

STANWICK PARISH COUNCIL

NEWS MEDIA POLICY

PREAMBLE

Responses to the press relating to matters discussed by the Parish Council shall be dealt with in the first instance by the Parish Clerk. The Parish Council Chairman, and in their absence the vice-chairman, are also authorised to give the views of the Council to the press on any non-confidential subject discussed by Council. Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting. At no time shall the personal views of either members or officers of the Council be given to the press in a way which could be interpreted as a view of the Council as a whole.

POLICY

1. This policy is to guide both Councillors and Officers of the Council in their relations with the news media in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.
2. This policy does not seek to be comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some issues that may arise when dealing with news media organisations including press officers attending meetings.
3. The Council is accountable to the electorate for its actions and shall therefore be proactive in making all reasonable efforts to make its decisions and policies known to the electorate.
4. The Council shall allow all reasonable access to news media organisations. The media are invited to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available. Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Parish Clerk and Chairman of the meeting (see Standing Orders).
5. The Council shall make every effort to respond without delay to requests for information from news media organisations.
6. Councillors and officers must **NOT** disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with news media organisations of any item which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's agenda.
7. Councillors and officers should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Stanwick Parish Council.
8. When dealing with news media organisations Councillors and officers should be informed and certain of all their facts; ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Parish Council they are aware what Council policy is and their comments reflect that policy; be calm; ensure that their comments and views will not bring the Council into disrepute.
9. Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the news media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made, while it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the news media.

10. Councillors and officers not used to dealing with the press may be surprised when they see that statements made in all innocence look very different in print than they did when they were spoken. It is advantageous to write out a statement or position on the issue beforehand if possible.

11. A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.

12. 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 Council's solicitor before any response is made.

13. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Members and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual Members unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council. The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election.

14. The Council's media relations must be consistent with the provisions of:

(a) The law governing communications in local authorities contained in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988.

(b) The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

(c) The Code of Conduct for members as adopted by the Council

(d) The Council's adopted Standing Orders.

15. In dealing with the media, the Clerk and Councillors should always be aware of the need to comply with data protection requirements and to observe confidentiality.

16. The Council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information under the Freedom of Information Act.

17. The Clerk will act as the Council's Press Officer and will seek opportunities to engage with the local media to provide information on Council decisions, policies and activities or to respond to negative publicity.

18. The Clerk will be responsible for issuing all Council press releases.

19. Prior to issue, the Clerk will clear all press releases with the Chairman of the Council.

20. In all appropriate cases, press releases should include a quote from the Chairman of the Council or other relevant councillor which is consistent with Council decisions and policies.

22. In all appropriate cases, the Chairman or other relevant councillor will act as the Council's spokesperson for interviews with the broadcast media.

22. All press releases issued will also be posted on the Council's website.

23. This Policy will be reviewed every three years or more frequently where new regulations necessitate a review.

