**Press and Media Policy**

Introduction

This policy defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council in its relationship with the media.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech but to provide guidance and provide an “aide memoire” as to how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

Policy

Responses to the press relating to matters discussed by the Parish Council shall be dealt with in the first instance by the Parish Clerk.

The Parish Council Chair, and in their absence the Vice-Chair, are also authorised to give the views of the Council to the press on any non-confidential subject discussed by Council.

Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.

At no time shall the personal view of either Members or Officers of the Council be given to the press in a way which could be interpreted as a view of the Council as a whole.

Legal framework

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.

The Parish Council’s adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

Key aims

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions. Accountability and trust are best served through effective two-way communication

The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community. The Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them, for example, to:

* increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council
* to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities
* to invite opinion or public debate on matters of current concern

It is important that the press have access to the Clerk, and Members, as well as 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 to ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

Contact with the media

The Clerk and Members must always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

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 those responsible and appropriate action taken.

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 appointed Council solicitor before any response is made.

Due regard must be taken in respect of personal privacy issues for both Clerk and Members, and these must be handled carefully and with appropriate sensitively to the circumstances. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences affecting service provision. In this type of situation advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk, Chair or Vice
Chair are authorised to make contact with the media.

Statements made by the above should reflect the Council’s minuted position.

Other Council Members may 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.

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 be issued by the Clerk.

Attendance of media at council meetings

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

Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chair of the meeting (see Standing Orders).

News Releases

The purpose of a news 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
* to raise the awareness of the role, responsibilities and work of the Parish Council
* to invite opinion or public debate on matters of current concern
* to publicise meetings, events and exhibitions

It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release; however, they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in the Legal Framework section are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored. News releases will be copied to all members.

Interviews

It is recognised that on rare occasions an interview with the media is desirable. Prior to the interview the Parish Clerk/interviewee should establish the context of the interview and the scope of questions being asked. The Clerk, as necessary, will prepare a briefing paper for the interviewee.

Training

Glapwell Parish Council recognises the role training has in promoting effective media relations and will support requests for Councillor and Clerk training in communications and media relations where appropriate

Related documents

National Association of Local Council’s – Communication Toolkit

Adopted 15th May 2025

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