

Press and Media Policy

Adopted: 19th June 2017; Reviewed: October 2020 (Full Council); September 2021
Review Date: May 2022

The policy defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with day to day relationships 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

AIMS

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can be achieved through effective two-way communication. 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 that the press have access to the Clerk/Members 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 that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988, The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Transparency Code 2015, as a minimum. The Council must also have regard to the governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to

CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

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

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 appropriate action will be taken

When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceeding then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made

There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These 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 Clerk before any response is made to the media

When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk and Chairman are authorised to make contact with the media. In specific cases the Clerk and/or Chairman may authorise other Member/s to respond to media requests

Statements made by the Chairman and the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion

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 and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. **All correspondence must come from the Clerk**

Should a member decide to submit a letter to the press on any subject they should not use the term "Parish Councillor" or give the impression, directly or implied, that they are writing on behalf of the Council

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 and seating and workspace will be made available

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 members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial

All press releases must be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in the section on Legal Framework (above) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored

NB Newsletters/Publications produced by the Parish Council

The quarterly newsletter has an editing team. Final drafts of the newsletters will be circulated to all Editorial Team members for comment before publishing. The Editorial team makes the final decision on content. Other Council publications, when delegated to Councillors to prepare, will always be proof read before distribution

Newspapers with Parish Council information included, produced by others. See above, and in the case of a local newspaper for Histon & Impington, any information item prepared by the office staff will be circulated to all for comment prior to submission