



PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH PRESS AND MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

This Policy defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech but to provide guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The Council must work with the media to increase public awareness of the services and facilities it provides and to explain the reasons for particular actions, policies and priorities.

The Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public is properly informed of all the relevant facts.

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 governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and to its own adopted Standing Orders.

CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

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

The media should not be given access to confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence. If disclosures do occur, an investigation will take place to establish responsibility and appropriate action taken.

When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings advice should be sought from the Council's solicitor before a response is made.

The Clerk and Councillors must handle personal privacy issues carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absence that are affecting service provision. In all these, and similar situations, advice must be sought from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

The Clerk is authorised to contact or respond to the media. In specific cases the Chairman or other councillors may be authorised to respond.

Statements made by the Clerk or authorised councillors should accurately reflect the Council's position on issues resolved by the Council. On all other issues, statement should only be made for the purposes of clarification, they must be factual and not incorporate personal opinions.

On occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter to the media, it should be kept brief and balanced in tone. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.

If a Councillor wishes to communicate with or submit a letter to the media on any subject they should not imply that they are writing on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so by the Council.

Unless authorised to do so by the Council, councillors must not discuss any business of the Council that is confidential and/or not yet in the public domain.

ATTENDANCE OF THE MEDIA AT COUNCIL AND/OR COMMITTEE 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 and/or Committee meetings, seating and work space will be made available.

As a courtesy to members of the Council the Chairman should be informed of any filming or recording of Council proceedings by the media.

PRESS RELEASES

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 seek out opportunities where issuing a press release would be beneficial.

All press releases must be issued by the Clerk.