

# Breage Parish Council



## Press & Media Policy

Adopted at the Parish Council Meeting 3 August 2021

Signed..... Chairman Cllr A E Woodhams

### 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Councillors and officers not used to dealing with the press may be surprised when they see that statements made in all innocence look very different in print than they did when they were spoken.

1.1 This policy is guidance for Councillors and Officers of Breage Parish Council in their relations with the Press and Media, to ensure the smooth running of the Council. It does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media. It sets out the framework for Breage Parish Council Members and employees to follow when in contact with the media, to inform the public about the Parish Council's activities, decisions and the services it provides

**1.2 Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the news media whether or not they relate to matters of Council business.**

### 2. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

2.1 The Parish Clerk is the Press Officer. Any official contact with the media concerning the Parish Council's policies, the decisions it takes and the services it provides, are to be initiated through the Parish Clerk. The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and if necessary with full Council.

2.2 Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or Chairman/Vice-Chairman in association with other Members as required, and will be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.

2.3 If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council, it should be referred to the Parish Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Chairman/Vice-Chairman, in consultation with other Members where necessary, about the format and content of any response.

2.4 Members of the Parish Council who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Chairman and Parish Clerk so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media. **Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.**

**2.4 The prefix ‘Councillor’ should never be used when in contact with the Press as an individual. This implies that Council policy is being stated.**

2.5 These guidelines do not prevent a Member from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example, by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. **Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views.** However, Members should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.

**2.6 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of a Member or Officer at meetings held in public or before the Press.**

2.7 Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made, while it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the news media.

2.8 A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature

2.9 A copy of all press releases and other materials are to be retained on file for reference.

2.10 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 Chairman of that Committee.

2.11 Statements made must reflect the Council’s opinion.

2.12 Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. 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. At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

2.13 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 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.**

### **3. IN RESPONSE TO A PARISH COUNCIL PRESS RELEASE**

3.1. Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Parish Clerk and the author of the press release.

3.2 No other Member should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.)

3.3 Any Member taking part in a radio or television broadcast regarding a Parish Council Press Release should only do so on behalf of the Parish Council with the approval of the Chairman and/or Clerk, in consultation with other Members where necessary.

3.4 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter enquiring about press releases issued by other organisations: a. The views of the Parish Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above. b. The Parish Clerk should be informed so that facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.

## 4. MONITORING

4.1 It is important to check the media for items (reports, articles and letters) about the Parish Council to: a. Monitor the effectiveness of press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council. b. Monitor what members of the community are saying about the Parish Council.

4.2 Members and employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Parish Council in the media – original press cuttings to be provided to the Clerk, where possible.

4.3 Any Member taking part in a radio or television broadcast should only do so on behalf of the Parish Council with the approval of the Chairman and/or Clerk, in consultation with other Members where necessary. Arrangements should be made for it to be recorded to be retained in Parish Council records. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcast's contents should be sent to the Clerk.

## 5. Unexpected Approaches from the Press / Media

5.1 Unexpected approaches from representatives of the media can lead to unguarded comments being made and great care must therefore be taken to avoid misrepresentation of the Council's policy or its position on the matter in question.

5.2 Reporters should be directed to contact the Clerk if they want to carry out an interview or obtain a statement about the Council's business and actions.

5.3 Except in the most straightforward cases, the caller should be informed that a statement will be made within 24 hours and they should be asked to set out clearly what they want to know. This will allow time for the Clerk to consult with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman in producing a carefully worded response within a reasonable time.

5.4 Any verbal or written statement given by the Clerk must represent the corporate position and views of the Council, not the individual views of councillors or staff held in their official capacity.

5.5 The Council shall allow all reasonable access to news media organisations.

5.6 Copies of Agendas, Minutes and Reports of Council and Committees will be e-mailed to the Press and Media if requested.

5.7 The Council shall make every effort to respond without delay to requests for information from news media organisations.

**5.8 Where the matter concerned has not been discussed by the Council an immediate response cannot be made and this should be made clear to the enquirer.** The Clerk should then consult the Chairman and Vice Chairman on an appropriate response, which may be "no comment".