

Aldham Parish Council

Media Relations Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Aldham Parish Council's relationship with the community is vital to its work and for the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying attitudes and measuring satisfaction.
- 1.2 Effective media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between the Parish Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Parish Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.
- 1.3 The community in this sense includes all residents and elected representatives, businesses, schools, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, groups and associations.
- 1.4 This document sets out the framework for Parish Council Members and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Parish Council's activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.

2. Media Opportunities

- 2.1 "The Media" is more than the local newspaper. The phrase encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience, and includes broadcast media (radio and television), the Internet and a wide range of printed media (e.g. newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters and the newsletters).
- 2.2 Many of the categories in 2.1 have different facets, e.g. a newspaper has feature writers and specialist correspondents in addition to its "news" staff.
- 2.3 Different media respond more readily to certain factors. For example, newspapers are more likely to print a general interest story if supplied with a photograph, radio items tend to be quite brief with a short 'sound bite' and television producers will want moving pictures to illustrate a story.

3. Making Contact with the Media

- 3.1 The general principle is that the Parish Clerk will act as the Press Office. 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 Clerk.

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

3.3 All press releases should be no longer than two sides of A4 and answer the following questions:

- What happened?
- Where has it happened?
- Why has it happened?
- When has it happened?
- How has it happened?

The most important aspects of the release should come first, then descending with importance. The Council's contact details should be at the end of the press release. An easy to read format, avoiding jargon, should be used.

3.4 Other Members of the Parish Council who identify a media opportunity should refer it to the Clerk so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.

3.5 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 Clerk. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Chairman, in consultation with other Members where necessary, about the format and content of any response.

3.6 Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to 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 Code of Conduct.

3.7 All press releases and other materials are to be kept for reference.

4. Talking to the Media

4.1 In response to Parish Council press release:

4.1.1 Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Clerk and the author of the press release, if different.

4.1.2 No-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.).

4.2 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations):

4.2.1 The views of the Parish Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.

4.2.2 The Clerk should be informed so that facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.

5. Handling a Crisis

5.1 The message that the Parish Council wants to get across to the media should be agreed first.

5.2 Ground rules should be agreed with other agencies or authorities that might be involved.

5.3 Background information to be provided (or the media may find their own which may be skewed to the Parish Council's disadvantage).

5.4 The media to be monitored and any errors refuted before they become accepted fact.

6. Monitoring

6.1 It is important to monitor the media generally for items (reports, articles, letters) about the Parish Council to order to know:

6.1.1 Whether press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council are picked up and used effectively.

6.1.2 What members of the community are saying about the Parish Council.

6.2 Members and employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Parish Council in the media – original press cuttings should be sent to the Clerk for circulation to all Members.

6.3 Anyone taking part in a radio or television broadcast should try to arrange for it to be recorded and a copy sent to the Clerk. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcast's contents should be sent.