

PEWSEY PARISH COUNCIL

PRESS AND MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

Contact with the Press and Media

Pewsey Parish Council welcomes enquiries from the press and media and recognises that this relationship helps the Council to communicate with residents and community. The aim of this policy is to set a framework to ensure that the Parish Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner.

Nothing in this policy is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a Councillor from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. However, Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council policy, are their own personal views.

Members should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct. At no time shall the personal views of Councillors (or Officers of the Council) be given to the press in a way which could be interpreted as the view of the Council as a whole.

The Council's approach to the media should be:

- lawful
- cost effective
- objective
- even-handed
- appropriate
- having regard to equality and diversity
- issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Communications with the press and media are likely to include press releases, briefings, publications and event promotion.

Press Releases

The Parish Clerk is the point of contact for the press/media. The Chairperson is also authorised to give the views of the Council to the press on any non-confidential subject discussed by Council.

An official Council press release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole. This will be issued by the Parish Clerk and could include a quote from the relevant Councillor(s) to which the subject matter may relate.

Press Release Protocol

All official Council press releases should be to a standard format and be issued by the Parish Clerk in consultation with the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson or Chairperson of the relevant Committee.

Official press releases will not state any political affiliation of any Member(s) quoted in the release.

The Parish Clerk is the first line of decision making in terms of what is newsworthy for official press releases. He/she shall make the final decision on whether a press release shall be issued, unless otherwise directed by the Council or a Committee. This will help to ensure timely reporting of information.

In years when elections take place, during periods from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day of the Election, no press releases will be issued quoting Council Members. During this time any quotes will be from the Parish Clerk.

The role of the Parish Clerk is to advise and provide support and advice to Council members in communication activities.

Councillors and the Press/Media

Councillor press releases, statements or interviews are the responsibility of that Councillor who should make clear that the views contained therein are personal. They must not include the Parish Council's logo, the name of a Council Officer, or a Council telephone number as a point of contact. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases, especially those of a factual nature, to be provided to the Parish Clerk.

Councillors and Officers must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature, this includes any discussion with news media organisations of any item that has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's agenda. It is noted that the outcome of confidential discussions may well not be confidential.

Councillors are reminded that they must not misuse Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes. Should the Council receive a Freedom of Information request on a topic on which there is correspondence (email or written) from or with Members, normally that correspondence would have to be disclosed, unless it was exempt. The fact that the disclosure of the correspondence may prove embarrassing would not, of itself, prevent disclosure.

In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data. The Data Protection Act 2018 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by the electorate.

Responsibilities

The Council's Proper Officer for the purposes of this policy shall be the Parish Clerk whose decision as to the application of this policy shall be final.