

North Hinksey Parish Council

Press and Media Policy

1 INTRODUCTION

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.
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 KEYS AIMS

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 (including parish magazine articles), 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. 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

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 governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
2. The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to, and should any conflict occur between this policy and the Standing Orders then the requirements of the Standing Orders take precedence.

4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

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.
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 will be taken.
3. When the media wish to discuss an issue that is currently, or is likely to become, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made. Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.
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 certain Member contact details are in the public domain by consent); 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.
5. The Clerk should immediately be made aware of any request for information or a quote from the Press or media whenever possible.

6. When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk or the Chairman (or Vice Chairman in their absence) are authorised to make contact with the media.
7. If the subject matter relates specifically to the activities of a Committee then the Chairman of the relevant Committee may be asked to produce a written response for submission by the Clerk.
8. Any written or oral statements made should reflect the Council's opinion.
9. During situations where an immediate response is required and the Clerk is unavailable, the guidelines in 4.6 and 4.7 apply, with any response being sent directly from the Chairman (or Vice Chairman)
10. If an urgent verbal quote is requested then arrangements should be made to call back as soon as possible with an agreed statement. This should be agreed between the Clerk and Chairman, or in the Clerk's absence, the Chairman and either the Vice Chairman, or Chairman of the Communications Committee.
11. Other Councillors 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. Any public statement must not seek to undermine agreed Council policies or activities.
12. Where a Councillor is dealing with the media outside of their role as a Councillor (e.g. as a representative of another organisation, or simply as an individual) then it must be made clear that this is their personal opinion or that of another organisation, and that they are not in this context representing NHPC and should not be identified as a Councillor in any resulting publicity. Where information is provided that is not covered by an agreed NHPC position then it must be made clear that this is the personal opinion of that Councillor, not an agreed NHPC position.
13. 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.
14. Council as a whole should be made aware by the Clerk of any requests from the press or media and any resulting publicity arising these interactions.

5 ATTENDANCES OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

1. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.
2. The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.
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 & PARISH MAGAZINE ARTICLES

1. The purpose of a press release or parish magazine article 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 or parish magazine article may be beneficial.
2. The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release or parish magazine article, 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 or parish magazine article can be monitored.

7 SPEAKING IN MEETINGS/PUBLIC EVENTS

1. In all situations the Clerk and Councillors should always have due regard for the reputation of the Council.

2. If a Councillor or the Clerk attends a meeting or public event to represent NHPC then the rules in 4.8 and 4.11 will apply to their public interactions.
3. If a Councillor or the Clerk attends a meeting or public event outside their role at NHPC then the rules in 4.12 will apply to their public interactions.

Adopted by North Hinksey Parish at the Council Meeting on 25th March 2021.

Date of review March 2023.