

Press & Media Policy

Introduction

1. This policy sets out Beaulieu Parish Council's ("the Council") requirements for both Councillors and Officers in their relations with the Press and Media to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

Delegated authorities

2. The Clerk 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, media communication process will be handled by the Chair or in the absence of both by the Vice Chair.
3. Any responses to the Press and Media will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council and shall not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk the enquiry should be referred to the Chair or in his/her absence to the Vice Chair.
4. Should the Press and Media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, then (a) legal advice shall be sought by the Clerk and any (b) response must be referred to the Chair before release. The Chair will decide whether the matter needs to be referred to Council before release.
5. No information shall be disclosed to the Press and Media that is of a confidential nature. This includes any matter that has been discussed under confidential items on Council or Committee agendas or at any other private briefing.
6. No other Councillor, unless authorised by the Clerk or the Chair, is permitted to speak or communicate with the Press and Media on behalf of the Council.

Dealing with the Press and Media on behalf of the Council

7. When dealing with the Press on behalf of the Council, members and officers shall:
 - a. act with integrity at all times following the Council's Code of Conduct;
 - b. be informed and certain of all your facts;
 - c. be aware of what Council Policy is and that your comments only reflect that policy;
 - d. be calm; and
 - e. ensure that your comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.

Beaulieu Parish Council Press & Media Policy (cont'd)

8. If a matter raised by the Press and Media has yet to be discussed at Council, or if the relevant policy is not clear on the matter, the response shall be “no comment” and the matter referred to the Clerk who shall:
 - a. immediately contact the Chair, or in his/her absence to the Vice Chair, if the matter is urgent; or
 - b. otherwise include the matter on the Council’s next agenda.
9. A written summary of any verbal briefing and/or a copy of any written material sent to the Press and Media by a Councillor representing the Council must immediately be sent to the Clerk, who shall forward it to Council.

Councillors dealing with the Press and Media in a personal capacity

10. Case law states that the role of a Councillor overrides their rights to act as an individual.
11. Councillors must therefore be careful not to express their own personal views to the Press and Media where the matter relates to Council business.
12. The Council’s Code of Conduct shall always be observed, and in particular any response to the Press & Media:
 - a. shall be impartial and in the interests of the local community;
 - b. shall not improperly seek to confer an advantage, or disadvantage, on any person; and
 - c. shall avoid any matter where the individual has, or may have, a conflict of interest.
13. When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media, Councillors shall make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. For example: - as Chair or Vice Chair.
14. Councillors may talk to the media in a personal capacity but they must ensure that it is clear that any opinions given are their own and they are not commenting on behalf of Council.
15. A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of a Councillor or the Clerk at meetings held in public or before the press.
16. In their use of social media (Facebook, X *formerly known as Twitter*, WhatsApp, email, etc) Councillors and the Clerk must at all times observe the principles stated in this policy.

Meetings of Council and Committees

17. Facilities will be provided at meetings when requested for the Press to take notes of the proceedings.

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18. As provided in the Council's Standing Orders both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion.