

Binegar Parish Council

Press and Media Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Binegar Parish Council for working with the press and media.
- 1.2 The intention of this policy is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions. Effective two-way communications, the media – press, radio, TV, internet, parish magazine and notice boards – convey information to the community.

2. KEYS AIMS

- 2.1 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 The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to The Chair, Clerk, Members and to background information to assist them in this role.

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 also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 3.2 In particular, Officers and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.
- 3.3 Confidential documents including exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media.
- 3.4 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 the Council's solicitor before any response is made.
- 3.5 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These issues include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number, 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. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1 When responding to approaches from the media, the Chair of the Council should be the authorised contact with the media.
- 4.2 Statements made must reflect the Council's opinion.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. 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. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.

4.5 Letters representing the views of the Council should only be submitted by the Chair or the Clerk. If individual members choose to send letters to express their own opinions on Council policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Clerk. It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or of an individual Member.

4.6 At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

5. ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE MEETINGS

5.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting.

5.2 Any filming or taping of Council or Committee proceedings by the media is not allowed without the permission of the Council's prior (written) consent.

6. PRESS RELEASES

6.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information, to explain the Council's position on a particular issue or to highlight a meeting or event. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and all Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

6.2 The Clerk or Members may draft a press release; however they must all be issued by the Clerk following agreement by the Chair.

7. NOTICES

7.1 The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Chair / Clerk.

7.2 Parish notice boards will be used for the advertising of agendas, minutes and other Parish Council or District Council information.