

SWANMORE PARISH COUNCIL

SWANMORE PARISH COUNCIL MEDIA POLICY

This document sets out the framework for Parish Council Members and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Parish Council's activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.

"The Media" is more than the local newspaper. The phrase encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience, and includes broadcast media (radio and television), the internet, and a wide range of printed media.

The general principle is that the Parish Council office will act as the Press Office. Any official contact with the media concerning the Parish Council's policies, the decisions it takes and the services it provides, are to be initiated through the Press office.

Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or Chairman in association with other Members as required, and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.

Other Members of the Parish Council and employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Press Office so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.

If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be referred to the Press Office. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Chairman, in consultation with other Members where necessary, about the format and content of any response.

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 taken.

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 legal adviser before any response is made.

There are a number of personal privacy issues for Officers and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number, disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision.

Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a Member from expressing a **personal** opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own **personal** views. However, members should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council

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into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.

Employees (other than the Clerk) should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Parish Council unless specifically authorised by the Clerk and/or Chairman of the Council.

All press releases and other materials are to be kept for reference.

In response to a Parish Council press release:

- a) Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Press Office and the author of the press release.
- b) No-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.)

In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations)

- a) The views of the Parish Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.
- b) The Press Office should be informed so that facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.

It is important to monitor the media for items (reports, articles, letters) about the Parish Council in order to know:

- a) whether press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council are picked up and used effectively.
- b) what members of the community are saying about the Parish Council.

Members and employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Parish Council in the media – original press cuttings should be sent to the Press Office. It is not permissible to send photocopies.

Anyone taking part in a radio or television broadcast should try to arrange for it to be recorded and a copy sent to the Press Office. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcast's contents should be sent.