

Hurstbourne Tarrant Parish Council

Press & Media Policy Statement

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Good communication between Hurstbourne Tarrant Parish Council and the public it serves is fundamental to its democratic accountability. Hurstbourne Tarrant parishioners' are entitled to and expect clear information on the services available to them and on the policies and initiatives developed on their behalf. Equally, to make sound decisions, the Parish Council needs good information about its parishioners. One way in which the Parish Council communicates with the public and encourages feedback is through its media relations - in particular, through issuing press releases about its services, policies and objectives. These can be viewed on the village website www.hbt.org.uk

The following guidance explains the way press releases are issued on behalf of the Parish Council and sets out basic guidelines that need to be considered before a press release is issued.

One voice

The Parish Council has a corporate approach to media relations. All our press releases are issued by the Parish Council. The Parish Council is, of course, one organisation and aims to present that image to the public by issuing press releases corporately. This ensures that the Parish Council speaks with one voice and that messages are consistent, effective and focused.

The Parish Council

One of the key roles of the Parish Council is to define priorities for media communication. The Parish Clerk has responsibility for exercising editorial judgements about the timing, content and newsworthiness of all Parish Council press releases in consultation with Parish Councillors and the Parish Council Chairman. Their combined professional expertise helps to ensure that appropriate standards are set and maintained for all news releases and that they are kept within the law.

Message and audience

As with any communication, producing a press release begins with consideration of the message and audience. Sometimes a press release may not be the right or the only way to get our points across. For example, a message for councillors or a partner organisation may be more effective in a letter than a press release or an event may need promotion through marketing activity as well as through the media.

If the Parish Council is considering a press release, discuss it as early as possible. Make sure that careful consideration is given to: - The news angle and the wording and timing of a release, the most efficient and effective promotion - as well as accurate targeting to local, specialist or national media.

Issuing releases that are not newsworthy undermines the Parish Council's credibility with the media and drowns out our more important messages.

Timing

Timing of a release is crucial. The Parish Council will need to understand print and broadcast deadlines.

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Quotes

Local government publicity is governed by the Local Government Act and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Region's (DETR) Code of Practice on Publicity 1986 and 1988. This determines both the sort of information that can be legally publicised by an authority and who can speak on its behalf.

The code includes specific guidelines about using comments or quotes from individual councillors in parish council press releases. It makes it clear that the functions of a local authority are discharged corporately and it is inappropriate to use public resources to publicise an individual councillor's views. However, senior councillors such as the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Parish Council may be quoted if they are speaking on behalf of the Parish Council as a whole or on behalf of a committee.

The Parish Clerk will make every effort to clear quotes with parish councillors before news releases or statements are issued. However, responses to issues in the news are often needed urgently. If a comment needs to be issued urgently, a quote will be cleared with the Parish Council Chairman.

Clearance

All press releases are cleared and agreed by the Parish Council. Press releases containing financial information are also checked with the Responsible Financial Officer.