



PRESS AND MEDIA PROTOCOL **Adopted May 2021**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this protocol is to guide both Councillors and Clerk to the Council in their relations with the press and media, in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.
- 1.2 This protocol does not seek to be over prescriptive but provides guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the press and media.
- 1.3 Above everything else, a Councillor must observe the Council's Code of Conduct whenever he/she conducts the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which he/she has been elected/appointed or acts as a representative of the authority.

2 Employees

- 2.1 The Clerk must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committees' agenda or at any other private briefing.
- 2.2 The Clerk should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.
- 2.3 The Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the press and media and to issue press releases on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Chair of the Council.
- 2.4 All communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Parish Clerk,

the Clerk, and where appropriate, the Clerk should refer the enquirer to the Council Chair.

3 Councillors

- 3.1 A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the agenda of a meeting of the Council or a Committee or at any other private briefing.
- 3.2 A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.
- 3.3 When speaking or providing written material to the press and media, Councillors should make clear the capacity, in which they are providing the information. For example, as Chair of the Council, or as a Parish Councillor, or as an individual (i.e. letter to press for publication), or as spokesperson for the Council as a whole.
- 3.4 Councillors should not use the prefix “Cllr” when writing to the press as an individual. This implies Council policy is being represented. A copy of any written material sent to the press and media by a Councillor, when representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Parish Clerk.
- 3.5 Particular care should be taken if the press or media approach Councillors for comment on a controversial subject. If unsure about any particular policy, Councillors should simply state “no comment” and, if appropriate, ask the press to contact the Parish Clerk.
- 3.6 Councillors should be aware that case law states the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business.
- 3.7 Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.
- 3.8 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer or member of staff at meetings held in public or before the press.

4 Dealing with the Press

- 4.1 The following advice is offered to Councillors and Clerk when dealing with the press:-

- 4.1.1 Be informed and certain of all your facts;
- 4.1.2 Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Council, you are aware of the relevant Council Policy is, and that your comments reflect that policy;
- 4.1.3 Be calm and measured in any comment or response to a question;
- 4.1.4 Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous;
- 4.1.5 Verbal statements made to the media in good faith can look very different in print. It is advantageous to write out a statement before contact, if possible.

5 Meetings of Council and Committees

- 5.1 Copies of Agenda, Minutes and Reports sent to Members for meetings of the Council or its Committees can be emailed to the press and media on request, in addition to publication on the council's web site.
- 5.2 Facilities will be provided at meetings for the press to take notes of the proceedings.
- 5.3 As provided in the Council's Standing Orders both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion.
- 5.4 The Parish Council is governed by the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, 1960.

6 Press Releases

- 6.1 All press releases made on behalf of the Parish Council will be prepared by the Clerk and agreed with the Chair whenever practicable. The release will be raised at the next available meeting of the Council.
- 6.2 The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair, has delegated authority to publish press releases on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for consultation with the Chair or the opportunity for discussion at a Council meeting.

7 Parish Website and Social Media

7.1 Role of Clerk

7.1.1 The Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to issue public notices on the Parish website on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Clerk, such notices will be handled by the Chair or a nominated Councillor.

7.2 Role of Councillors

7.2.1 Parish Councillors should be reminded that, while the website and social media are useful means of encouraging public debate on local issues and for keeping residents updated on the work of the Parish Council, Councillors should focus any comments on the issues; language should be measured and respectful and personal criticism should be avoided. Many examples exist of controversy and criticism following social media postings – some many years after first publication.

7.2.2 Parish Councillors should be clear about the roles which they are performing when communicating with the public and public media ie. as a private individual, as a Councillor, or as an authorised representative of the Parish Council.

8 Policy

8.1 This document has been prepared as a guidance note for Councillors and Clerk. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with the press and media. The policy is intended to ensure consistency in the Council's dealing with the press and media and details who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council. It has been drafted to ensure that the views and policy of the Council are presented accurately.