

Brewood and Coven Parish Council
with Bishop's Wood and Coven Heath



BREWOOD AND COVEN PARISH COUNCIL

with Bishop's Wood and Coven Heath

Relations with the Press

Policy Statement

REVIEWED 14 April 2021

Press & 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 Parish 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 provided guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

2. KEYS AIMS

2.1 The Parish Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two way communication. The media – press, radio TV and internet –are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Parish 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 and Members and to background information in order to assist in giving accurate and factual 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, using other channels of communication if necessary.

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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 Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders must be adhered to.

4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

4.1 The Clerk and Members must 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 and private correspondence must not be leaked to the media. If such leaks occur an investigation must take place to establish who was responsible and the appropriate action taken.

4.3 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is or is likely to be subject to legal proceedings then advice must be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.

4.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information such as home address and telephone number (although Members' contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long term sickness absences that are affecting service provision.

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4.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk, Chairman, Vice Chairman or Chairman of a committee are authorised to make contact with the media.

4.6 Statements made by the Clerk, Chairman, Vice Chairman or Chairman of a Committee must not reflect their personal opinion, they must reflect the opinion of the Council as a body.

4.7 Other Councillors may 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 policy or policy decisions, or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence must not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence should come from the Clerk.

5. ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

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

5.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings. Seating and workspace will be made available and access to remote meetings will be provided.

5.3 Any filming or recording of Council proceedings by the media must be permitted under the Openness of Local Government Regulation 2014 which gives rights to members of the press and public to use modern technology and communication methods such as filming, audio recording,

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blogging and tweeting to report the proceedings of the meetings of parish and town councils and other local government bodies.

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 matter. 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 be issued by the Clerk in order that the principles outlined in section 3 above are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

PUBLIC STATEMENT:

Responses to the press relating to matters discussed by the Parish Council shall be dealt with in the first instance by the Clerk. The Chairman of the Parish Council, the Vice Chairman and the Chairman of a committee are also authorised to give the views of the Council to the press on any non-confidential subject resolved by the Council. Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting. At no time shall the personal views of either members or officers of the Council be given to the press in a way which could be interpreted as the views of the Council as a whole.