

Hassocks Parish Council
Public communications policy
Approved July 2026 (PRC26/20.2)
To be reviewed July 2029



PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Scope

This policy applies to all councillors, staff or volunteers communicating externally on behalf of Hassocks Parish Council. This policy sets out the principles and obligations which must inform communications strategy and implementation. It does not set out details on the content of communications.

Legal context

1. This policy operates within the legal frameworks provided by:
 - The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
 - The Local Government Acts 1972 and 1986
 - The Freedom of Information Act 2000
 - The Data Protection Act 1998 (and subsequent GDPR updates)
 - Hassock Parish Council's [Standing Orders](#)
 - Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014
 - Hassock Parish Council's [Photography and Filming Policy](#)

General principles

2. Good communications with our community and partner organisations contribute to all aims in the business plan. However, they particularly contribute to the aim: *‘To develop a culture of delivering services in partnership with community groups and volunteers and to engage with all sections of the community through a variety of appropriate and effective channels of communication.’*
3. Any public communications on behalf of The Council must clearly serve at least one of the following purposes:
 - Informing the public of, or encouraging participation in, the work, activities and responsibilities of the Parish Council, or of relevant District and County Councils. *(Purpose 1).*
 - Promoting public understanding of the social, civic, economic and ecological life of Hassocks, including sharing information on local social and civic events and organisations. *(Purpose 2).*
4. All communications should be inclusive, accessible, non-discriminatory and non-partisan. We will take particular care not to appear to endorse specific partisan, religious or business beliefs or interests. Particular care and caution will be taken during purdah (the six-week run up to an election).
5. Staff should monitor and regularly report to the Policy, Resources & Communications Committee on the effectiveness of Council communications. The Policy, Resources & Communications Committee should conduct an annual review of the communications strategy, and periodic reviews of this communications policy.

Style and attribution

6. Our preference in informal communications is to use the first-person plural – ‘We’. In formal communications we will use the third-person singular: ‘The Council said...’, ‘Hassocks Parish Council will...’ etc.
7. All communications with the public or media must reflect the corporate views and positions of The Council. Formal statements should be signed off by the Clerk, Chair or appropriate councillor, speaking on behalf of Council and agreed policy.
8. Quotes may be attributed to a ‘spokesperson for The Council’ or a specific named spokesperson.

Accessibility

9. We will use clear, plain language and accessible formats wherever practical, taking care that communications are able to be understood by people with different needs, including those using assistive technologies.

- We will ensure that our website is regularly reviewed to ensure it meets best practice in accessibility standards.
 - We will always aim to include image description text and will avoid use of text heavy images where alternative text is not provided.
10. We will make key information available through more than one channel or format and will respond reasonably to requests for alternative formats or communication support.

Prioritisation and proportionality

11. We prioritise communications serving purpose 1 over those serving purpose 2. Within purpose 1, we prioritise communications most directly related to the work of the Parish Council. Within purpose 2 we prioritise messages which are most positive and/or uncontroversial.
12. Particular care will be taken to ensure that minutes from meetings and other publicly reported information on Parish Council decisions, actions or deliberations, are appropriately shared.
13. We will ensure that staff time and other resources invested in communications efforts are proportionate the purpose they serve.
14. We will restrict two-way communications on social media channels and/or redirect responses to alternative channels. This will be in cases where an informal response is not appropriate, or managing repeated informal responses is not proportionate.

Third party content

15. From time to time, we may share content from third parties on our communications channels – e.g. information about local events or volunteer activities. We will do so in a proportionate, non-discriminatory and consistent manner.
16. We will not share third party content which is:
- Not strongly related to one of our two communications purposes.
 - Of a purely or predominantly commercial, partisan or religious/non-religious nature.
17. We may also restrict the sharing of third-party content where it is excessive, disproportionate or gives an inaccurate impression of endorsement.
18. We will follow local community groups, businesses, representatives, officials, organisations or media on social media when requested to do so, or when identified as a relevant stakeholder. Such following will not indicate endorsement or an expectation of sharing content.

19. Consistent with these principles we may include channel specific rules on third party content in the communications strategy.

Responsibilities

20. Substantive public communications are defined as:

- Issuing press releases or publishing news articles or reports
- Any communications expressing a new Council policy, preference or decision.
- Any communications where unusual public interest or controversy is foreseeable.

21. All substantive public communications must be signed off by the Clerk. Substantive public communications will be issued by the office with the approval of the Chair of the relevant committee or working group, with notice provided to the Chair and Vice Chair of Council, and the Chair of the Policy, Resources & Communications Committee.

- Communications activities related to specific projects should be approved by the Councillor leading on that project.
- Approval will also be required from any councillors or Council representative mentioned by name or quoted in any communication.

22. Non-substantive or informal public communications are defined as:

- The repetition or resharing of previously approved communications content or messages.
- The sharing of third-party content (where consistent with this policy and the communications strategy).
- Generic uncontroversial messages consistent with the communications policy and strategy.
- Ongoing communications related to a specific project consistent with the approved project plan, and the communications policy and strategy.

23. Non-substantive or informal public communications will be issued by the Community Engagement Officer (or other staff member, volunteer or councillor designated by the Clerk) on behalf of The Council.

24. Access to communications channels should be restricted to those with a need and agreed purpose to use them. Access to communications channels should be periodically reviewed to ensure that outdated accesses are withdrawn, and security is maintained.

Channels

25. The Council will maintain a number of digital and print such communications channels and details of the content, regularity, third party content and responsibility for each channel will be set out in the Communications Strategy.

Other communications identifying members of the public

26. Where any public communication (whether by video, audio recordings, photography or written reference) identifies a specific member or members of the public, appropriate care will be taken to ensure they are informed of this, and where appropriate that their consent is obtained.

Use of personal social media

27. Councillors and staff are likely to have personal social media/network accounts. Personal accounts need to be used in a way that does not conflict with The Council's 'Code of Conduct' or terms of their contract of employment.
28. Councillors, volunteers and staff's use of personal social media/network accounts must clearly delineate personal views from those of The Council. They must not bring The Council into disrepute, reveal privileged internal communications or data, or purport to speak on behalf of The Council.
29. Personal email or social accounts (including WhatsApp or similar message platforms) must not be used to conduct Council business. Official Council email addresses should be used for all correspondence to ensure transparency and compliance with Freedom of Information laws.

Video, audio recordings and photography

30. Representatives of The Council may only record video, audio or photography at meetings, events and activities in a manner consistent with the [Photography and Filming Policy](#) (see Appendix 1).
31. Occasionally, councillors, staff or volunteers may take personal video or audio recordings or photography of Council events or activities (or third-party events or activities at which The Council is represented). In doing so, they must clearly delineate themselves from any official Council authorised video, audio recordings or photography.
32. Councillors, volunteers and staff sharing personal (or non- Council authorised) video or audio recordings or photography of Council events or activities (or third-party events or activities at which The Council is represented) should clearly delineate these from official video, audio recordings or photography.
33. The Council may only externally publicise or share video or audio recordings or photography in a manner consistent with the [Photography and Filming Policy](#) (see Appendix 1) and in furtherance with the purposes of this policy.

Appendix 1 (Copy of Photography and Filming Policy)

Photography and Filming Policy

Approved 10 February 2025 (PC25/131.3)



Photography and Filming Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the Parish Council's position regarding filming, photographing, audio recording and social media reporting of Council meetings and other activities, in line with national legislation.

2. Legislative Context

Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, any person may film, photograph, audio record, or report on the proceedings of meetings that are open to the public. This does not apply to parts of meetings where the public is lawfully excluded due to confidential or sensitive business.

The Council also needs to comply with Data Protection legislation and safeguarding guidance - Children Act 1989 & 2004, Data Protection Act 2018 & UK GDPR, Working Together to Safeguard Children, ICO Guidance on Photography.

3. Recording of Public Meetings

- 3.1. Permission – filming, photographing, and audio recording of public meetings is permitted.
- 3.2. Notification – anyone wishing to record should inform the Clerk at least 24 hours in advance to allow arrangements (e.g., notifying attendees, providing space for those who do not wish to be filmed).
- 3.3. Conduct – recording must not disrupt proceedings. Flash photography, intrusive lighting, or commentary during meetings is prohibited without prior consent of the Chair.
- 3.4. Privacy – filming should focus on the meeting itself and avoid capturing members of the public who are not part of proceedings unless they give explicit consent.
- 3.5. Live Reporting – use of social media during meetings is permitted, provided it does not disrupt proceedings. Devices must remain on silent.
- 3.6. Recording is not allowed during confidential sessions where the public is excluded. The Chair may stop any activity that disrupts the meeting or breaches this policy.
- 3.7. The approved minutes taken by the Clerk remain the official record of the meeting.

4. Recording of Council Events and Activities

- 4.1. Photographs and film of Council events and activities allow us to record and share information with residents and Councillors, celebrate success, promote the Parish and show how public resources have been spent.
- 4.2. If Councillors, staff or a photographer appointed by the Council take photos or videos of participants, those individuals are **data subjects** under GDPR because:
 - A photo of a person is considered personal data if the person can be identified directly (their face) or indirectly (through context, clothing, location).
 - The council is processing personal data by capturing, storing, or using those images
 - If the photos reveal or imply special category data (e.g., religious beliefs at a faith event, health conditions) then extra safeguards apply.
- 4.3. Data protection laws apply to all photos or videos taken for official use. The Council must have a **lawful basis** for taking, using and storing photos and video (e.g., consent, legitimate interest).
- 4.4. **Consent** is the best option for identifiable photos and videos
 - consent should be specific, informed, and documented.
 - for children under 16 years old, obtain parent/guardian consent
- 4.5. Alternatively, **legitimate interest** may apply for general event coverage but opt-outs must be allowed.

- 4.6. All participants must be informed (privacy notice or signage) and their rights respected (e.g., right to object, right to erasure). Images must be stored securely for a specified period.
- 4.7. Children have the same rights as adults over their personal data. If photos and videos of children are shared or posted online without consent there may also be **safeguarding risks**.
- 4.8. Children should never be excluded from an activity because the Council doesn't have consent to take their photo or video. Instead, anyone filming or taking photographs should be made aware of who hasn't given consent for their image to be used. For example, children could be given a sticker or a badge.
- 4.9. If consent is not practical, it is better to take group shots where individuals are less identifiable and to avoid capturing sensitive data (e.g., health conditions, religion or belief beliefs).
- 4.10. The distribution, publication and circulation of photos and video of Council events must be approved by the Clerk or Deputy Clerk to ensure compliance with Data Protection legislation.