

## **Wolvey Parish Council**

### **Press and Media Policy adopted by the Council on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2014 and revised and agreed on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2015**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and to deal with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

1.2 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.

#### **2 KEYS AIMS**

2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so 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 It is important that the press have access to the Clerk/Members and 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 and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

#### **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 governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

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

#### **4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA**

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

4.2 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 who was responsible and appropriate action taken.

4.3 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.

4.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. 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 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.

4.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk, Chairman or a nominated lead councillor are authorised to make contact with the media.

4.6 Statements made by the Chairman or a nominated lead councillor and the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.

4.7 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.

4.8 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 come from the Clerk. Further advice on dealing with the media is at Annex A.

## **5 ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS**

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

5.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

## **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 or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

6.2. 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 section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored. Guidance on the content and format of press releases is at Annex B.

## **Annex A**

### **Dealing with the media**

#### **Press and broadcasting**

First, it is important to understand each type of media and how they operate. They have a nature, which spreads news from local/provincial to regional to national media.

Specialist press, such as *Local Government Chronicle*, *Municipal Journal* and *Local Government News*, have a positive influence and are widely respected. They often provide the initial starting point in the information trails for the national media; therefore they cannot be ignored. Equally important is the local press, which may have a tremendous influence over the local electorate and communities.

#### **The 'story'**

It is essential that you understand the motivation and psychology of journalists and reporters so that you can avoid being caught off guard. Journalists and reporters need information and facts but they are also looking for a story. You will need to think about what 'angle' the journalist or reporter is interested in.

You also need to consider what message you want to get across on behalf of the council. It is important to stick to your message and avoid being drawn in to giving opinions about what at the time may appear to be innocent questions but might give an opportunity for someone to present your views in a way that you had not intended.

Avoid getting too 'friendly' with journalists and reporters. Keep a courteous but professional distance. Be helpful by all means but don't get drawn in to making 'off the record' comments. There is no such thing as 'off the record.'

#### **Two way street**

It ought not to be the case that the council is always reacting to requests for information and interviews. There will be occasions when the council can take the initiative and issue press statements about work that it feels should reach a wider audience. Developing good relations with local media outlets will be helpful in gaining access to space in newspapers or on local radio.

When looking to publicise its work, the council should be clear about what it wants to achieve and the best place and means to convey the message.

## **Annex B**

### **Guidance on press releases**

#### **1. How to write a press release**

- the press release can be the cornerstone to getting any media coverage.
- the press release should be no longer than two sides of A4.
- the most important aspects of the release should come first, then with other aspects descending in □importance.
- your contact details should be at the end of the release.

All press releases should answer the following questions:

- what happened?
- where has it happened?
- why has it happened?
- when has it happened?
- how has it happened?

Presentation and distribution □

The press release must be presented in an easy-to-read format. Remember that the people working in the media are very busy and working towards tight deadlines. Set up a database of key journalists and editorial staff in your locality that might be interested in the stories that come from your organisation. □

#### **2. Writing opinion pieces or feeding information for news and feature stories**

You should call the relevant editors, news editors or feature editors at your local or regional newspapers to find out how to submit an opinion piece or provide information for news and feature stories.

Ideally, you should prepare and rehearse a 15-second statement of the contents of your opinion piece or information you want to get across so that you can quickly convey your idea to the journalist. Also be aware of, and respect, the paper's deadline.

Send the opinion piece to the appropriate local or regional paper first. If it is rejected, try another paper. Do not be discouraged if it takes several tries to secure a placement. □

Make the relevant member or officer available for interviews by the media.

## **Sample media release**

### **Logo**

**Wolvey Parish Council Media Release**

**date/month/year**

### **Heading**

#### **Text:**

*ideally one side of A4 and no more than two  
short clear paragraphs starting with the most important points  
Include quotes where appropriate*

#### **Ends:**

*this enables media outlets to know that they have seen the whole release*

#### **Notes for editors:**

*this is where you can give brief background facts and references as well as  
contact details for more information.*