Harpole Parish Council Press and Media Policy

Introduction

- This policy describes how councillors and the clerk should act when in contact with the press or media
- 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.

Legal Framework

- The Council will have regard to the provisions of Part II of the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011) when undertaking publicity and communications activities. The Council will also comply with applicable requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR and the Local Government Act 1972 relating to public access to meetings and documents.
- The Council will also have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011), Specifically:
    - "Any publicity describing the council's aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanations or both"
    - "Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the council should be handled with particular care, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimply facts, issues or arguments."
    - "Publicity should not attack, not appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards."
    - Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy"
- At all times the council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.
- The Clerk and members should always have due regard to the long-term reputation of the council in all their dealings with the media.

Responding to approaches from the Press and media

- 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. No further comment should be offered.

  Other requests should be directed to the clerk who 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.

- Requests for opinion

  Neither a councillor nor the clerk should offer an opinion on behalf of the council on a matter that has not been discussed and minuted. Such requests should be directed to the clerk who will arrange for them to be placed on a future agenda.

  This is not intended to restrict the freedom of councillors to offer personal opinions but they MUST ensure when giving a statement that it is clear the opinions being expressed are their own view and not those of the council.

- Requests for Interviews

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

Making Approaches to the Press and Media

- The council's own information and opinions

  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 counillor 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 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.

Attendance of media at council meetings

- Part VA of 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.

Urgent Situations

- In case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a council or committee meeting, this may be issued by the clerk with the agreement of the Chair of the council or relevant committee following circulation of a draft version to other members for comment.
- In case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the members and officers with specific roles and responsibilities under this policy the following delegations shall apply:
    - The deputy chair of the council may act in the absence of the chair;
    - The chair of a committee may act in the absence of the chair;
    - The parish clerk may act in the absence of the deputy chair of the council or the chair of the committee.

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Next Review September 2028