

St Peter the Great County Parish Council

Press & 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 to deal 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 interacting with the media.

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/ Councillors and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will respond to any criticism it considers unfounded 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 Council must also have regard to the government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

3.2 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, 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 taken as provided for in the Council's Code of Conduct.

4.3 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then appropriate legal advice should be obtained before any response is made.

4.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues that may be subject to Data Protection legislation and may therefore require careful and sensitive handling. Examples include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Councillor contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary proceedings; and long-term sickness absences that are affecting

service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Council's Data Protection Officer before any response is made to the media.

4.5 Whenever possible, all official enquiries from the press and media to the Council should be directed in the first instance to the Clerk who, as Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications from the press and media and to issue all written Press Statements on behalf of the Council.

4.6 The Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, Vice Chairman and relevant Portfolio Holder is authorised to draft and publish press statements on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time to hold a Council Meeting.

4.7 When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk, Chairman, Vice Chairman and relevant portfolio holder, if applicable, are authorised to speak with the media on behalf of the Council. Any statements made by the Clerk, Chairman, Vice Chairman or relevant Portfolio Holder should reflect the Council's opinion, where known.

4.8 Other Councillors may talk to the media but must ensure that it is made clear where their personal opinions differ from any established viewpoint of the council, as expressed in any policy, statement or resolution previously adopted.

4.9 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a written statement, 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 Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chairman of the meeting.

6 PRESS RELEASES

6.1 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.

6.2. Press releases on behalf of the Council will normally be prepared by the Clerk following any meetings of the Council. If Press Releases are drafted by any other officer of councillor, they can only be issued by the Clerk, following consultation with the Chairman, Vice Chairman and relevant Portfolio Holder. This is to ensure that any Press Release reflects council policy and decisions, adheres to all legal requirements and provides a consistency of style across the council.