

# Lower Beeding Parish Council

## PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Lower Beeding Parish Council (LBPC) for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the LBPC and the media.

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.

### KEYS AIMS

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 LBPC 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.

It is important that the press have access to the Clerk and Chair and to any background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the LBPC 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.

### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

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 governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders shall be adhered to.

### CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

The Chair and the Clerk should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the LBPC in all their dealings with the media.

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 was responsible and appropriate action taken.

Wherever possible all communications with the Press and Media should be made through the Chair or the Clerk. The Clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue

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Press Statements on behalf of the Council in consultation with the Chair. In the absence of the Chair, media communications will be handled by the Clerk, in consultation with the Vice-Chair.

Press releases made on behalf of the LBPC will normally be prepared by the Clerk following any meetings of the Council.

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 SSALC or the Council's solicitor before any response is made.

Other Councillors can 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. 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 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 an open session, Councillors should not seek to undermine a decision through the Press.

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.

### ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

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

The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available. Before any meeting commences any media representative must identify themselves and the company they work for.

Meetings of the council 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.

In accordance with standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.

Where meetings include time for public participation and subject to the Council's standing orders, media representatives may speak and ask questions. The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 has amended section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 to require Councils to permit any person (including the press) who attends a council (or committee) meeting to report on the proceedings of the meeting except where the Council has resolved to exclude the public. The new provisions address the existence of different means of reporting,

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including the use of social media. The “press” in the widest terms includes traditional print media, filming crews, hyperlocal journalists and bloggers.

However, the Council is not required by the regulations to permit oral reporting or oral commentary on a meeting as it takes place if the person reporting or providing the commentary is present at the meeting (e.g. running a verbal commentary while filming) which could be disruptive.

### **PRESS RELEASES**

The Chair and Clerk may draft a press release on approval of the Council, however they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to.