

# RIPPINGALE PARISH COUNCIL



## MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

### GENERAL

Rippingale Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media. This policy applies to Members of Council and its Officers and is intended to provide a framework for maintaining an effective working relationship with the media and to define the roles and responsibilities for managing communication between the Council and the media.

Rippingale Parish Council has adopted the statutory Code of Conduct for members, the objective of which is to enhance and maintain standards of personal conduct and the integrity of the Council.

### AIMS OF MEDIA RELATIONS

- Develop a relationship of trust and mutual understanding between the Council and the media.
- Explain the Council's policies to the local community
- Communicate important public information messages
- Provide transparency of the Council's actions and enable the public to take part in the Council's work.

### THE LEGALITIES

- Officers and members should have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in their dealings with the media.
- Confidential documents, reports and private correspondence should not be disclosed to the media without prior Council approval.
- The Council's Publication Scheme specifies the information that it publishes or intends to publish, as required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

- The Council reserves the right to withhold certain sensitive information as guided by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Data Protection Act 1998 and exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- Professional guidance should be taken before any response is made to the media concerning personal privacy information relating to Members and Officers:
- "any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims 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 attach 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."\*

(\* Local Government Acts 1986, 1988 & Code of Rec'd Practice on Local Authority Publicity.)

### MEDIA ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS.

- The media are welcome and encouraged to attend Council Meetings. Any recording or filming of the proceedings must be with prior notice to the Chairman of the meeting, provided a request has been made in advance via the Clerk.
- In the situation where Council business is discussed in closed session, the Council may be approached for comment on items discussed, with due respect to the confidentiality issues.

### GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS

- All media enquiries should be directed to the Officer/Spokesperson – normally the Clerk or Chairman of the Council. The

Chairman may authorise another Councillor to make a statement on behalf of the Council.

- All media comment must accurately reflect the Council's position on the topic as adopted in Minutes or Policies.
- All decisions of the Council made in an Open Meeting can be quoted and made available to the media.
- Councillors should not make personal comments which could damage the reputation of the Council or negatively affect the credibility of the Council or other members.
- Professional advice should be taken on matters which are or are likely to be subject to legal proceedings.
- Councillors wishing to make a "Personal Statement" must clearly inform the media that:
  - ~ their comments are made as an individual and are not necessarily the view of the Council;
  - ~ Other Councillors may hold a different view;
  - ~ The matter may still be discussed or resolved by the Council.

#### RESPONDING TO MEDIA APPROACHES.

- All press, radio or TV approaches should be directed in the first instance to the Clerk who will discuss the nature of the story and if appropriate direct the enquiry to the Chairman or other Councillor.
- All requests for feature articles or broadcast interview or debates should be made through the Clerk.

#### PROACTIVE PUBLICITY

The Council also has a duty to inform the public how their Council Tax is spent. Rippingale Parish Council presents its Draft Budget at an annual Public Meeting, reports its budget monitoring at Council Meetings and publicises its Annual Statement of Accounts.

The local media may receive copies of agendas for full Council Meetings and will be sent Press Releases regarding specific projects and initiatives. Any Office or Councillor appointed as Spokesperson for the Council must be fully

briefed on any issues that are likely to be complex or contentious before communicating with the media.

Press Releases must be issued via the Clerk or appointed Councillor to ensure that the principles outlined above are adhered to, to provide a consistency of style and to enable use of the Press Release to be monitored. Written communication should be:

- Authoritative, but not authoritarian
- Communicative, but not irresponsible
- Approachable, without being over-familiar
- Accurate in terms of grammar, spelling and phraseology, but not old-fashioned
- Concise, but not economical with the truth
- Considered, but not withholding essential information.
- Friendly, but not casual.

Protocol for issuing News Release is:

- Identify potential news story
- Preliminary discussion with relevant Officer or Member, if appropriate
- Draft text in house style
- Distribute the Press Release, copy to relevant Members and Officers, post on [www.rippingalevillage.co.uk](http://www.rippingalevillage.co.uk)

#### ADVICE AND TRAINING

- The Clerk will maintain a current list of Media contacts
- All Members and Officers who are expected to deal with the Media will be trained to the appropriate level and the Clerk will arrange training courses.

***It is the responsibility of all Members and Officers to ensure that effective Media Relations are maintained.***

*At a meeting of Rippingale Parish Council held on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2011 the above Media Relations Policy was unanimously adopted by the Council.*

*J.M. Hallas, Chairman,*

*Mrs. S.M. Scholes, Clerk/Responsible Officer.*