



Press and Media Policy

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and for 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 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 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 in order to assist the supply of 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, such as the website, if necessary.

Legal Framework

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts of 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practise on Local Authority Publicity.

Headbourne Worthy Parish Council's 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, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks occur, an investigation will take place to establish who is responsible and appropriate action will be taken.

Proper legal advice should be sought before talking to the media if the issue is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings. Whenever possible any information given to the press should be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.

Care should be taken with personal privacy issues. These include the release of personal information, such as home addresses and telephone numbers (although Councillor contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

The Clerk and Chair are authorised to respond to approaches from the media.

Statements made by the Clerk and/or Chair should reflect the opinion of the Council.

Other Councillors may talk to the media but they must make sure that it is clear their opinions are their own and not necessarily that of the Council.

There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter (to explain factual errors or important policies) but these 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 upon request.

The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and workspace should be made available to them upon request.

Any filming or recording of proceedings by the media can only be made by prior notice with the Clerk or Chair (see Standing Orders).

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 a Councillor may draft a press release, however they must be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in Legal Framework section (see above) are adhered to;

that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

Press releases, or the content of the releases will be posted on the Council's website as soon after release to the media as is practicable.

Facebook

Headbourne Worthy Parish Council does not hold or maintain a Facebook page. There are no Facebook pages authorised to post on the Council's behalf or to promote the Council's activities.

Website

The Council maintains its own website for statutory purposes. The information on the website is available to all, including the Press, so care should be given to the content of what is posted and, in order to ensure consistency, the style of it. The website may also be used to announce to the community events, news and other information pertinent to the Headbourne Worthy Parish. The website is hosted by a third party and can be used to communicate out to subscribers, with the third party being responsible for all GDPR issues.

Twitter Feed

The news section of the website has an automatic twitter feed. This is available for the Chair and the Clerk to use provided it is in accordance with the legal framework (see above) and is consistent with the style used by the Council.