

Minster Parish Council

Press and Media Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. This policy should be read in conjunction with *Open and accountable local government: A guide for the press and public on attending and reporting meetings of local government* (Department for Communities and Local Government, August 2014).

2. KEYS AIMS

- 2.1. 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.
- 2.2. 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.

3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 3.1. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988, The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 (S.1.2014/...) and The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 (S.1.2012/2089).
- 3.2. The Council will also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and any other recommended guidance.
- 3.3. The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1. The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.
- 4.2. Confidential documents, 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 taken.
- 4.3. 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 a solicitor or advisor (e.g. KALC or Thanet District Council) before any response is made.
- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. When responding to approaches from the media, only the Clerk, Chair / Chairman, or Vice Chair / Chairman are authorised to make contact with the media.
- 4.6. Statements made by the Clerk, Chair / Chairman or the Vice Chair / Chairman should reflect the Council's opinion.
- 4.7. Other Councilors' can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council.
- 4.8. 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.

5. ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

- 5.1. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.
- 5.2. The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.
- 5.3. Photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of a meeting by any means by the press and the public is permitted. While no prior permission is required for this, it is advisable that any person wishing to film or audio record any public meeting should inform the Council so that any necessary arrangements can be made and those present at the meeting can be made aware.
- 5.4. 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.
- 5.5. The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

6. PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- 6.1. The Parish Council website and other form of social media are a very useful way for the Council to connect with the electorate and increase public participation in the business of the Parish Council.
- 6.2. The Clerk has overall responsibility for maintaining the contents of the Parish Council website and will be supported in this task by a Website Support Volunteer who will physically upload the content of the website. The content will either be provided by the Clerk or with his/her approval.
- 6.3. The Website Support Volunteer will also keep the Clerk updated with general developments in Parish Council websites and will advise and support the Parish Council to explore the options and use of web based communication and social media.

A Facebook Moderator Volunteer may also be employed to assist with the Parish Council's social media activity.

- 6.4. The Website Support Volunteer and Facebook Moderator Volunteer will sign a written agreement to the effect that they will abide by Council policies and procedures and not act in any way to bring the Parish Council into disrepute.