

## **EAST PECKHAM PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL**

### **1. Introduction**

This Protocol has been drawn up in accordance with the "Governance Toolkit for Parish and Town Councils" prepared as a partner publication by *Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors, Society of Local Council Clerks, Standards for England, the National Association of Local Councils and the Local Government Association*. It also takes into account the principles in the National Code for Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2001.

The Code of Practice aims to help local government communicate effectively and impartially so that legitimate political debate is not stifled. It states "*The main purpose of local authority publicity is to increase public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs; to explain to electors and ratepayers the reasons for particular policies and priorities; and in general to improve local accountability*".

### **2. General Principles**

The Council's communications will be open and honest in dealing with the media.

- Media releases will report the decisions and outcomes of the Council's activities, and explain the reasons for them.
- They will not report on political debates within the Parish Council.
- They will not be used to comment on national political debates unless of specific relevance to this Parish Council.
- All media releases issued by the Council will include a quote from the Chairman (or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Chairman of the Parish Council).
- The Clerk will be the first point of contact for the media; however, where it is appropriate for an elected Member to represent the Parish Council, the Chairman or Deputy Chairman shall be authorised as the official spokesmen for the Council.
- Individual Members will not be permitted to issue media releases on behalf of the Parish Council.
- In the restricted period before an election, commonly known as "*purdah*" media releases will not include quotes from Members who are due for re-election.

### **3. Parish Council Correspondence**

- The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed.
- The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- No individual Parish Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council (or its committees/sub-committees). [In particular, Parish Councillors do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a "need to know".]
- All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Parish Council, using Council letter-headed paper.
- Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person.
- Correspondence sent on behalf of the Parish Council to the Borough Council shall also be copied to the two Borough Councillors.

### **4. Parish Councillor Correspondence with External Parties**

The Clerk sends out the Council's correspondence to other bodies and correspondence from individual Parish Councillors should be avoided; however, there may be exceptional situations when it is appropriate for a Parish Councillor to issue correspondence in his/her own name. Such correspondence must be authorised by the Parish Council and the correspondence must make it clear that it has been written in an official capacity and has been authorised.

### **5. Communications with the Press and Public**

In accordance with the Parish Councils Standing Orders, all requests from the press or other media, for an oral or written statement, or comment from the Council shall be processed in accordance with the Council's policy in respect of dealing with the press and/or other media. In the absence of a policy, Councillors shall not, in their official capacity, provide oral or written statements or written articles to the press or other media.

6. **Agendas for Parish Council Meetings**

- In accordance with Paragraph 1 (4) (a) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, agendas will be published no later than 3 clear days before a meeting (this excludes the day of publication and the day of the meeting – Saturdays are included within this calculation).
- Where the Clerk or a Parish Councillor wishes fellow councillors to receive matters “for information only” this will be circulated via the Clerk.