

Cheddleton Parish Council



Press, Media and Social Media Policy

1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 Cheddleton Parish Council recognises the importance of clear, consistent and transparent communication with residents, stakeholders, partners and the wider public.

1.2 This policy sets out how the Parish Council will engage with the press, media and the public, including through social media and other digital channels. It aims to:

- Support positive and meaningful engagement with the community;
- Protect the reputation of the Parish Council, its councillors and staff;
- Ensure communications are professional, accurate, objective and lawful;
- Clarify roles and responsibilities when dealing with the media and public communications.

1.3 This policy is not intended to restrict legitimate freedom of speech. Rather, it provides guidance to reduce risk, ensure consistency and support good governance.

1.4 This policy should be read alongside the Council's Standing Orders, Code of Conduct for Councillors, GDPR/Data Protection Policy, Freedom of Information Policy and any other relevant policies.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to: - All councillors of Cheddleton Parish Council; - All employees of the Council; - Any contractors or volunteers acting on behalf of the Council; - All forms of public communication, including press, broadcast media, websites, email, letters and social media.

3. Legal and Regulatory Framework

3.1 Communications by the Parish Council are governed by, but not limited to:

- Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988;
- Government Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity;
- Equality Act 2010;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR;

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- Defamation law;
- Copyright law;
- Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960;
- Relevant electoral law and guidance (including the pre-election period / purdah)

3.2 Cheddleton Parish Council operates within the district of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and has regard to guidance, advice and best practice issued by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and its Monitoring Officer, where relevant and appropriate.

3.3 Where uncertainty arises in relation to communications, publicity, confidentiality, member conduct or legal risk, the Clerk will seek advice from the Monitoring Officer of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council or other appropriate professional advisers.

3.4 Failure to comply with these requirements may expose the Council and/or individuals to legal, financial or reputational risk.

4. Principles of Council Communication

4.1 All Council communications should be:

- Lawful and compliant with relevant legislation;
- Accurate, factual and not misleading;
- Objective and politically neutral;
- Respectful and courteous;
- Timely and accessible;
- Consistent with Council policy and decisions.

4.2 Council publicity must not:

- Be party political or appear to promote a political party or candidate;
- Seek to persuade the public to adopt a particular political view;
- Undermine generally accepted standards of propriety;
- Attack individuals or groups.

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5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Clerk to the Council

- Acts as the Proper Officer and primary point of contact for the press and media;
- Is authorised to issue press statements and official responses on behalf of the Council;
- Ensures all communications comply with legal requirements, Council policy and relevant guidance issued by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council;
- May, where necessary, seek advice from the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Monitoring Officer on matters relating to conduct, legality or reputational risk;
- May delegate specific communications tasks to officers where appropriate.

5.2 Chair of the Council

- May act as spokesperson for the Council where appropriate, particularly on civic or ceremonial matters;
- Works with the Clerk on sensitive or high-profile issues and where Monitoring Officer advice has been sought.

5.3 Councillors

- May speak to the media in a personal capacity but must make it clear when doing so that they are expressing personal views and not speaking on behalf of the Council;
- Must not disclose confidential or exempt information;
- Should not undermine lawful decisions of the Council once made;
- Must have regard to the advice of the Clerk and, where applicable, the Monitoring Officer of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

5.4 Contractors and Volunteers

- Must not speak to the media on Council matters unless authorised by the Clerk;
- Must remain politically neutral in all Council-related communications.

6. Press and Media Relations

6.1 General Approach

- Cheddleton Parish Council welcomes engagement with the press and media and recognises their role in informing the public;
- The Council will seek to be open, helpful and responsive wherever possible.

6.2 Media Enquiries

- All media enquiries relating to Council business should be referred to the Clerk;
- Where legal proceedings are ongoing or anticipated, legal advice should be sought before any response is issued;

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- Wherever possible, responses should be provided in writing to avoid misunderstanding or misreporting.

6.3 Confidentiality

- Confidential documents, exempt agenda items, minutes, reports or correspondence must not be shared with the media;
- Any suspected leak of confidential information may be investigated and appropriate action taken.

7. Press Releases

7.1 Press releases may be used to:

- Provide important public information;
- Promote Council events or initiatives;
- Explain Council decisions or policies;
- Correct significant factual inaccuracies.

7.2 Press releases:

- May be drafted by the Clerk or Chair;
- Must be approved and issued by the Clerk;
- Should be factual, balanced and consistent in tone and style.

8. Attendance of Media at Council Meetings

8.1 The press and public are entitled to attend meetings of the Council and its committees unless excluded under legislation.

8.2 Agendas, reports and minutes will be provided to the media on request in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972.

8.3 Filming, recording or live broadcasting of meetings must comply with Standing Orders and relevant legislation, and prior notice should be given to the Clerk and Chair.

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9. Social Media – Overview

9.1 Social media includes online platforms that allow users to share content or interact with others, including (but not limited to) Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and websites.

9.2 The Council recognises the benefits of social media, including improved engagement, transparency and timely communication, while also acknowledging the associated risks.

10. Official Council Social Media Accounts

10.1 Any official Cheddleton Parish Council social media accounts and the Council website are Council-controlled communication channels.

10.2 Only authorised officers may post on official Council accounts, with the Clerk retaining overall responsibility.

10.3 Official accounts are used to:

- Share information about Council services, meetings and decisions;
- Promote events and initiatives;
- Provide public updates.

10.4 Official Council accounts will not engage in political debate or comment on individual councillors' personal accounts.

11. Conduct on Social Media

11.1 Councillors and staff should always consider that online content is public, permanent and easily shared.

11.2 When using social media in any capacity, councillors and staff must:

- Act respectfully and courteously;
- Avoid harassment, bullying or offensive language;
- Comply with data protection, defamation and copyright law;
- Avoid commenting on confidential matters;
- Avoid commenting on matters due to be decided by the Council in a way that could suggest bias or predetermination.

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11.3 Officers must not comment on Council matters or political issues on personal social media accounts.

12. Moderation and Removal of Content

12.1 The Council reserves the right to remove comments from its official social media accounts that are:

- Abusive, threatening or defamatory;
- Discriminatory or offensive;
- Misleading or factually incorrect;
- Unlawful or in breach of platform rules.

12.2 Records may be kept of abusive or threatening communications and, where appropriate, matters may be reported to the relevant platform or the police.

13. Private Messages and Correspondence

13.1 The preferred methods of contacting the Council are via official email, telephone or the Council website.

13.2 Social media messaging is not encouraged for Council business but may be responded to where received.

13.3 Official correspondence must use Council letterhead or Council email addresses and must not be sent anonymously or under a pseudonym.

14. Pre-Election Period (Purdah)

14.1 During the period between the publication of notice of election and polling day, Cheddleton Parish Council will comply with the Government Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and guidance issued by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

14.2 During this period, the Council will:

- Avoid proactive or promotional publicity;
- Not quote councillors or feature them in press releases, social media posts or other publicity;

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- Ensure all communications are factual, neutral and necessary for the continuation of essential services.

14.3 Where there is uncertainty about whether a communication is permissible during the pre-election period, the Clerk will seek advice from the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Monitoring Officer.

14.4 Exceptions may apply in cases of emergency or where there is a genuine need for a civic response, in line with statutory guidance.

15. Breaches of the Policy

15.1 Alleged breaches of this policy by councillors may be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

15.2 Alleged breaches by staff may be addressed through internal procedures.

16. Review and Adoption

16.1 This policy will be reviewed periodically and at least every year.

16.2 The Council may review this policy earlier where there are changes to legislation, statutory guidance, or advice issued by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council or its Monitoring Officer.

16.3 Date created: 23rd December 2025

16.4 Approved by Cheddleton Parish Council on: [date] and [minute reference]

16.5 Review date: [date]

16.6 Chair to sign: [sign]