular a serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
  - a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
  - b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
  - c) material which is offensive, obscene;
  - d) material which is criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council, members, or our employees;
  - e) confidential information about the Council or anyone else;
  - f) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the Council); or
  - g) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.



Any such action will be addressed under the Council's disciplinary procedure and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

- (iv) Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedures, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.
- (vii) If you notice any use of social media by other employees or volunteers in breach of this policy please report it to the Clerk, Chair of the Council or Chair of the Staffing Committee

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