

South Wonston Parish Council

Media Policy

Introduction

1. The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within South Wonston Parish Council (hereinafter referred to as “the Council”) for communication with the press and media (hereinafter referred to as “the media”). Communication by other means such as the Parish Council website, Social Media and Council noticeboards is also covered by this policy. The policy also confirms the arrangements relating to attendance by the media at Council meetings.
2. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations, but to establish a framework for achieving an effective and clear working relationship with the media.

Policy

3. The media wishing to contact the Council should contact either the Chairman (or in his absence the Vice Chairman) of the Council, or the Parish Clerk.
4. Wherever possible a request from the media for a statement or comment by the Council will be referred to a meeting of the Parish Council.
5. The Chairman of the Council (or in his absence the Vice Chairman) and the Parish Clerk are authorised to respond to requests from the media for a statement or comment by the Council. Wherever possible the statement or comment will be processed by the Parish Clerk in consultation with the Chairman.
6. The Chairman (or in his absence the Vice Chairman) may delegate the authorised contact role to the Clerk or to another Member of the Council in respect of any single matter.
7. The Council is not obliged to make any comment or issue a statement, and shall not do so if not fully conversant with the facts. In such case a “no comment” response shall be issued.
8. Any comments or statements shall reflect the Council’s opinion and shall have due regard for the long term reputation of the Council.
9. Wherever possible and to assist with accuracy, statements or comments will be made in writing.
10. If necessary 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.
11. When the media wishes to discuss an issue that is or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then legal advice will be taken before any response is made.
12. Any statement or comment issued shall not include personal information such as home addresses or telephone numbers (although Member and Clerk contact details are in the public domain), nor any matter discussed as confidential items at meetings or the Council, or at any other private briefing.
13. In the event of any letters being submitted to the Editor for publication in newspapers, such as to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents, these shall be kept brief, factual and balanced in tone and should not be drawn out over several weeks.

14. In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders this policy governs communications with the media.

Attendance of the Media at Council Meetings

15. Dates of Parish Council meetings along with agendas and minutes (once approved) of the Council's meetings are available to the media on the Council's website.
16. The Council's Standing Orders allow for the provision of reasonable facilities for the media to take a report at all or part of a Parish Council meeting at which they are entitled to be present.
17. In accordance with Council's Standing Orders the Council will exclude the press (and public) from such meeting when confidential or sensitive information is to be discussed.
18. In accordance with Standing Orders photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of a meeting by any means is not permitted with the Parish Council's prior written consent.

Members of the Council

19. Members of the Council may write to the press as an individual but must never imply they are stating Council policy and must never use the prefix of Cllr or Councillor as a title. It must be made absolutely clear that the views put forward are those of the private individual.
20. Members of the Council should be mindful of the decisions made by the Council and should not issue any verbal or written statement which undermines them, even if they voted against that decision.

Adopted: 9th June 2014