



PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

1.2 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

2. KEY AIMS

2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

2.2 It is important that the press have access to the Clerk/Members and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts.

3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

3.2 The City of Ely Council's adopted Standing Orders should also be adhered to.

4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

4.1 The Clerk, Members and all staff should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

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

4.3 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. Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.

4.4 There are a number of privacy issues for the Clerk, Members and staff that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

4.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk, the Chairman or Chairman of Committees are authorised to make contact with the media. In the Clerk's absence the Deputy Clerk has authority and in the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman has authority.

4.6 Statements made by the Chairman, the Clerk and Chairman of Committees should reflect the decisions of the Council or its Committees.

4.7 Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

4.8 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk or the Deputy Clerk in the Clerk's absence.

5. ATTENDANCES OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

5.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.

5.2 Meetings of the Council, its 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. The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available. In accordance with Standing Orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.

5.3 Where meetings include time for public participation and subject to the Council's Standing Orders, media representatives may speak and ask questions.

5.4 Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chairman of the meeting.

6. PRESS RELEASES

6.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

6.2. The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored. In the absence of the Clerk this authority passes to the Deputy Clerk.

7. REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

8. CHANGES TO POLICY IN RELATION TO A NATIONAL PANDEMIC OR OTHER MAJOR SITUATIONS

The Council will ensure they provide regular updates to the press and media with regards to how the Council is working during these circumstances, how they can be contacted and how they are supporting the local community.

The principles of this Policy will still be followed, even under abnormal circumstances.

In the instances where Council meetings are held remotely, through an online platform, eg Zoom, Teams etc, the Clerk will ensure that the agendas are posted on the Council's website and displayed in the Council's noticeboard as normal. The invite to the meeting will be contained at the bottom of the agenda, to allow the public and press access to the meeting. The Virtual Meetings Procedure will be followed for such meetings. A copy of this Policy is available on the Council's website.

Reviewed and approved 22nd May 2023

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Cllr C Phillips
Chairman of the Council