



Earls Colne Parish Council – Press and Media Policy

Introduction

Earls Colne Parish Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of the functions, decisions and actions.

The council may communicate with those whose work involves gathering material for editorial publication in print, broadcast and electronic form.

Where information is not available via the councils publication scheme, the council shall endeavour to assist the media with enquiries about the councils functions, decisions and actions.

Legal framework

This policy is subject to the councils statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Councils Standing Orders. The council must also have regard to the Governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

Media Attendance at Meetings

Meetings of the council, its committees and sub 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 clerk

Wherever possible all communications with the press and media should be made through the clerk.

Communications made by the clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the council. She/he should not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the council. Where questions are put to the clerk, s/he should inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response within 24 hours where practical. The clerk should then consult with the chairman or relevant councillors on a suitable response.

The clerk in consultation with the chairman/vice chairman/committee is authorized to publish press statements on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a council meeting.

Councillors

Councillors should be aware that according to case law the role of councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. Councillors must therefore be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media whether or not they relate to matters of the council business.

Whilst it may be legitimate for a councillor to make clear that s/he voted against a policy if this took place in open session, councillors should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.

Press releases/approaches made to the press/media by the council

Press releases may be issued proactively to alert the media to a potential story, provide important public information or to explore the councils position in a particular issue.

Press releases made on behalf of the council will normally be prepared by the clerk following any meeting of the council or committees. If press releases are drafted by any other officer or councillor they must be issued by the clerk in consultation with the chairman.

Approaches from the press/media

Unexpected approaches from representatives of the media can lead to unguarded comments being made and great care must be therefore taken to avoid misrepresentation of the councils policy or its position on the matter in question.

Reporters should be directed to contact the clerk if they want to carry out an interview or obtain a statement about the councils business and actions.

Except in the most straightforward cases, the caller should be informed that a statement will be made within 24 hours and they should be asked to set out clearly what they want to know. This will allow time for the clerk to consult with the chairman in producing a carefully worded response within a reasonable time.

Any verbal or written statement given by the clerk must represent the corporate position and views of the council not the individual views of councillors or staff held in their official capacity.

Where the matters concerned has not been discussed by the council an immediate response cannot be made and this should be made clear to the enquirer. The clerk should then consult the chairman on an appropriate response.