

Boughton Parish Council

Press and Media Policy

1. Introduction

Boughton Parish Council (“the Council”) is committed to providing 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, or electronic form, in both traditional and social media (“the media”).

Page | 1

2. Purpose

- to establish a framework for achieving a consistent and 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 and provide guidance for Councillors and staff on how to deal with contact by the media

3. 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.

4. The Clerk

The Clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications and will be report correspondence to the Council. If a press statement is required to be issued, a full Council meeting will need to resolve a formal press statement in accordance with paragraph 6 below, either at the next ordinary meeting or at an extra-ordinary meeting.

The Clerk is only authorised to publish a statement stating “In accordance with the Council’s Press and Media Policy, the Parish Council must resolve to approve a formal press statement. The next Parish Council meeting will take place on [DATE].”

5. Reactive responses by the Council to approaches from the media

If any members of the Council are approached by the media, they should immediately direct the enquiry to the Clerk either by: -

- providing the journalist with the Clerk’s telephone number (07918329763) and email address (clerk@boughtonparishcouncil.co.uk); or
- taking the name and telephone number of the journalist with brief but clear notes about the nature of the enquiry and a deadline and forward it to the Clerk.

The Clerk will forward the correspondence to the Council who will confirm if they wish to convene an extra-ordinary meeting or if the response can wait for the next ordinary meeting.

Boughton Parish Council

6. General principles to be observed by the Council when responding to media enquiries

A suitable response, may in fact be “we do not comment on”. Should the Council wish to provide a more detailed response they should consider the following:-

- Be informed and certain of all facts and do not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council.
- Ensure comments/views on behalf of the Council:-
 - do not disclose information which is confidential or prohibited by law
 - reflect the stated business and day to day management of the activities or the Council Policy.
 - should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both. They should be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although facts, issues or arguments should not be oversimplified.
 - will not bring the Council, its Councillors or Staff, into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.
 - do not misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council or damage the reputation of others in the Council, or the Council itself.
- Not utilising public funds or council resources:-
 - to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.
 - 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.

Page | 2

7. Spokesperson

Only the Chair or Vice Chair is authorised to act as a spokesperson for the Council but only after consultation with the full Council and the preparation of a formal response/written statement.

8. Councillors – expression of personal views

The guidelines set out in paragraph 6 also apply to Councillors when expressing views in a private capacity.

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.

For the avoidance of doubt, Councillors are not permitted to use their title “Councillor” and Staff are not permitted to use their job title as this would imply that you are stating Council policy. A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.

9. Proactive press releases / approaches to the 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. A draft press release will be prepared by the Clerk to be reviewed, amended and resolved at the full Council meeting.

Boughton Parish Council

10. 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 because 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. Recording and reporting on meetings is subject to the Council's Standing Orders.

Page | 3

Disclaimer:-

Whilst the Council encourages councillors to keep parishioners informed of Boughton issues the Council cannot be held responsible for any statements or information which may then be passed on by a third party to the media as they may not be representing the Council's policies or opinions.