


Congresbury Parish Council

Press and Media Policy

1. Introduction

Date of adoption by Parish Council	14 th April 2025	Next review date	April 2027
Signature of Chair of Parish Council		Policy reference	POL - 006

This policy defines the roles and responsibilities of Congresbury Parish Council when working and dealing with their day-to-day relationships with the media.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or enforce strict rules and regulations. It provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

The is not a comprehensive policy but a guide to Congresbury Parish Council members and employees regarding their relationships with the media. The term media encompasses many different means of communicating information to a wide audience and whilst not exhaustive includes the following: radio, television, internet, newspapers, social media, magazines, leaflets, and posters.

2. Policy

1. If a Councillor receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to Congresbury Parish Council, this must immediately be referred to the Chair and the Clerk.
2. When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk, the Chair or the Chair of a Committee are authorised to contact them. Where it is possible, it will take the form of a written statement, a copy should be sent to the Clerk for documenting.
3. Other Councillors wishing to submit press releases will require prior authorisation from the Chair, Clerk or Chair of Committees. If a verbal submission is made by an authorised person this should be confirmed in a written format or a copy of the article requested before publication.
4. Congresbury Parish Council will only comment on matters of fact or matters agreed at Congresbury Parish Council meetings. Representations will be in accordance with the Council's decision. No representations will be made in matters which are discussed in closed session i.e.,

where press and public have been excluded. No representations will be made on any item that may cause Congresbury Parish Council to be subject to litigation. The disclosure and sharing of information will normally be restricted to matters that have been discussed as an agenda item by Congresbury Parish Council except for requests made under the Freedom of Information Act.

5. Where a request is received on a matter where no Council Policy has yet been made the matter should be considered by the Full Council at the next scheduled meeting or, if of sufficient importance, at an extraordinary meeting; before a formal reply is given.
6. Congresbury Parish Council will respect the rights of individuals and others and will have regard to Data Protection issues and legislation when issuing press releases.
7. If Councillors have direct dealings with the press on any matter which may reasonably be construed as being associated with Congresbury Parish Council, they must make it clear that they are not commenting as a representative of Congresbury Parish Council or reflecting its views.
8. When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then further advice should be taken before any response is made.
9. There is considerable potential using social media and it can provide significant advantages. Responsible corporate use of social media is encouraged and users must ensure they use social media sensibly, responsibly and that its use will not adversely affect the council, or its business. Nor be damaging to the Council's reputation, credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.
10. The Chair of the Library Management Committee is authorised to respond to an approach or enquiry from the media regarding the day-to-day running of the service or events. If there is any doubt that the query is outside of the Management Committees remit the query should be referred to the Chair of Congresbury Parish Council and the Clerk.

3. Attendance of media at Council meetings

The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings, seating and workspace will be available.

4. Social Media

Social media provides Congresbury Parish Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantly on a range of subjects. Council activities, updates, news, information and relevant information from other sources.

Congresbury Parish Council will make use of approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control its use to minimise the risks as stated above. In the first instance this will include Facebook.

4.1 Aims and Objectives

Social media can be used by Congresbury Parish Council as an effective way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

The aim of this Policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and the successful promotion of council-based services through social media.
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained when using social media.
- Council information remains secure and is not compromised by using social media.
- Users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.
- The Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.
- Social media communication is effective, timely, appropriate, useful and engages with a wider audience. It utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools (e.g., the website).

4.2 Guidelines

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Congresbury Parish Council:

- Be aware and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Policy.
- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
- Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.
- When using social media for personal purposes you must not imply you are speaking for the council. Avoid use of the council e-mail address, logos or other council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. You should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the council's policies or opinions".
- You must comply with other council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.
- You should be respectful of Congresbury Parish Council members and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.
- Congresbury Parish Council's Facebook accounts must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinions, particularly when used by a Councillor. If unsure, say nothing.

Councillors are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view. Councillors should always present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

4.3. Responsibilities

The RFO is the designated 'Council' owner of the Council Facebook feed and any other Social Media channels agreed by the Council. This will be monitored by the Clerk.

Councillors officially appointed by the Council may assist to disseminate information on the Council's Facebook account to ensure the best use of the account. However, all must follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk.

The Parish Clerk, RFO and Administrator are permitted to operate a Facebook account but must adhere to this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.

4.4 Good practice for Facebook use

Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by Congresbury Parish Council as a body or Councillors as individuals are:

- As a Parish Council we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
- Remember that people classified as "friends" could download and share your information with others.
- Post only what you want the world to see. It is not like posting something to your web site or blog and then realizing that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, basically once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.
- Do not disclose confidential matters, criticise council policies or personnel.
- Set your profile's security and privacy settings carefully. All privacy settings should be set to "only friends" or "friends of friends". "Networks and Friends" open the content to a large group of unknown people.
- All activity on the Council Facebook page must follow the Council's agreed statement of purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool.
- Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
- Pay attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved personnel full access to the site.
- Only add statements approved by either the Full Council, a committee or the Parish Clerk.

- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libellous. Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions and derogatory remarks or characterisations.
- Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Congresbuy Parish Council at risk.
- To reduce security risks do not install any external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.
- Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
- Be careful not to fall for phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click leading to a fake login page.
- If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law. Please stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.

4.5. Other Social Media

It is not intended to use any other forms of social media; however, this could be open to review in the future.