



PRESS & MEDIA POLICY

Adopted on: 24th May 2022

Review: May 2023

Datchworth Parish Council recognises the role of its relationship with the local community in influencing the work and decisions it takes. Positive media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between the Parish Council and the community.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media.

This policy sets out the framework for Parish Council members and employees to follow when in contact with the media, to inform the public about the Parish Council's activities, decisions and the services it provides. The term "Media" encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience and includes radio, television, social media, the internet and a wide range of printed media such as newspapers, leaflets, posters, Parish Magazine and the Parish Council Newsletter*.

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

Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media or any external party. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and take appropriate action in accordance with the Standing Orders and Code of Conduct adopted by the Council.

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 legal advisor before any response is made.

There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the council's policies on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. These issues include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain unless redacted), 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 to the Parish Council before any response is made to the media.

CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

1. The general principle is that the Clerk shall act as the Press Office for the Parish Council. Any official contact with the media concerning the Parish Council's policies, decisions and services should be initiated through the Clerk. The Clerk will clear all press reports or comments to the media with the Chairman** of the Parish Council.
2. Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or Chairman**, in association with other Members as required, and will be informally restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council. All Press releases and statements made must reflect the Council's opinion and not a personal view of any member(s).
3. If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be referred to the Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Chairman**, in consultation with other Members as necessary, about the format and content of any response.
4. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Parish Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, they should refer the matter to the Clerk/Chairman. Otherwise, if comments are made to the Press, Councillors must make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it is clearly reported as such.
5. Any Member taking part in a radio or television broadcast should only do so on behalf of the Parish Council after consultation with the Clerk and approval with the Chairman** and other Members where necessary. Ideally arrangements should be made for the broadcast to be recorded and retained for reference. Alternatively, a note of the broadcast's content should be made and sent to the Clerk.
6. Members of the Parish Council who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Clerk and Chairman** so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.
7. Members of the Parish Council are not prevented from expressing a personal opinion through the media e.g. by writing to a newspaper or posting an opinion on an internet site. However, Members must make it clear that any views expressed are their own views. Members should take care not to misrepresent

and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct.

8. 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.
9. The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Clerk to the Parish Council

* This policy should be read in conjunction with our Filming & Recording at Meetings, Social Networking and Public Attendance at Meetings policies.

** or in the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman