



PRESS AND MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

As re-adopted at a meeting of Meppershall Parish Council on 8th June 2020

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

Organisation	Meppershall Parish Council
Title	MPC Press and Media Relations Policy
Creator	Alessandra Marabese - Clerk
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DOCUMENT AMENDMENT HISTORY

Revision No.	Originator of change	Date of change	Change Description
1.0	Creation	08/06/20	Policy Created

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Meppershall Parish Council (the Council) for working with the media and dealing with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media and or press.
- 1.2. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.
- 1.3. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. 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.
- 1.4. It is important that the press have access to the Clerk and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public is properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.
- 1.5. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Meetings – Recording and Filming Policy, Data Protection Policy, Privacy Notice and Social Media Policy.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 2.1. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988, as amended. The Council must also have regard to the governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 2.2. The Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

3. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

- 3.1. The Clerk and councillors should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.
- 3.2. 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 is / was responsible and appropriate action taken.
- 3.3. 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 advisors before any response is made.
- 3.4. There are personal privacy issues that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include but are not limited to; the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although councillors contact details can be in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.
- 3.5. When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk and Chairman are authorised to make contact with the media. In specific cases the Clerk and/or Chairman may authorise other councillor/s to respond to media requests.

- 3.6. Statements made should accurately reflect the Council's position on issues that relate to motions passed by the Council. On all other issues, statements should only be made for purposes of clarification. Such statements must be factual and must not incorporate personal opinions. Statements made to the media should make no reference to the position of any individual, member of staff or a named councillor on any issue.
- 3.7. 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. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.
- 3.8. Should a councillor decide to communicate with or submit a letter to the media on any subject they should not use the term 'Parish Councillor' or give the impression, directly or implied, that they are writing on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so by the Clerk or Chairman (see clause 3.5 above).
- 3.9. Unless authorised to do so by the Clerk and/or Chairman, councillors may not discuss any business of the Council that is confidential and/or not yet in the public domain.

4. ATTENDANCE OF PRESS AND MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

- 4.1. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media upon request.
- 4.2. The media are encouraged to attend council meetings.
- 4.3. The recording and filming of council meetings is covered by the Councils Meetings – Recording and Filming policy.

5. EXCLUDING THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

- 5.1. At certain times in Council meetings and for specific reasons the Council may have to debate a sensitive or personal matter and it may not be in the public interest for the press and/or the public to be in attendance at that point in the meeting.
- 5.2. These matters may relate to but are not limited to; contracts that are in discussion but not yet agreed, or finalised, an HR issue with a member of staff etc.
- 5.3. Under such conditions, MPC has a right to exclude the press and/or the public and can do so by the introduction of a motion to that effect.
- 5.4. The motion to exclude can be moved, with or without notice and does not need to be on the agenda. However, it is good practice to ensure that any such motion is prominently placed on the agenda in advance of Council meetings to forewarn the press and/or the public that they may be excluded.
- 5.5. The Chairman at the meeting should explain, prior to the motion to exclude being tabled and voted upon, to the press and/or the public the reasons for the exclusion and can request named individuals to remain.
- 5.6. The Clerk should record in the minutes the time the meeting is closed to the press and/or public.
- 5.7. The Clerk should record again when the meeting is re-opened to the press and/or the public.
- 5.8. Any decisions made during the closed session should be reported in Council minutes at the first opportunity.

- 5.9. Nothing in this policy shall infer or imply that the Council has, or intends to exclude the press and/or the public permanently from council meetings and/or specific parts thereof.
- 5.10. A motion to exclude the Press and/or the public shall be formally recorded as follows:
Proposed by:.....
Seconded by:.....
Carried (or voting decision)
It is hereby resolved in accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended that as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the {special}[confidential] nature of the business about to be transacted at Agenda Item Namely[state business] it is advisable in the public interest that the Press and/or the Public be temporarily excluded from this meeting and they are herewith instructed to withdraw.
Persons invited to remain:

6. USE OF WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

- 6.1. Care should be taken when using written correspondence and email because email messages are perceived to be less formal than paper-based communication and there is a tendency to be lax about their content. All expressions of fact, intention and opinion via e-mail can be held against individuals and / or the Council in the same way as verbal and written expressions or statements.
- 6.2. When using e-mail (or sending any form of written correspondence):
- 6.2.1. be mindful of the content. Never forget that e-mail and written correspondence are not the same as conversation. They are a written record and can be duplicated at will;
 - 6.2.2. do not use e-mail to say anything the Council would not wish to be made public, that is inappropriate, might be misinterpreted by the reader or you are not prepared to account for. In particular councillors should not make any statements on their own behalf or on behalf of the Council, which may or do defame, libel or damage the reputation of any person, customer, or company/organisation including the Council;
 - 6.2.3. send confidential information using password protected attachments;
 - 6.2.4. treat e-mail like any other documentation. If you would normally retain a certain document in hard copy you should retain the e-mail;
 - 6.2.5. do not forward e-mail messages unless the original sender is aware or has given consent that the message may be forwarded;
 - 6.2.6. check your e-mail inbox on a regular basis;
 - 6.2.7. do not use meppershall.org e-mail addresses for the purpose of carrying out any business activity other than Council business.