PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

Revised & adopted by Full Council on 15.11.18 New Revision date November 2019

Introduction

Kingmoor Parish Council ("the Council") is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions.

The Council may communicate with those whose work involves gathering material for editorial publication in print, broadcast and electronic form ("the media"). The Council shall endeavour to assist the media with enquiries about the Council's functions, decisions and actions.

The purpose of this policy is:

- to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media
- to ensure that the views and policies of the Council are presented accurately
- to clarify who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council
- to provide guidance for Councillors and Staff on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media
- to ensure consistency in the Council's dealings with the Press and Media to ensure that all elements of the Press and Media will be treated equally.

Legal Framework

This policy is subject to the Council's statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Council's Standing Orders. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

Media Attendance at Meetings

Meetings of the council, its committees and sub-committees are open to the public and press unless the Council resolves that their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons.

In accordance with standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting. Where meetings include time for public participation and subject to the Council's standing orders, media representatives may speak and ask questions.

The press/media are entitled, on payment of postage or other necessary charges, to copies of the agenda and necessary supporting papers for a meeting and their representatives shall be given reasonable facilities for taking and communicating their report of a meeting.

The Clerk

Wherever possible all communications with the Press and Media should be made through the Clerk. The Clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council in consultation with the Chairman. In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman and will be consulted.

Communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. S/he should not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk, s/he should inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response within 48 hours where practical. The Clerk should then consult with the Chairman or Vice Chairman on a suitable response, which may in fact be "no comment".

The Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice Chairman is authorised to publish press statements on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a Council meeting.

Councillors

Councillors should be aware that according to case law the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. Councillors must therefore be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that s/he voted against a policy if this took place in an open session, Councillors should not seek to undermine a decision through the Press.

Press releases / approaches made to the Press / Media by the Council Press releases may be issued proactively to alert the media to a potential story, provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue.

Press releases made on behalf of the Council will normally be prepared by the Clerk following any meetings of the Council. If press releases are drafted by any other officer or Councillor, they must be issued by the Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice Chairman.

KINGMOOR PARISH COUNCIL

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A direct approach by the Council to the media seeking an interview, issuing a statement or press release or to publish an article may only be made with authorisation from the Council except in the case of an urgent matter, with insufficient time for a Council meeting, when the Clerk is authorised to publish statements in consultation with the Chairman or Vice Chairman.

Approaches from the Press / Media

Unexpected approaches from representatives of the media can lead to unguarded comments being made and great care must therefore be taken to avoid misrepresentation of the Council's policy or its position on the matter in question.

Reporters should be directed to contact the Clerk if they want to carry out an interview or obtain a statement about the Council's business and actions. Except in the most straightforward cases, the caller should be informed that a statement will be made within 48 hours and they should be asked to set out clearly what they want to know. This will allow time for the Clerk to consult with the Chairman in producing a carefully worded response within a reasonable time.

Any verbal or written statement given by the Clerk must represent the corporate position and views of the Council, not the individual views of councillors or staff held in their official capacity. Where the matter concerned has not been discussed by the Council an immediate response cannot be made and this should be made clear to the enquirer.

The Clerk should then consult the Chairman or Vice Chairman on an appropriate response, which may be "no comment".

General Principles to be observed by Councillors and The Clerk

- Be calm
- Be informed and certain of all your facts
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Council that you are aware what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy
- Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or staff, into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.
- Any publicity should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both

- Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular care.
- Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although facts, issues or arguments should not be oversimplified
- Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards
- Public funds must not be used to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.
- Council resources must not be used on publicity that is, or could be misinterpreted as being, party political or on publicity which could be seen as promoting an individual member, particularly at election times.
- The Council, it's Councillors and Staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law.
- Councillors must act with integrity and observe the Members' Code of Conduct at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.
- Councillors and staff must not communicate their personal views about the Council's business, decisions and actions.
- Councillors and Staff are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council or damage the reputation of others in the Council, or the Council itself.
- If expressing personal views in their private capacity, Councillors are not permitted to use their title "Councillor" and staff are not permitted to use their job title. This would imply that you are stating Council policy.
- A copy of any written material sent to the Press and/or Media by a Councillor, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Clerk.
- A Councillor or Officer must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the Press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committee's agenda or at any other private briefing.
- A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer at meetings held in public or before the Press.

Social Media

In their use of social media (Facebook, Twitter email, etc.) Councillors and Staff must at all times observe the principles stated in this policy.