

RINGMER PARISH COUNCIL

Press and Media Policy

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Purpose of the policy is to define roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and dealing 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.

2 KEY 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 and 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 Members, the Clerk 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 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 have regard to the governments Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5670/1878324.pdf

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

4 CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1 The Members and the Clerk should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media and press.
- 4.2 Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who is 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 prior to any response being made.
- 4.4 There are a number of privacy issues for Members and the Clerk that must be handled sensibly. These include the release of personal information such as home address, email address and telephone numbers. (Cllr email addresses are permitted to be 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 by the media the Clerk, Chairman, Vice Chairman or Chairman of the relevant Committee are authorised to make contact with the media.
- 4.6 Statements made by the Clerk, Chairman, Vice Chairman or Chairman of the relevant Committee must reflect the Council's opinion or view of Council.
- 4.7 Other Councillors may talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions or statements given were their own and not necessarily the view of the Council.
- 4.8 There are occasions when it is appropriate for 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 of this nature must come from the Clerk.

5 ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT 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. Seating and workspace will be made available.
- 5.3 Any filming or recording of Council proceedings by the media must be made with prior notice to the Clerk and Chairman of the meeting (see Standing Orders).

6 PRESS RELEASES

- 6.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media or public 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 Members and the Clerk to look for opportunities where issuing a press release may be beneficial.
- 6.2 Members of the Council or the Clerk may draft a press release, however they must be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the legal principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, this will ensure that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.