PORINGLAND PARISH COUNCIL

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Press and Media Policy

Policy Reference	PPC 32
Version Number	2
Associated Documents	• PPC8 Code of Conduct – Staff • PPC3 Code of Conduct – Councillors • PPC33 Social Media Policy • PPC20 Disciplinary Policy • PPC19 Data Protection inc GDPR Policy • PPC11 Equality and Diversity Policy
Last Review Date	September 2025
Frequency of Review	Three Years
Approved by	Full Council
Date for Next Review	September 2028

This is a non-contractual policy that does not require approval from employees before changes are made. Staff will remain bound by amended non-contractual policies.

PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

Poringland Parish Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions. The Council may communicate with the media, including those who publish editorial material in print, broadcast or electronic form. The Council shall endeavour to assist the media with enquiries about its functions, decisions and actions.

The purpose of this Policy is:

- To establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media
- To ensure that the views and policies of the Council are presented accurately
- To clarify who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council
- To provide guidance for Councillors and Staff on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the press and media
- To ensure consistency in the Council's dealings with the press and media
- To ensure that all elements of the press and media will be treated equally.

This Policy sits alongside the Social Media Policy (PPC 33).

Where reference is made to the Clerk, this is delegated to the Chair of the Council in their absence. Where reference is made to the Chair of the Council, this is delegated to the Vice Chair in their absence. Where the Chair is referred to, this can be delegated to the relevant Chair of a Committee where appropriate. This only applies to formal Committees of the Council, and not Advisory Groups.

Media Attendance at Meetings
Meetings of the Council, its Committees and Sub-Committees are open to the public and press unless the Council resolves under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, or for other special reasons. Advisory Groups are not open to the public and press.

As with any member of the public, members of the press and media may be asked to leave the room if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.

Where meetings include time for public participation and subject the Council's standing orders, media representatives may speak and ask questions.

Recording of meetings is subject to the Council's Reporting and Filming at Meetings Policy (PPC 13).

The press and media are entitled to hard copies of the agenda and necessary supporting paperwork for a meeting. In the first instance, they will be directed to the website to download and print the papers for the meeting. Representatives of the press shall be given reasonable facilities for taking and communicating their report of a meeting, subject to the Council's Filming at Meetings Policy.

The Clerk
Wherever possible all communications with the press and media should be made through the Clerk or the Chair of the Council if the clerk is unavailable.

The Clerk, as Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications from the press and media and to issue press statements on behalf of the Council in consultation with the Chair of the Council or the relevant Committee.

Communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk should not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk, s/he should inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response within one working day where possible. The Clerk should then consult with the Chair on a suitable response – which may be 'No Comment'.

The Clerk is authorised to publish press statements on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a Council meeting.

Councillors
Councillors should be aware that according to case law the role of councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. Councillors must therefore be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business.

While it may be legitimate for a councillor to make clear that they voted against a policy if this took place in open session, councillors should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.

Councillors should be mindful of predetermination when making comment to the press, and ensure that any views expressed could not result in an accusation of predetermination. If this is the case, councillors are required to declare the interest and withdraw from the debate at that point.

Councillors occupying more than one role of public office (for example district or county councillor) should make it clear to the press in which capacity they are acting. If their role as Parish Councillor is identified, either intentionally or otherwise, they should consider whether predetermination may apply.

Press Releases / Approaches made to the Press / Media by the Council
Press releases may be issued proactively to alert the media to a potential story, provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue.

Press releases made on behalf of the Council will normally be prepared and issued by the Clerk.

A direct approach by the Council to the media seeking an interview, issuing a statement or press release, or to publish an article may only be made with authorisation from the Council or relevant Committee, except in the following situations:

- The direct approach relates to an event being co-ordinated by the Council, for example a public consultation
- The direct approach relates to advertising a tender for works or other opportunity to engage with the Council on a basis approved by the Council (eg opportunities for contractors to price for services requested by the Council)
- There is insufficient time for a Council meeting, and the matter is urgent enough to warrant response.

Approaches from the Press / Media

Unexpected approaches from representatives of the media can lead to unguarded comments being made, and great care must be taken to avoid misrepresentation of the Council's policy or position on the matter in question. 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. Interviews may be given by the Clerk; Chair of the Council; or the Chair of the relevant Committee.

Except in most straightforward cases, the enquirer should be informed that a statement will be made within one working day 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 Chair in producing a carefully worded response within a reasonable time.

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

Where the matter concerned has not been discussed by Council an immediate response cannot be made and this should be made clear to the enquirer. The Clerk should then consult the Chair on an appropriate response, which may be 'No Comment'.

General Principles

- Be calm
- Be informed and certain of all your facts
- Ask for more time to consolidate your response if needed
- Avoid live interviews where possible
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Council that you are aware of Council policy and that your comments reflect that policy
- Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or staff, into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous or slanderous
- Any publicity 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 facts, issues or arguments should not be oversimplified

- Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards
- Public funds must not be used to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy
- Council resources must not be used on publicity that is, or could be misinterpreted as being, party political or on publicity which could be seen as promoting an individual member, particularly at election time
- The Council, its Councillors and staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law
- Councillors must act with integrity and observe the Members' Code of Conduct at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council
- Councillors and staff must not communicate their personal views about the Council's business, decisions and actions
- Councillors and staff are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council or damage the reputation of others in the Council, or the Council itself
- If expressing personal views in their private capacity, Councillors are not permitted to use their title 'Councillor' and staff are not permitted to use their job title. This would imply that you are stating Council policy
- A copy of any written material sent to the press / media by a Councillor, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Clerk
- A Councillor or Officer must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committee's agenda, or at any other private briefing
- A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer at meetings held in public or before the press.