



Press & Media

Version number:	1	Author:	Margaret Gould, Clerk
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1. Introduction

Speen Parish Council (SPC) is committed to communication with the parish through our own website and social media presence, but also through other publicity materials and via the press and media.

Occasionally, Councillors and/or the Clerk may be called upon by the press and media to comment on the SPC's opinion on specific matters. In this eventuality, it is essential that the full Council opinion is represented correctly. By following this policy, the approach will be consistent and the views expressed will be those of the whole council, appropriately approved, or otherwise identifiable as those personal views of the individual.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- outline SPC's approach to successful press and media relations
- provide clear and simple guidance to councillors and the Clerk as to how to handle press and media contacts and publicity when representing the views of the council
- ensure consistent & positive coverage for the council
- confirm that, wherever possible, the Communications & PR Working Party (WP) and/or Clerk should handle press and media relations.

4. Scope

4.1 The scope of this policy is the interactions with the press and media by SPC.

4.2 The term 'media' covers a wide variety of different means of communications

- local and national press
- social media (including but not limited to, for example Facebook, Twitter *etc*)
- radio, television
- blogs and vlogs
- other types of publicity, such as magazines, newsletters, posters or leaflets
- general correspondences, whether by letter, email, phone *etc*

4.3 This policy is fully supported by the council. It lays out guidelines to be followed in order to ensure SPC is appropriately represented publicly. However, should a council representative wish to express their own opinion, this policy does not infringe their right to do so, as long as the aforementioned makes it clear this is a *personal* opinion, and not necessarily that of the council.

4.4 This policy confirms that SPC will continue following these guidelines for the forthcoming year until the next review date



5. Procedure:

Press and media at council meetings:

- 5.1 Agendas and Minutes of meetings are published on the SPC website. Press and media may attend these meetings to observe proceedings and take notes; a table and chair will be provided on request. An open session of usually 10 minutes takes place at the start of each meeting in order for parishioners, press / media and others to comment. Thereafter, only councillors may participate in proceedings; others present can observe only unless by invitation of the Chair.
- 5.2 The council reserves the right to exclude the press & media and public from parts of the meeting which contain confidential proceedings. This is stated in the council's standing orders and permissible and specified under relevant legislation.

Approaches by press and media to individual councillors:

- 5.3 Contact details for the media representative should be taken. The person should be given the details of the Clerk and Chair and asked to make the request in writing; email is acceptable. Councillors should not respond under any circumstances to any requests for information or make any comment *on behalf of the council* unless by prior agreement with the council.
- 5.4 Any approach should be referred as quickly, informatively and accurately as possible, ideally in writing with full contact details, to the Chair and Clerk who will advise the Communications & PR WP in the first instance and full council as second if considered necessary.

Considering council responses:

- 5.5 All approaches to and from the press and media, and any other publicity representing the council, need to be *considered*. The Communications & PR WP is delegated the responsibility for representing the council to press and media, unless the Chair determines that full council input and approval is required.
- 5.6 If the enquiry is of sufficient importance, as determined by the Chair and the Communications & PR WP, an Extraordinary meeting may be called in order to discuss the approach and response from the full Council. Alternatively, if time permits, the press and media enquiry may be dealt with at a scheduled council meeting.
- 5.7 Consideration by full council will be required where no legislation or policy is available.
- 5.8 SPC will make every effort to respond promptly. However all enquiries or requests for statements must never be answered immediately, but only after due consideration according to this policy.

Formulating & issuing council responses:

- 5.9 All SPC communications with the press and media, such as responses to enquiries or requests for comment, press releases, articles, letters to be published *etc*, need the **approval** of the council, or Communications & PR WP. The ultimate authority to issue responses may be delegated to the Chairman or Clerk (or Vice Chairman or Chair of the Communications & PR WP) before being released into the public arena.
- 5.10 When speaking or providing written material on behalf of the council, those delegated this authority should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information e.g. as



Chairman, Chair of the Communications & PR WP or Clerk. It is especially important if speaking as an individual that this fact is made clear and indisputable.

- 5.11 Wherever possible, the material should be prepared by the Clerk in association with the Communications & PR WP, relevant Chair and/or individual councillor, agreed according to this policy and released by the Clerk.
- 5.12 The Clerk will determine the design, format and layout.
- 5.13 The Clerk will maintain full records of communications in case of future queries *etc.*

Talking to the press and media:

- 5.14 Conversations with reporters, photographic sessions, media interviews and press conferences must be organised through the Communications & PR WP, Chairman or Clerk. All Press and Media requests for interviews should be made to the Communications & PR WP, Clerk or Chairman and they will then coordinate the process.
- 5.15 Especially if approached 'off guard', councillors should take particular care if asked to comment on a topic, and not be led into commenting without due consideration. In this situation, councillors are recommended to simply state "no comment" and refer the Press to the Communications & PR WP, Clerk and/or Chair who can then co-ordinate the council's response, as above.
- 5.16 Whilst attending public meetings, SPC representatives must act with integrity at all times and ensure that any comments they make are entirely accurate and reflect the views of the council as a whole or, if not, that this is made known.

Acting as an individual out with council responsibilities:

- 5.17 Councillors will be expected to declare their interests in any specific press and media approach and act according to the SPC Code of Conduct. Any breach of this policy will be considered for potential disciplinary process.
- 5.18 A councillor acting in an individual capacity shall make it clear that they are giving their personal views and are not representing the SPC view.
- 5.19 If a councillor's personal opinion differs from the formal view of SPC, this must be made clear.
- 5.20 Whilst acting individually, care must be taken not to misrepresent and or bring the Parish Council into disrepute or undermine any decision made and must take account of the role and responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.
- 5.21 A Parish Councillor talking or writing independently to the Press or communicating with the Media on a matter (e.g. a planning application), may be viewed as having 'predetermination' and may be requested by the Chairman to refrain from taking part in any subsequent debate and vote on the matter.
- 5.22 There is nothing in these guidelines that seeks to prevent any individual from expressing a personal opinion for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on the internet.

Items which must not be disclosed:

- 5.23 No matter relating to the conduct or capability of a Councillor or staff can be disclosed. No information of a confidential nature may be disclosed.
- 5.24 Refer to the SPC Data Protection, Freedom of Information and employment policies.



6. Authorisation of Policy on behalf of Full Council:

The undersigned approves this policy on behalf of Speen Parish Council.

Signature:	
Name (print):	
Position:	Date: ___/___/___

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Page approved by (initials) & date:
