

Media, Press and Public Communications Policy

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Next review due: May 2027

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to guide both Councillors and staff of the Council in their relations with the media and press organisations, in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

1.2 This policy does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the media and press.

1.3 Above everything else, a Councillor must observe Ripley Parish Council's adopted Code of Conduct whenever they conduct the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which they have been elected or appointed, or acts as a representative of the authority.

2. Staff

2.1 An officer of the Council must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committee's Agenda or at any other private briefing.

2.2 An officer of the Council should always act with integrity when representing or acting on behalf of Ripley Parish Council.

2.3 The Parish Clerk, as Proper Officer, is authorised to receive media enquiries and issue statements on behalf of the Council. In the Clerk's absence, media enquiries should be referred to the Chair of the Council, or where relevant the Chair of the appropriate Committee, unless the Council has resolved otherwise.

2.4 All communications made by the Parish Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Parish Clerk, the Clerk should refer the enquirer to the appropriate Committee Chairman.

2.5 No other officer of the Council nor member of staff apart from the above, unless authorised by the Parish Clerk, is permitted to speak or communicate with the media and press on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

3. Members of the Council

3.1 A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the media or press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committees' Agenda or at any other private briefing.

3.2 A Councillor should always act with integrity when representing or acting on behalf of Ripley Parish Council.

3.3 When speaking or providing written material to the media or press, members should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. For example: as Chairman of the Council; as Chairman of a Committee; as a Parish Councillor; as an individual (such as a letter to the press for publication); as a spokesperson or as Press Officer for a political party.

3.4 The prefix "Cllr" should never be used when writing to the media or press as an individual as it implies a statement of Council policy.

3.5 Take particular care when approached by the media or press for comment on a potentially controversial subject, and do not be led into making statements. Do not comment upon policy unless there is certainty as to its provenance. Contact the Parish Council Office for clarification.

3.6 Councillors should be aware that, even when expressing personal views, they may still be perceived by the public as speaking in their capacity as councillors. Councillors should therefore take care to make their capacity clear and to comply with the Code of Conduct where it applies.

3.7 Councillors have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that they 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 media or press.

3.8 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer or member of staff at meetings held in public or before the media or press.

4. Dealing with media and press

4.1 When dealing with media or press verbally, members and officers should be aware of the following:

- 4.1.1 Be informed and certain of the facts
- 4.1.2 Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Parish Council that you are aware of Council Policy and that comments reflect that policy
- 4.1.3 Remain calm
- 4.1.4 Ensure that comments and views expressed will not bring the Council, its Councillors, or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous

4.2 During pre-election periods, the Council will take particular care to ensure that all publicity and communications are politically neutral and comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and any relevant election guidance. Council publicity must not be

used, or appear to be used, to support or oppose any political party, candidate or election campaign.

5. Issues to be aware of

5.1 Councillors and officers unused to dealing with media or press may be surprised when statements made in all innocence appear very different when in print than they did when spoken. It is advantageous to prepare a written statement or position beforehand.

6. Press Releases

6.1 All Press releases issued on behalf of the Council shall be prepared by the Clerk and approved by the Council or relevant Committee where time permits. Where a response is required urgently, the Clerk may issue a press release in consultation with the Chair of the Council, or the Chair of the relevant Committee.

7. Social Media

7.1 See Ripley Parish Council *Social Media Policy & guidelines*

8. Policy

8.1 This document has been prepared as a guidance note for officers, staff, and elected members of Ripley Parish Council. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with media and press. The policy has been prepared to ensure consistency in the Council's dealing with media and press, and details who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council. It has been drafted to ensure that the views and policy of the Council are presented accurately.

8.2 Officers, staff and councillors should have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, issued under section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986, together with any subsequent Government or sector guidance.

8.3 The overriding principle of this policy is that all elements of the media and press will be treated equally.