

HOLYBROOK PARISH COUNCIL

Press and Media Protocol

Introduction

The purpose of this protocol is to guide both Councillors and Officers of the Council in their relations with the Press and Media in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council and to ensure the Council does not come into disrepute. It will also ensure that the Council's messages are consistent.

This protocol sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media and addressing the public by whatever mechanism is available.

Above everything else, a Councillor must observe Holybrook Parish Council's Code of Conduct and all other policies, procedures and regulations adopted by the Parish Council whenever he/she has been elected/appointed, or acts as a representative of the Council.

Parish Clerk and Officers of the Council

The Parish Clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Parish Clerk, media communications will be referred to the Chairman who will act as the spokesperson for the purpose of this element of the policy.

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. He/she 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 he/she should only respond following consultation with the Council.

No other officer of the Council, apart from the above, unless authorised by the Parish Clerk, is permitted to speak or communicate with the Press and Media (including any Social Media sites such as Twitter or Facebook) on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

Members of the Council

- Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of a Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the press, media, or in any public forum such as social media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and, irrespective of their own personal views, they should not seek to undermine a decision through the Press or any other public forum¹.
- A Councillor 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.
- A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of Holybrook Parish Council.

- When speaking or providing written material to the Press, Media, or at any public forum, Members should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. For example:
 - ❖ as Chairman
 - ❖ as Chairman of a Committee
 - ❖ as an individual (i.e. letter to the Press for publication)
 - ❖ as spokesperson or as Press Officer for the Parish Council
- Never use the prefix 'Cllr' when writing to the Press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy. A copy of any written material sent to the Press, Media or any open forum, by a Member, *as representing the Council*, must be forwarded to the Parish Clerk for prior approval.
- Take particular care if the Press or Media approach you for comment on a controversial subject. Do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. Simply state 'no comment' and ask the Press to contact the Parish Office.
- A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer/other Council Members at meetings held in public or before the Press. Neither should negative comments be written in the public domain.

Dealing with the Press

If contacted by the Press, whether verbally, by e-mail, social media or other, remain calm and please refer to protocol expressly laid out in previous paragraphs. If in doubt refer to the Parish Clerk.

Meetings of Council and Committees

Copies of the Agenda, Minutes and Reports sent to Members for meetings of the Council or its Committees will be placed on the Council's website.

Facilities will be provided at meetings for the Press to take notes of the proceedings.

As provided in the Council's Standing Orders both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion. *[Note: the Parish Council is governed by the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, 1960 and the Local Government Act 1972]*

Press Releases

- All press releases made on behalf of the Parish Council will be prepared by the Parish Clerk following any meetings of Committees, Sub-Committees, Working and Steering Groups.
- The Parish Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, is authorised to publish press releases on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a council meeting.

This document has been prepared as a guidance note for officers and members. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with the Press and Media and the conduct of Councillors in public forums. The policy has been prepared to ensure that there is consistency in the Council's dealings with the Press, Media and Public Forums and details who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council. It has been prepared to ensure that the views and policy of the Council are presented accurately.

In providing information to the Press and Media or to any public forums, Members and Officers representing the Council will abide by the '*Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Policy*' published by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹Public Forums are defined as:

Any mechanism of communicating with the public, which includes, (but is not restricted to), Websites, Journal, Facebook, Twitter, Leaflets, public speaking opportunities, Blog (web or phone) LinkedIn Sites, etc.