# FORDHAM PARISH COUNCIL
# Press and Media Policy

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**1 General Statement of Policy.**

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Fordham Parish Council (the Council) for working with the press, radio, TV, Internet, etc. (the Media), and to deal with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the Media.

1.2 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the Media.

**2 Key Aims.**

2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions; this accountability can be managed, in part, through effective two-way communications. The media is crucially important in conveying information to the community and, as such, the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with the media to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council, and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

2.2 It is important that the media has access to the Clerk/Members and to background information to assist them in giving accurate accounts to the public. To balance this, the Council reserves the right to 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.

**3 Legal Framework.**

3.1 The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Governments Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

3.2 The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

**4 Processing of Personal Data.**

4.1 The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in their dealings with the media.

4.2 Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible, with appropriate action taken.

4.3 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made. Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.

4.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although member contact details are in the public domain), and disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these, and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before responses are made to the media.

4.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Parish Clerk, Chairman and Vice-Chairman are authorised to make contact with the media.

4.6 Statements made by the Clerk, Chairman or Vice-Chairman should reflect the Council's opinion.

4.7 Other Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

4.8 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.

**5. Attendance of the Media at Council Meetings.**

5.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the Media upon request.

5.2 The Media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

5.3 Filming or taping Council proceedings will be in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders.

**6. Press Releases.**

6.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look at opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

6.2 The Clerk or any Member may draft a press release, however, they must all be issued by the Parish Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section 3 (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of press releases can be monitored.

**7. Notices.**

7.1 The Council website and Facebook page will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Clerk.

7.2 Council noticeboards will be used to advertise meetings.

**8. Urgent Situations.**

8.1 In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the members and officers with specific roles and responsibilities under this policy, the following delegations shall apply:

a. Vice-Chairman of the Council may act in the absence of the Chairman.
b. The Clerk may act in the absence of the Chairman or the Vice-Chairman.

**Date Adopted: ……..**

**Signed: ……**

**Print Name: ……**

**Policy to be Reviewed on: ……**