

EXMINSTER PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Exminster Parish Council's relationship with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying attitudes and measuring satisfaction.
- 1.2 Effective media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between the Parish Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Parish Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.
- 1.3 The community in this sense includes all residents and elected representatives, businesses, schools, shops, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organizations, groups and associations.
- 1.4 This document sets out the framework for Parish Council Members and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Parish Council's activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides, to ensure consistency in the Council's dealings with the press and media.
- 1.5 This policy is subject to the Council's statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Council's Standing Orders.

2. Media Opportunities

- 2.1 "The Media" is more than the local newspaper. The phrase encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience, and includes broadcast media (radio and television), the internet (including social media), and a wide range of printed media (e.g. newspapers, free sheets, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters,)
- 2.2 Many of the categories in 2.1 have different facets, e.g. a newspaper has feature writers and specialist correspondents in addition to its "news" staff.
- 2.3 Different media respond more readily to certain factors. For example, newspapers are more likely to print a general interest story if supplied with a photograph, radio items tend to be quite brief with a short 'sound bite', and television producers will want moving pictures to illustrate a story.

3. Making Contact with the Media

- 3.1 The general principle is that the Parish Council Clerk will act as the Press Office. Any official contact with the media concerning the Parish Council's policies, the decisions it takes and the services it provides, are to be initiated through the Clerk.
- 3.2 Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or Chairman in association with other Members as required, and will be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.
- 3.3 Other Members of the Parish Council and employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Clerk so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.
- 3.4 If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be referred to the Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Chairman, in consultation with other Members where necessary, about the format and content of any response.
- 3.5 Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a Member from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site or social media. Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views. However, Members should take care not to

misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.

3.6 Employees (other than the Clerk) should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Parish Council unless specifically authorized by the Clerk and/or Chairman of the Council.

3.7 All press releases and other materials are to be kept for reference.

4. Talking to the Media

4.1 In response to a Parish Council press release:

- a) Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Clerk and the author of the press release
- b) No-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.)

4.2 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations)

- a) The views of the Parish Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.
- b) The Clerk should be informed so that facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.

5. Monitoring

5.1 It is important to monitor the media for items (reports, articles, letters) about the Parish Council in order to know:

- a) Whether press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council are picked up and used effectively.
- b) What members of the community are saying about the Parish Council.

5.2 Members and employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Parish Council in the media – press cuttings should be sent to the Clerk.

5.3 Anyone taking part in a radio or television broadcast should try to arrange for it to be recorded and a copy sent to the Clerk. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcast's contents should be sent.

6. Social Media

6.1 Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet including (but not limited to):

- Parish council website
- Facebook, and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites.
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Parish Council Emails.

6.2 In their use of Social Media, Councillors and employees must observe the principles outlined in section 7.

7. General Principles to be observed by Councillors and Employees

7.1 Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Council that you are aware of Council policy and that comments reflect that policy.

7.2 Ensure that comments or views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or employees, into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libelous or slanderous.

7.3 All publicity should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.

7.4 Publicity touching on issues which are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against, should be handled with particular care.

7.5 Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although facts, issues or arguments should not be over simplified.

7.6 Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.

- 7.7 Public funds must not be used to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.
- 7.8 Council resources must not be used on publicity that is, or could be misinterpreted as being, party political or on publicity that could be seen as promoting an individual member, particularly at election times.
- 7.9 The Council, its Councillors and employees cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law.
- 7.10 Councillors or employees must not communicate their personal views about the Council's business, decision and actions.
- 7.11 Councillors or employees are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council or damage the reputation of others in the Council or the Council itself.
- 7.12 When expressing personal views in a private capacity, Councillors are not permitted to use their title "Councillor" and employees are not permitted to use their job title as it may imply that Council policy was being stated.
- 7.13 Councillors and employees should not disclose information that has been discussed under confidential items (part II) of any meeting of the Parish Council.
- 7.14 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer of the Council at meetings held in public.