

CORSCOMBE, HALSTOCK AND DISTRICT PARISH COUNCIL

Press and Media Policy

Introduction

This document has been prepared as a guidance note for councillors. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with the Press and Media. The policy has been prepared to ensure consistency in the Council's dealings with the Media and the purpose of the policy is to provide details of who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council.

The aim of the protocol is to ensure that the Parish Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner, and it is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech, the purpose is to establish a framework for achieving effective working relationships with the media.

The phrase "Media" encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience, and includes:

- Broadcast Media (radio and Television)
- Internet (website and social media)
- Printed media (newspapers, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets, and the Council's Annual Report)
- Council Agendas and Displaying information on Council notice boards

Information

Requests for factual information

Where possible Councillors and the Clerk may refer enquirers to the policies, agendas and minutes already published on the Council's website if these provide the necessary information. Councillors should advise the Clerk of their response. No further comment should be offered.

Other requests should be directed to the Clerk who as appropriate will

- respond in accordance with the Freedom of Information Policy, or
- place the request on the agenda of the next meeting for discussion, or
- contact the Chair who (in an emergency) will decide if it is in the clear interests of residents to prepare a response in advance of the next meeting. The Clerk will inform councillors of all such requests and responses.

There are two types of press release-

1) Official Council Releases

An official Council release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole; it will be written by the Chairman or a delegated councillor and issued by the Clerk. It is non-party political and, if necessary, includes a quote from the relevant Councillor(s).

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/statements on behalf of the Council as instructed or as the Clerk may consider appropriate.

Whenever possible, any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting and all official Council press releases are to include the Parish Council logo.

No other officer of the Council, unless authorised by the Clerk, can speak, or communicate with the media on any matter relating to or affecting the Council or its business. Any officer may draft a press release; however, they must all be approved by the Chairman and issued by the clerk.

Parish Council relations with the media are the responsibility of the Clerk who can authorise other Officers and/or the Chairman to provide factual information.

2) Councillor Press Releases

Councillors may issue their own press releases, but it must be obvious to the recipient that these are personal and are not written on behalf of the Council. This release may or may not be political and should not include the name of a Council Officer, or a Council telephone

number as a point of contact. Member releases must not use the Councils logo. It would be beneficial for copies of intended personal press releases to be sent to the clerk .

- Councillors should take great care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Parish Council's Code of Conduct.
- 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 as a confidential item (in closed session) on the Council's or Committees' agenda or at any other private briefing.
- 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.
- A Councillor should never raise matters or make comment on subjects relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer/Employee at meetings held in public or to the media.

Requests for interviews

Requests for interviews on behalf of the Council should be declined unless agreed at a meeting.

Meetings of Council and Committee

Agendas and minutes of meetings will be supplied to the media on request and can also be found on the Parish Council website. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports, and minutes are sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting.

As detailed in the Councils Standing Orders both the press and public may be excluded from a meeting whilst confidential matters are under discussion (as provided for in the relevant legislation).

Making approaches to the press and media

The Council's own information and opinion

Subjects which the Council wishes to publicise through the press or media should be discussed at a meeting where the purpose, content, timing, and method of doing so can be agreed.

If it is agreed that a draft by a councillor or the clerk should be reviewed prior to publication this will be circulated by the clerk to confirm that it reflects the Council's intentions. If responses indicate conflicting opinions about its content, then these must be discussed at a further meeting before publication.

Third party information

Information may be received from third parties which the Council could publicise. These should be directed to the Clerk.

Where this information is factual, publicly available, non-confidential and likely to be of interest to residents the Clerk may publicise it by any convenient means. This must be done in a manner that does not imply support from the Council of any particular view.

The Policy will be reviewed annually.