

Torver Parish Council

Press and Media Policy

Reviewed on 21st May 2024

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Introduction and legal framework

1. It is important for the Parish Council to have effective two-way communication with all sectors of the media – press, radio, TV, internet and social media. It enables the Council to:
 - ✓ increase the public's awareness of parish council activities, and
 - ✓ explain the reasons for particular policies and decisions.
2. The Parish Council welcomes press and media attendance at Council meetings and is happy to provide additional information in the form of interviews, press releases and background reports as appropriate. The purpose of this policy is to:
 - ✓ define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media
 - ✓ ensure that council views and policies are presented accurately and fairly
 - ✓ promote consistency in the Council's dealings with the media
 - ✓ provide guidance on some of the practical issues that may arise.
3. This policy is consistent with the law relating to communications by local authorities which is contained in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988, and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
4. The Parish Council's own standing orders, where relevant, should also be adhered to.

Meetings and agenda papers

5. Press and media representatives are welcome to attend all Council meetings and seating will be made available for them. Where meetings include time for public participation and questions, representatives may also speak and ask questions providing that the usual notice requirements contained in Council standing orders are complied with. Press and media representatives may take notes of the meeting and make recordings of the meeting providing that the Clerk has been advised of this intention at least 3 working days in advance.
6. Press and media organisations are entitled to receive electronic copies of the agenda and supporting information for each parish council meeting free of charge on request. If hard copies are required, the Clerk will be entitled to charge an appropriate amount to cover photocopying, postage etc.
7. The Council may resolve that certain matters to be discussed at meetings should be treated as confidential and not discussed in public. These could be for example:
 - ✓ commercially sensitive decisions relating to the letting of contracts or procurement of services

- ✓ staffing issues – recruitment, employment terms, grievance or disciplinary matters
 - ✓ other items of a personal or sensitive nature.
8. Such items will be dealt with at the end of each meeting, at which point the press and members of the public will be asked to leave. Press and public will not be provided with the supporting information for confidential agenda items, and Councillors and the Clerk should not under any circumstances “leak” this information to the press, media or other external parties.

Press releases

9. The purpose of a press release is to provide information to the public in relation to important Council policies or decisions. It is the responsibility of all elected members to identify opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial, and to move a resolution to that effect at Council meetings.
10. Once such a resolution has been approved it is the Clerk’s responsibility to draft the press release and issue it. Press releases should be short, factual, and objective in tone and will normally be restricted to a summary of the matters that have been discussed and agreed at the relevant Parish Council meeting. Press releases should not speculate on matters that have not yet been formally considered or approved.

Other contact with the media

11. Enquiries from the media in response to a press release, or requesting an interview, should in normal cases be dealt with by the Chair in order to ensure consistency. The Chair may however authorise the Clerk or another councillor to speak on a particular issue if he feels this would be more appropriate.
12. Media opportunities identified by councillors or the Clerk should be referred to the Chair who will then make a decision, in consultation with other councillors and/or the Clerk where necessary, about how and whether the opportunity should be pursued.
13. Unless the Clerk or a councillor has been authorised to speak on a particular issue, any unsolicited communication should be limited to confirming basic matters of fact – dates of meetings, decisions made, etc.
14. Where the media wish to discuss a matter that is or may be subject to legal proceedings, legal advice should be obtained before any further comment is made.
15. In circumstances where it becomes necessary for the Council to correct factual errors contained in press and media coverage, a letter should be sent from the Clerk. Such letters should be brief, balanced and factual in tone and the Council should avoid being drawn into protracted or unproductive correspondence.
16. Nothing in these guidelines should be interpreted as preventing or discouraging elected members from expressing personal opinions through the

media for example by writing to a newspaper or posting on an internet site. Members must however:

- ✓ represent the corporate position of the parish council accurately
- ✓ if they disagree with the corporate position or the parish council's position is not clear, emphasise that they are expressing their own personal views and not that of the Council as a whole
- ✓ take care not to misrepresent the parish council or bring it into disrepute
- ✓ always bear in mind their personal responsibilities under the Code of Conduct

17. Elected members often have other roles and responsibilities in the community eg as school governors, charity trustees or local businesspeople. It is important to distinguish between any comments made as individuals, or when acting in a different capacity, by not using the title “Councillor”, or parish council stationery, unless specifically authorised to do so by the Chair.

Monitoring media coverage

18. Monitoring media coverage is important so that the parish council can:
- ✓ be aware of what information local people are receiving
 - ✓ assess the effectiveness of press releases, interviews and statements issued.
19. The Clerk and councillors are encouraged to look out for items referring to the parish council in the media and provide copies to the Clerk.
20. The Clerk should also retain copies of press releases, broadcast/interview transcripts and other examples of media coverage, and compile a “media scrapbook” for future reference.

General principles for dealing with the media

21. The following general principles apply when dealing with the media:
- ✓ remain calm and treat all press and media representatives with courtesy
 - ✓ keep abreast of council policy and recent decisions
 - ✓ ensure that any comments made to the press are factually accurate
 - ✓ always regard to the long term reputation of the Parish Council as paramount
 - ✓ remain as objective as possible, concentrating on facts and explanations not personal opinions
 - ✓ present issues as clearly and simply as possible using simple sentence construction and short, everyday words

- ✓ avoid using abbreviations, acronyms and words or phrases which may not be commonly understood
- ✓ do not make comments which are libellous, slanderous or offensive to persons of different race, gender, or sexual orientation
- ✓ do not disclose confidential, sensitive or personal information
- ✓ do not use Council press releases, interviews or resources to make party political statements or promote individual council members at the expense of others.

Approved by Torver Parish Council

14 January 2016