

Crosby Ravensworth
Parish Council

Press, Media and Correspondence Policy

Part 1. Press and Media

1.1 Crosby Ravensworth’s Parish Council’s relationship with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying attitudes and measuring satisfaction.

1.2 The aim of this policy is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena.

1.3 Effective media relations are an important factor in maintaining a good relationship between the Parish Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Parish Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.

1.4 The community in this sense includes all residents and elected representatives, businesses, schools, shops, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, groups and associations.

1.5 This document sets out the framework for Parish Councillors, Officers/Employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Parish Council’s activities, the decisions it makes and the services it provides.

2. Media Opportunities

2.1 “The Media” is more than the local newspaper. The phrase encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience, and includes:

- a. Broadcast Media (radio and television)
- b. Internet (website and social media)
- c. Printed media (newspapers, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets, and the Council’s Annual Report)
- d. Council Agendas and Displaying information on Council notice boards

3. Making contact with the media

3.1 The Parish Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue press statements on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Parish Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Chairman in conjunction with the Vice Chairman.

3.2 All communications made by the Parish Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk, he/she should inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response within 24 hours where practical. The Clerk should then consult with the Chairman (Vice Chairman in their absence) on a suitable response, which may in fact be “no comment”.

4. Councillors dealing with the media and issues to be aware of

4.1 Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing a Councillor from expressing their personal opinion through the media, but Councillors must make it explicitly clear that any views expressed, are their own personal views and that they do not represent the views of the Parish Council.

4.2 The prefix 'Cllr' should never be used when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy. It is your responsibility as a Councillor to make it clear that it is your own personal opinion.

- a. Councillors should take great care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Parish Council's Code of Conduct.
- b. All Councillors should be particularly cautious if using social media sites so that they do not respond in haste and repent at leisure.
- c. A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed as a confidential item (in closed session) on the Council's or Committees' agenda or at any other private briefing.
- d. Take particular care if the press or media approach you for comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure, simply state "no comment" and ask the press to contact the Parish Council Office.
- e. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.
- f. A Councillor should never raise matters or make comment on subjects relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer/Employee at meetings held in public or to the media.

4.2 Crosby Ravensworth Parish Council chooses not to engage in Party Politics and individual Councillors should apply Parish Council policies not Party-Political opinions.

5. Talking to the Media in your role as a Councillor

5.1 In response to a Parish Council press release:

- a. Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Parish Clerk, who will raise it with the Chair.
- b. No-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion with the Parish Clerk, who will refer to the Chair before responding, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.)

5.2 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist, reporter or any author of an article likely to be placed in the public domain, including enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations:

- a. The views of the Parish Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.
- b. The Parish Clerk should be informed so that he/she is fully appraised of the communication that has taken place.

6. Monitoring

6.1 It is important to monitor the media for items (reports, articles, and letters) about the Parish Council in order to ensure that any press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council are picked up and used effectively. It is also important to monitor what the community is saying about the Parish Council.

6.2 Councillors and Officers / Employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Parish Council in all Medias and to inform the Parish Clerk. Wherever possible, supply original press cuttings rather than photocopies to the Parish Clerk.

Part 2 Parish Council Correspondence

1. All official correspondence will be from the Clerk in the name of the Council. Responses to correspondence received will be given within ten working days of receipt, where possible. If this is not possible, an acknowledgement will be sent, and the letter will be discussed at the next Council meeting.

1.1 Where correspondence is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person.

Email Etiquette

2.1 Email etiquette refers to the code of conduct that guides behaviour when writing or responding to emails. All emails (internal and external) must adhere to the Code of Conduct. These principles of behaviour can be modified to suit the intended audience and purpose, and are meant to project professionalism and respect. The way you communicate reflects your professionalism, work ethic and attention to detail. Emails that are efficient, are direct and concise convey their message quickly.

2.2 Point to note:

a. Be cautious with 'reply all'.

Sometimes it is more effective to reply to the sender rather than to reply all.

b. Avoid using all CAPITAL LETTERS. Use sentence case as you would for any formal communication, and avoid using all capitals as it can read like you're shouting.

c. Don't use emojis - unless the sender has used them. They can come across as unprofessional

c. Use caution before forwarding.

Best practice for forwarding is to summarise what's being discussed so the recipient quickly knows what you need from them. It's also important to keep in mind that some emails are not intended to be forwarded and may contain private or sensitive information.

2.3 Emails between councillors and the Clerk:

- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated.
- Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk.
- E-mails from Councillors to external parties (on Council matters) should be copied to the Clerk.
- Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

- The Clerk and Councillors are not required to send read receipt acknowledgements of emails.

Councillors' Correspondence with External Parties

3.1 Written correspondence (letters or e-mails) from Councillors to other parties on Council matters will be sent through the Clerk, unless agreed otherwise. The Clerk will make clear that it is written in their official capacity and the Council has authorised it.

3.2 All outgoing correspondence relating to the Council, or a Councillor's role within it, will be copied to the Clerk in a manner that makes it clear to the recipient that the Clerk has been advised.

3.3 Councillors must use their judgement when communicating with others in a personal capacity as to how the correspondence will be received. If there is any risk of the recipient considering that the Councillor is speaking on behalf of the Council, then it is the Councillor's responsibility to make it clear that they are not.