

SOBERTON PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA POLICY

This document sets out how Parish Council members should react when:

- contacted by the media (print, radio, television or online news sites/blogs)
- contacting the media or using social media to inform the public about the Parish Council's activities, decisions and services.

In response to a Parish Council press release:

Any enquiry from the media should be referred to the Clerk, Chairman and/or the relevant Councillor owning that particular issue.

No-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.)

In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist:

The Clerk, Chairman or any Councillor who has been designated as "spokesperson" should be informed so that appropriate action can be decided and taken.

Ad hoc comments to unsolicited contacts from journalists should be avoided – either refer the journalist to the Clerk or arrange a subsequent interview opportunity and opt to have the Clerk or another Councillor included on a conference call for the interview.

The Parish Council office acts as the "Press Office" and any approach from the media* should initially be made to the office; the office is also responsible for issuing any "press releases", statements or social media posts concerning the Parish Council. These inputs should be prepared by the Clerk in association with the Chairman and /or other Councillors as relevant and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.

Any Councillor identifying a media opportunity should alert the Clerk rather than initiating the contact themselves.

Any unsolicited approach from the media to individual Councillors should be referred to the Clerk, Chairman or any Councillor who has been designated as "spokesperson" for that topic. If the issue is subject to legal proceedings, then advice from the Council's legal adviser should be taken before any response is made.

Confidential documents (exempt minutes), reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leak occurs an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action taken.

These guidelines do not prevent Councillors from speaking or writing to the media or making social media posts in their personal capacity or giving a personal opinion but they must make it quite clear that they are speaking in a personal capacity and not as a Parish Council representative. Councillors must also bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.

In response to a Parish Council press release:

- any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Press Office and the author of the press release.
- no-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion except to confirm basic matters of fact ie dates of event, spelling of names, etc.

In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations)

- the views of the Parish Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.
- The Press Office should be informed so that facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.

There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Councillors that must be handled carefully and sensitively which includes the release of personal information, such as home address.

All Councillors and the Clerk should be alert for any mention of the Parish Council in the media (reports, articles, letters, social media etc) in order to know whether press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council are used effectively and obtain feedback on community views of Parish Council activities. Any relevant press cuttings found should be sent to the office.

Copies of press releases and other materials should be kept for reference. Council "spokespersons" should also keep a record of any conversation they may have with members of the media. The option of having the Clerk or another Councillor included on a conference call interview should also be considered if felt appropriate. Replies to any questions journalists submit by e-mail should also be kept. Anyone taking part in a radio or television item should notify the Clerk of the likely broadcast time or otherwise try to arrange for it to be recorded.

Summary

In response to a Parish Council press release:

- a) Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Clerk, Chairman and/or the relevant Councillor owning that particular issue.
- b) No-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.)

In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist:

- a) The Clerk, Chairman or any Councillor who has been designated as “spokesperson” should be informed so that appropriate action can be decided and taken.
- b) Ad hoc comments to unsolicited contacts from journalists should be avoided – either refer the journalist to the office or arrange a subsequent interview opportunity after achieving (a) above, or take the option of having the Clerk or another Councillor included on a conference call for the interview.

***It should be noted that Media is more than the local newspaper. It encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience including radio and television, the internet and a wide range of printed media.**

