



## **POLICY ON RELATIONS WITH THE PRESS AND MEDIA 2022**

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*This policy was reviewed on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and remains in force until amended by the Council.*

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to guide both councillors and officers of the Council in their relations with the press and media, in such a way as to ensure clarity of roles, the smooth running of the Council and positive relations with the press and media.
- 1.2 This policy 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.
- 1.3 Above everything else, councillors must observe the Council's Code of Conduct whenever they conduct the business of the authority, conduct the business of the office to which they have been elected/appointed or act as a representative of the authority.

### **2 CLERK AND OFFICERS OF THE COUNCIL**

- 2.1 The Clerk as the 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 the absence of the Clerk, or if deemed by the Clerk to be preferable, media communications will be handled by the person who has been designated by the Council (usually at its annual meeting) to be the Council's "press officer".
- 2.2 In the absence of both the press officer and the Clerk, enquiries from the press or media will be referred to the Chair of the Council, who will act in that case as the spokesperson of the Council. All communications made by the Clerk or any other person acting on behalf of the Council will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policies of the Council.
- 2.3 The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk, the enquirer should be referred to the designated press officer or the Chair of the Council, as deemed appropriate. No other officer of the Council (unless authorised by the Clerk or

the designated press officer or the Chair) is permitted to speak or communicate with the press and media on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

### **3 COUNCILLORS**

- 3.1 A councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press or media on any matter which has been discussed in confidential session at Council or Committee meetings or at any other private briefing. A councillor must act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council. Should the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or may be likely to be subject to legal proceedings, then legal advice should be sought before any response is made.
- 3.2 When speaking to or providing written material to the press and media, councillors should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. For example: as Chair of the Council, as a Committee Chair or as an individual member.
- 3.3 If a councillor is speaking to the media in a private, personal capacity, they must never use the prefix “Councillor” or refer to their position on the Council. Doing so could imply they may be stating Council policy. They must make clear to the press that they are speaking in a private, personal capacity (and not speaking as a Pontypool Community Councillor). A copy of any written material sent to the press and media by a councillor, representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Clerk.
- 3.4 Take particular care if the press or media approach you for comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If you are unsure about any particular policy, simply state “no comment” and ask the press to contact the Council Office.
- 3.5 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 press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors can talk to the media, but must ensure they make it clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made. Whilst it may be legitimate in some circumstances for a councillor to state that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open meeting), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.
- 3.6 A councillor must never raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer at meetings held in public or before the press. Such matters are confidential, subject to employment law and could result in legal proceedings.

#### **4 DEALING WITH THE PRESS VERBALLY (E.G. IN CASES OF LOCAL EMERGENCIES OR EVENTS)**

4.1 When dealing with the press verbally, members and officers should be aware of the following:

- Be informed and certain of all your facts
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Community Council that you are aware what Council policy is and that your comments reflect that policy.
- Only discuss items that are in the public domain.
- Be aware of data protection laws.
- Be calm and present a professional, informed image of the Council.
- Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.

#### **5 MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES**

- 5.1 Facilities will be provided at meetings when requested for the press and media to take notes of the proceedings. The press and media are welcome to attend meetings, whether held physically or remotely, and will be sent a link to the meeting on request.
- 5.2 As provided in the Council's Standing Orders, both the press and the public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion.