FULL SUTTON & SKIRPENBECK PARISH COUNCIL

Press & Media Policy

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Press & Media Relations Policy

a. The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Full Sutton & Skirpenbeck Parish Council (known as "the Council") for working with the press and media (known as "the media") and deals with the day-today relationship between the Council and the media.

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

2. KEY AIMS

a. 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) are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

b. The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Officers and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. 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.

3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

a. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Some aspects of the Code are relevant to this policy: -

• "Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims [and the provision of services] should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both."

• "Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimplify facts, issues or arguments."

• "Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards."

• "Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy."

b. In particular, Officers and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

c. Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish

who was responsible and take appropriate action in accordance with the Standing Orders and Code of Conduct adopted by the Council.

d. When the media wish 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.

e. There are a number of personal privacy issues for Officers and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the council's policies on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. These issues include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain), disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Parish Clerk before any response is made to the media.

4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

a. When responding to approaches from the media, the Chairman of the Council should be the authorised contact with the media in consultation with the Parish Clerk. However, if the subject of an enquiry relates to the work of one of the Council's Committees, the Chairman of the Council may delegate the authorised contact role to the Chairman of that Committee.

b. Statements made must reflect the Council's opinion.

c. Other Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

d. Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. There are 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. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.

e. Letters representing the views of the Council should only be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee. If individual Members choose to send letters to express their own opinions on Council policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Parish Clerk. It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or of an individual Member.

f. At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

5. ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE MEETINGS

a. Agendas and Minutes of meetings will be on the Council's website and also displayed on the notice boards in both villages.

b. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes be sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting.

c. The media are encouraged to attend Council and Committee meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

6. ELECTIONS

a. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Members and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual Members unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council.

7. PRESS RELEASES

a. 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 all Officers and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

b. Any Officer or Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

8. NOTICES

a. The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Parish Clerk.

b. The Council notice boards will be used for the advertising of agendas, minutes and other council information.

9. SOCIAL MEDIA

a. With the rise in the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, Members and Officers need to be fully aware of the implications of using these products. All social media should only be used to present factual information about the Council or its decisions, where the person posting the information is identified as being associated with the Council. Use of Social Media is covered under a separate Policy.

10. URGENT SITUATIONS

a. In the case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a Council or Committee meeting, this may be issued by the Parish Clerk with the agreement of the Chairman of the Council or relevant Committee following circulation of a draft version to other Members for comment.

b. In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the Members and Officers with specific roles and responsibilities under this policy, the following delegations shall apply:
   a) the Vice Chairman of the Council may act in the absence of the Chairman;
   b) the Vice Chairman of a Committee may act in the absence of the Chairman;
   c) the Parish Clerk may act in the absence of the Vice Chairman of the Council or a Committee

Adopted: 21st February 2022