

Cookham Parish Council

Press and Media Relations Policy

Reviewed and Adopted with no changes at the

Annual Meeting on 16th May 2023

Minute page 3056 Item 17 (i)

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Effective media relations can be a useful tool in promoting honest and open dialogue with local residents, businesses and other organisations about Council activities and services, as well as ensuring that Council activities are represented accurately.
- 1.2. Effective media relations can also be useful for highlighting local community issues and concerns, and showcasing awards and other resident or community successes.
- 1.3. For the purposes of this policy, 'media' includes all forms of print, broadcast, online or digital journalism, and forums such as Cookham.com.
- 1.4. All Council's news releases will be published on the Council's website where possible.
- 1.5. This policy does not prevent Councillors speaking to the media in a personal capacity or as the elected councillor representing their ward. In such instances, Councillor should ensure that it is made clear that they are speaking in such a capacity and not on behalf of the Council.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. This policy aims to clearly define how the Council handles its media relations and the role of its Councillors in this process.
- 2.2. It is not the intention of this policy to curb free speech or prevent engaging with the media, but to provide an open and transparent framework.

3. Legal framework and other guidance

- 3.1. Councillors should have due regard for the Nolan principles for standards in public life.
- 3.2. Law governing communications can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (DCLG 2011) and Councillors to the Local Government Code of Conduct.
- 3.3. NALC's guidance on media relations has been considered for background information and guidance
- 3.4. The Council's standing orders should be adhered to.
- 3.5. The Council's Code of Conduct should be adhered to.

4. Working with the media

- 4.1. The Clerk of the Council should act as the Press Office. Out of office hours this may also be the Chairman of the Council if an enquiry is urgent.
- 4.2. It is preferable that the precise nature of all media enquiries is confirmed in writing via email to the Clerk.
- 4.3. The Clerk will keep suitable records of all media enquiries, Council media relations activity, such as news releases or statements, and coverage, such as newspaper cuttings or interviews.
- 4.4. The Clerk will inform the Chairman of any approach from the media immediately. However, if the journalists' deadline is not urgent, such as information for the following week, the Chairman should be informed within one working day.
- 4.5. Decisions on whether, and how, to respond to a media enquiry will be taken by the Chairman in consultation with the Clerk, and any other Councillors where appropriate.
- 4.6. If a Councillor or employee receives an approach from a journalist or media outlet, it should be referred to the Clerk. Individuals should not respond directly but politely inform the journalist that the Council's Press Office will be in contact and follow the process outlined.
- 4.7. The Chairman may speak to the media directly, or delegate this responsibility if more relevant, making it clear that any response is on behalf of the Council.
- 4.8. Any statements made on behalf of the Council should reflect Council business and policy.
- 4.9. No personal information should be disclosure as part of any response to the media, and due regard should be paid to the Data Protection Act.
- 4.10. The Chairman may appoint a deputy to handle media relations or act as spokesperson when required, for example due to holiday commitments, and this will usually be the Vice Chairman.

5. Media opportunities

- 5.1. If a Councillor or employee identifies any opportunity to showcase the work of the Council or other relevant local activities, then it should be referred to the Clerk, or Chairman.
- 5.2. If a Councillor or employee identifies an error in any media reporting, it should be referred to the Clerk, or Chairman, for a response to be developed and issued.
- 5.3. If a news release is prepared, it should be coordinated and issued by the Clerk, or the Chairman, to ensure a consistent approach and that high standards are maintained.
- 5.4. In all instances, the process outlined under section 4 will be followed.

6. Council meetings

- 6.1. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.
- 6.2. Council meetings are open to the public and journalists, and may be filmed or recorded.
- 6.3. Journalists are encouraged to attend Council meetings and suitable work space will be provided.