

Maker with Rame Parish Council
Press and Media Policy
Agreed and Adopted 10th March 2016
PRESS & MEDIA POLICY

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Maker with Rame Parish Council (known as “the Council”) for working with the press and media (known as “the media”) and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the 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, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena.

2 KEYS AIMS

2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the 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 The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Officers and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. 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.

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. Some aspects of the Code are relevant to this policy:-

- “Any publicity describing the Council’s policies and aims [and the provision of services] should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.”

4.4 Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.

4.5 Letters representing the views of the Council should only be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee. If individual Members choose to send letters to express their own opinions on Council policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Parish Clerk. It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or of an individual Member.

4.6 At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

5 ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE MEETINGS

5.1 Agendas and minutes of meetings will be supplied to media outlets together with dates of meetings being available on the Council's website.

5.2 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting.

5.3 The media are encouraged to attend Council and Committee meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

5.4 Any filming or taping of Council or Committee proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Parish Clerk and Chairman of the particular meeting.

6 ELECTIONS

6.1 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Members and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual Members unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council. These extracts from the Code illustrate the main points:-

- "Publicity about individual councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the council (for example, Chairman of a committee), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council.

All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and

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9 URGENT SITUATIONS

9.1 In the case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a Council or Committee meeting, this may be issued by the Parish Clerk with the agreement of the Chairman of the Council or relevant Committee following circulation of a draft version to other Members for comment.

9.2 In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the Members and Officers with specific roles and responsibilities under this policy, the following delegations shall apply:

- a) the Vice Chairman of the Council may act in the absence of the Chairman;
- b) the Vice Chairman of a Committee may act in the absence of the Chairman;
- c) the Parish Clerk may act in the absence of the Vice Chairman of the Council or a Committee; and
- d) the Assistant Clerk may act in the absence of the Parish Clerk.