

Thornley Parish Council



Policy for dealing with the Press and Media

1. Introduction

1.1 Thornley Parish Council's relationship with the community is vital to its work and 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 maintaining 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, shops, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, groups and associations.

1.4 This document sets out the framework for Parish Councillors and Officers to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Parish Council's activities, the decisions it makes 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)
- Internet (websites and social media)
- Printed media (newspapers, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets, and the Council's Annual Report)
- Council agendas and displaying information on Council notice boards.

3. Making contact with the Media

3.1 The Parish 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 Parish Clerk, media communications will be handled by a relevant Officer in conjunction with the Chair.

3.2 All communications made by the Parish Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. 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, they should inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response with 24 hours where practical. The Clerk (or relevant Officer) should then consult with the Chair (or Vice Chair if the Chair is unavailable) on a suitable response, which may in fact be 'no comment'.

4 Councillors dealing with the Media and issues to be aware of

4.1 Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing a Councillor from expressing their personal opinion through the media, for example writing to a newspaper or posting an item on the internet, or on a social media site, but Councillors must make it clear that any views expressed are their own personal views and that they do not represent the views of the Parish Council.

- Never use the prefix 'Councillor' when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy. It is your responsibility as a Councillor to make it clear that it is your own personal opinion.
- Councillors should take great care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Parish Council's Code of Conduct.
- All Councillors should be particularly cautious if using social media sites, so that they do not respond in haste and repent at leisure.
- A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed as a confidential item (in closed session) on the Council's or a Committee's agenda or at any other private briefing.
- Take particular care if the press or media approach you for a comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure, simply state 'no comment' and ask the press to contact the Parish Council Office.
- Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that they disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.
- A Councillor should never raise matters or make comment on subjects relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or to the media.

4.2 Thornley Parish Council chooses not to engage in Party Politics and individual Councillors should apply Parish Council policies not Party-Political opinions.

5 Talking to the Media in your role as a Councillor

5.1 In response to a Parish Council press release:

- a. Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Parish Clerk.
- b. No one else should offer any comment without prior discussion with the Parish Clerk, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names etc).

5.2 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist, reporter or any author of an article likely to be placed in the public domain, including enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations:

- a. The views of the Parish Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.
- b. The Parish Clerk should be informed so that they are fully apprised of the communication that has taken place.

6 Monitoring

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

- a. Whether press releases and statements issued by the Parish Council are picked up and used effectively.
- b. What the community is saying about the Parish Council.

6.2 Councillors and Officers are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Parish Council in all medias and to inform the Parish Clerk. Wherever possible supply original press cuttings rather than photocopies to the Parish Clerk.