

TOLLER PORCORUM PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT 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”) ~~for working when in contact~~ with the press and media (known as “the media”) ~~and deals with the day to day relationship between the Council 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 the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship~~ with the media. ~~The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena.~~

Key Aims

~~2.1 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, social media outlets – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so 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.~~

~~2.2 The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Officers and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. To balance this, the Council 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

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, ~~Officers and Members~~ councillors, officers and employees should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

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3. 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 ~~take~~ 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 ~~taken~~ sought from the Council's county association and/or solicitor before any response is made.
5. ~~There are a number of personal privacy issues for Officers and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the Council's policies on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. These issues include the~~ The release of personal information of councillors, officers and employees, such as home address and telephone number ~~(although Member contact details are in the public domain)~~, 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 ~~all~~ these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Parish Clerk/ clerk, who may seek legal advice, before any response is made to the media.

Contact with Approaches from the media

6. When responding to approaches from the media, the chair of the Council ~~should~~ will be the authorised contact ~~with the media~~ in consultation with the clerk. ~~However, if the subject of an enquiry relates to the work of one of the Council's committees, the chairman of the Council may delegate the authorised contact role to the chair of that committee.~~
7. ~~Statements made must reflect the Council's opinion.~~ 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, officers and employees will not offer an opinion on behalf of the Council to the media on any matter.
9. Other councillors ~~can talk~~ may speak to the media but must ensure ~~that~~ it is clear ~~that they~~ are speaking as a private citizen and not on behalf ~~opinions given were their own and not necessarily those~~ of the Council.
10. ~~Caution should be exercised when~~ When submitting letters ~~to the editor~~ for publication in newspapers or their online equivalents to, ~~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. ~~However,~~ such letters should be ~~kept~~ brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.
11. ~~Letters representing the views of the Council should only be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee. If individual Members choose to send letters to~~

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~~express their own opinions on Council policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Parish Clerk. It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or of an individual Member.~~

~~12.11. At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.~~

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.

~~The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of all Officers and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.~~

12. Press releases can be drafted by any councillor, officer or employee but must be issued by the chair of the Council or the clerk ~~to Any Officer or Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Parish Clerk following agreement by the Council or relevant Committee in order~~ to ensure that the principles outlined in section ~~three (Legal Framework)~~ The legal framework are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and ~~and that the~~ use of press releases can be monitored.

Urgent situations

13. ~~In the case of~~ If an urgent ~~letter or~~ press release or statement being is required in advance of a Council ~~or committee~~ meeting, this may be issued by the chair of the Council or the clerk ~~with the agreement of the Chairman of the Council or relevant Committee~~ following circulation of a draft version to ~~other Members all councillors~~ for comment.

14. In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the ~~Members councillors~~ and officers 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 Vice Chairman of a Committee may act in the absence of the Chairman;~~

~~14.3.~~ 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

~~Agendas and minutes of meetings will be on the Council's website.~~

13. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request, ~~prior to the meeting~~. Such requests will be directed to the Council's website where such documents are published.

14. The media are encouraged to attend Council and committee meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.