



The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and dealing with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

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

Key Aims

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.

It is important the press have access to the Clerk/Councillors and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

The Legal Framework

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.

The Village Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

Contact with the Media

The Clerk and Councillors should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

Confidential documents should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who is responsible and appropriate action will be taken.

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. Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.

There are number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Councillors that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk or the Chair are authorised to make contact with the media, or to authorise another Councillor to make contact. The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the council or the Chair of the relevant committee. Statements made should reflect the Council's opinion.

Other Councillors can talk to the media without Council approval but must ensure it is clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure.

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. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.

Attendance of media at council meetings

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.

The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings. Seating and workspace will be made available.

Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media should be in accordance with 'A guide for the press and public on attending and reporting meetings of local government' issued by the UK Government Department for Communities and Local Government.

Press releases

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 the Clerk and Councillors to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

The Clerk or any Councillor may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in the above 'Legal Framework' section are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council, and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

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