

# Boxted Parish Council Press and Media Policy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.
- 1.2. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media

## 2. KEYS AIMS

- 2.1. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – may be important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
- 2.2. It is important that the press have access to the Clerk/ Members and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

## 3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 3.1. 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 (the Publicity Code).
- 3.2. Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

## 4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1. The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.
- 4.2. Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers, personal data and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who responsible and appropriate action was taken.
- 4.3. 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 Borough Council's solicitor or Essex Association of Local Council (EALC) before any response is made.
- 4.4. There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); 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 before any response is made to the media.
- 4.5. When responding to approaches from the media the Clerk, Chair or Chair of a Committee are authorised to contact the media.
- 4.6. Statements made by the Chair, Chair of Committees or the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.
- 4.7. Other Councillors may talk to the media but should ensure that they are clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily the opinion of the Council.
- 4.8. Any letters sent to the media should be kept brief and balanced in tone. All letters should come

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from the Clerk.

## **5. ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS**

- 5.1. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agenda, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.
- 5.2. The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and workspace and seating will be provided.
- 5.3. Any filming or recording of the Council meeting can be made but prior notification must be given to the Clerk and the Chair of the meeting (See Council Standing Orders).

## **6. PRESS RELEASES**

- 6.1. The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is for the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- 6.2. The Clerk or and Member may draft a press release, however, they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in Section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.