

# DUNSTER PARISH COUNCIL

## Press and Media Policy

### 1. Introduction

This document has been prepared as a guidance note for officers and members. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with the press and media. The policy has been prepared to ensure consistency in the Council's dealings with the media and the purpose of the policy is to provide details of who is authorised to speak on behalf of the council.

The aim of the protocol is to ensure that the Parish Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner and it is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech the purpose is to establish a framework for achieving effective working relationships with the media.

### 2. Information

There are two types of press release:

#### 1) Official Council Releases

An official Council release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole; it will be agreed by the Council and issued by the Clerk. It is non-party political and if necessary, includes a quote from the relevant Councillor(s). This would usually be the Chair of the Council or the Committee Chair.

The Clerk, as the proper officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the press and media and to issue press releases/statement on behalf of the Council as instructed or as the Clerk may consider appropriate.

Whenever possible, any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.

No other officer of the Council, unless authorised by the Clerk or agreed at a Full Council meeting can speak or communicate with the media on any matter relating to or affecting the council or Council business. Any Councillor may draft a press release however, they must be issued by the Clerk. Parish Council relations with the media are the responsibility of the Clerk who can authorise other Councillors or the Chair to provide factual information.

#### 2) Councillor Press Releases

When councillors are speaking or providing written material to the media, they must make it clear in what capacity they are providing information. For example:

- As Chair of the Council
- As Chair of a committee or working party
- As an individual Councillor

- As a spokesperson or Press Officer for a political party

A copy of any written material provided by a Councillor, representing the Council to the media shall be forwarded to the Clerk for approval and will be issued by the Clerk to the media.

Councillors may issue their own press releases, but it must be obvious to the recipient that these are personal and are not written on behalf of the Council. This release may or may not be political and should not include the name of the Councillor or a Council telephone number as a point of contact. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases, especially those of a factual nature to be provided to the Clerk.

### **3. Meetings of Council and Committee**

Agendas and minutes of meetings could be supplied to the media, the local government act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request prior to the meeting.

As detailed in the Council Standing orders both the press and public may be excluded from a meeting whilst confidential matters are under discussion (as provided for in the relevant legislation).

### **4. Press Release Protocol**

The Clerk is the first line of decision making in terms of what is newsworthy for official press releases and shall make the final decision on whether a press release shall be issued unless otherwise directed by the whole Council.

In the years when elections occur during periods from the issue of notice of election until the day of the election Councillors will issue no releases quoting Councils members during this period any quotes will be from the Clerk only.