

TOLLER PORCORUM PARISH COUNCIL

Press and Media Policy

Updated: 10 September 2025 | Next review date: May 2026 | Last review date: 10 September 2025

Adopted: 19 September 2016

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Toller Porcorum Parish Council (known as “the Council”) when in contact with the press and media (known as “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.

The legal framework

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, aims and the provision of services should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.*
 - *Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council, should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimplify facts, issues or arguments.*
 - *Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.*
 - *Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.*
2. In particular, councillors and employees should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.
3. Confidential documents, 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 in accordance with the Standing Orders and Code of Conduct adopted by the Council.
4. When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be sought from the Council’s county association and/or solicitor before any response is made.
5. The release of personal information of councillors and employees, such as home address and telephone number, disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the Council’s Freedom of Information and Data Protection policies. In these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the clerk, who may seek legal advice, before any response is made to the media.

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Approaches from the media

6. When responding to approaches from the media, the chair of the Council will be the authorised contact in consultation with the clerk.
7. Any statements made, whether via email, letter, telephone or in person, must be factual and reflect the Council's position on a matter that was decided and minuted in a meeting.
 - 7.1 The chair may decide it is in the interests of the Council and the residents of the parish to provide a response in advance of the next meeting. In this case the chair will circulate a draft version to all councillors for comment.
8. Other councillors and employees will not offer an opinion on behalf of the Council to the media on any matter.
9. Other councillors may speak to the media but must ensure it is clear they are speaking as a private citizen and not on behalf of the Council.
10. When submitting letters for publication in newspapers or their online equivalents to, for example explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents, such letters should be brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.

Approaching the media

11. The Council may issue press releases on subjects which the Council wishes to publicise through the media. These will be discussed at a meeting where the purpose, content, timing and method of doing so can be agreed and minuted.
12. Press releases can be drafted by any councillor or employee but must be issued by the chair of the Council or the clerk to ensure that the principles outlined in section *The legal framework* are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and use of press releases can be monitored.

Urgent situations

13. If an urgent press release or statement is required in advance of a Council meeting, this may be issued by the chair of the Council or the clerk following circulation of a draft version to all councillors for comment.
14. In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the councillors and employees with specific roles and responsibilities under this policy, the following delegations shall apply:
 - 14.1. the vice chair of the Council may act in the absence of the chair;
 - 14.2. the clerk may act in the absence of the vice chair of the Council.

Attendance of the media at Council or committee meetings

15. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request. Such requests will be directed to the Council's website where such documents are published.
16. The media are encouraged to attend Council and committee meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.