



Branston Parish Council



BRANSTON PARISH COUNCIL – PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

Branston Parish Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of the functions, decisions and actions.

The council may communicate with those whose work involves gathering material for editorial publication in print, broadcast and electronic form

Where information is not available via the councils publication scheme, the council shall endeavor to assist the media with enquiries about the councils functions, decisions and actions.

Legal framework

This policy is subject to the councils statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Bill and the Councils Standing Orders. The council must also have regard to the Governments 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 behavior obstructs the business of the meeting.

The clerk

Wherever possible all communications with the press and media should be made through the clerk.

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. She/he should not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the council. Where should questions are put to the clerk, s/he should inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response within 24 hours where practical. The clerk should then consult with the chairman or relevant councillors on a suitable response which may in fact be 'no comment'

The clerk in consultation with the chairman /vice chairman/committee be authorized to publish press statements on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a council meeting.

Councillors



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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 the 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 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 explore the councils position in a particular issue.

Press releases made on behalf of the council will normally be prepared by the clerk following any meeting of the council or committees. If press releases are drafted by any other officer or councillor they must be issued by the clerk in consultation with the chairman.

Approaches from the press/media

Unexpected approaches from representatives of the media can lead to unguarded comments being made and great care must be therefore be taken to avoid misrepresentation of the councils 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 councils business and actions.

Except in the most straightforward cases, the caller should be informed that a statement will be made within 24 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 matters 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 on an appropriate response, which may be 'no comment'.

General principles to be observed by councilors and staff

- Be calm
- Be informed when making comments on behalf of the council
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- Ensure when making comments and views that you do not bring the council into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libelous nor slanderous
- Any publicity should be as objective as possible
- Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards
- The council, its councillors and staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law
- Councillors must act with integrity
- 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 should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer at meetings held in public or before the press