

Mulbarton Parish Council

Media Relations Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Mulbarton Parish Council's relationship with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying attitudes and measuring satisfaction.
- 1.2 Effective media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between the Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.
- 1.3 The community includes residents and their representatives, businesses, the school, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, groups and associations.
- 1.4 This document sets out the framework for Councillors and Council employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Council's activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.

2. Media Opportunities

- 2.1 "The Media" is more than the local newspaper. It encompasses many different means of communicating with a wide audience, and includes broadcast media (radio and television), the internet, and printed media (e.g. newspapers, free sheets, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets posters, the Mardle).
- 2.2 Different media respond more readily to certain factors. For example, newspapers are more likely to print a general interest story if supplied with a photograph, radio items tend to be quite brief with a short "sound bite", and television producers will want moving pictures to illustrate a story.

3. Making Contact with the Media

- 3.1 The general principle is that the Parish Clerk office will act as the first point of contact. The Chairman and the Clerk will initiate any official contact with the media concerning the Council's policies, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.
- 3.2 Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or the Chairman in association with other Councillors as required, and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Council.

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- 3.3 Other Councillors and Council employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Chairman/Clerk so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.
- 3.4 If a Councillor or Council employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Council, it should be referred, in the first instance to the Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Chairman and/or Clerk, in consultation with other Councillors where necessary, about the format and content of any response.
- 3.5 Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a Councillor from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. Councillors must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views. However, Councillors should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.
- 3.6 Employees (other than the Clerk) should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Council unless specifically authorised by the Clerk and/or Chairman.
- 3.7 All press releases and other materials are retained for the record.

4. Talking to the Media

- 4.1 In response to a Council press release:
 - a) any media enquiry is to be referred to the Clerk and the author of the press release;
 - b) no-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.).
- 4.2 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations)
 - a) The view of the Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above;
 - b) The Clerk should be informed so that the facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.

5. Monitoring

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- 5.1 It is important to monitor the media for items (reports, articles, letters) about the Council in order to know:
- whether press releases and statements issued by the Council are picked up and used effectively;
 - what members of the community are saying about the Council.
- 5.2 Councillors and Council employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Council in the media – original press cuttings, where obtainable, should be sent to the Clerk, copy to the Chairman.
- 5.3 Anyone taking part in a radio or television broadcast should try to arrange for it to be recorded and a copy sent to the Clerk. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcaster's comments should be provided.