

## **BRENT KNOLL PARISH COUNCIL**

### **Press, Media and Communications Policy 2020**

#### **Introduction**

- 1.1** The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with day to day relationships between the Council and the Public.
- 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 arise when dealing with the media.
- 1.3** It should be noted as part of this policy that Brent Knoll Parish Council has agreed to record all of its meetings and to publish them on the internet. This is the highest threshold of transparency available and therefore the content of its meetings and process is widely available for the media and the public.

#### **Key Aims**

- 2.1** The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two way communications. The media, press, radio, TV, and internet are sources of communication that can at times be at our disposal.
- 2.2** It is important that the press have access to the Clerk and the Chairman and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this the Council will always defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

#### **Communications.**

The objectives of Brent Knoll Parish Council communications policy are :

- 3.1** To increase awareness of the role and actions of Brent Knoll Parish Council.

- 3.2** To stimulate interest in Brent Knoll Parish Council among all members of the Parish particularly young people
- 3.3** Encourage more residents to consider taking an active part in their parish council.

### **The Legal Framework**

- 4.1** The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the local government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 4.2** The Parish Council's Code of Conduct and Standing Orders should always be the guide in the first instance.

### **Contact with the Media**

- 5.1** The Clerk and members of the Council should have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all dealings with the media
- 5.2** Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports and 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 and disciplinary action will be taken where necessary.
- 5.3** When the media wish to discuss an issue that is or likely to be subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's Solicitor before any response is made.
- 5.4** 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 addresses and telephone numbers, (Councillors' details are in the public domain) or 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 any response is made to the media
- 5.5** When responding to approaches from the media or when contact is made with the media, the Clerk and the Chairman are authorised to make the contact.
- 5.6** All statements made by the Clerk or the Chairman must be fully reflective of the Council's opinion.

- 5.7** Other Councillors can talk with the media provided that the contact and content is agreed with the full Council as being the views of the Council, otherwise it should be made very clear that the statement is a personal view. To do otherwise is extremely inadvisable as it can lead to bringing the Council into disrepute, misinterpretation and ultimately misquoted.
- 5.8** 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 out over several weeks. All correspondence **must** come from the Clerk.

### **Attendance of Media at Council Meetings**

- 6.1** The Local Government act of 1972 requires that agenda reports and minutes are sent to the media on request by the Clerk.
- 6.2** The media is encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating made available.
- 6.3** Any filming or taping by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chairman of the meeting.

### **Press Releases**

- 7.1** The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential news worthy story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk the Chairman and Councillors to agree on what constitutes a beneficial interest to the public.  
News-worthy items will be considered and agreed, under "Matters for Consideration" at each monthly meeting of the council.
- 7.2** The Clerk or any Councillor (by agreement of the council) may draft a press release, however the content must always be agreed by the Councillors within a period of 24 hours prior to being issued by the Clerk in order to ensure the principles outlined in section 4 ( Legal Framework). This will provide consistency of information and style across the Council and ensure that the use of the press is monitored.

- 7.3** The Clerk, in agreement with the Councillors, will issue all press releases to the following interested parties based on the importance/relevance of the news:
- Brent Knoll News
  - Local Reach
  - Burnham and Highbridge Weekly News
  - Burnham on Sea .com
  - Weston Mercury
  - BBC Somerset
  - Mendip Times
  - Brent Knoll Website news page

### **Action Plan**

The Press is to be encouraged to support the maximum transparency of Brent Parish Council however, this must be done within our strict media policy and always through the Clerk and Chairman to ensure completeness and accuracy.

### **Video.**

- 8.1** Brent Knoll Parish Council provides the highest level of transparency available to the public by actively recording their meetings.
- 8.2** In order to ensure that members of the public are properly informed public speakers will be invited to take part in the active recording of the public session of our meetings.
- 8.3** The recording of the meeting will be distributed by email URL link to the "Next Door Brent Knoll" only social media site. This is to ensure that our information is distributed to all public in Brent Knoll.

### **Quarterly news letters**

- 9.1** Brent Knoll Parish Council will issue a quarterly news letter. The content will be agreed by the members. The news letter will be distributed to all residents through the Brent Knoll News.

### **Parish Council Surgery**

**10.1** A 'drop-in' surgery is held monthly prior to the council meeting where members of the public are able to make personal contact with our Clerk and a member of the Council. The surgery will provide an environment where items of a personal nature or information in general can be discussed. Any items that are identified as requiring the attention of the Councillors will be brought forward to a full meeting of the Council.

### **Annual meet the Councillors event.**

**11.1** Each year the members of Brent Knoll Parish Council will hold a coffee morning where members of the public are invited to meet their elected councillors.

### **Annual General meeting.**

**12.1** Each year an Annual General Meeting of the Parish Council will be held to which all residents of the parish will be given due notice. The meeting will provide reports of the activities of the parish council, district council and county council together with any matters that will be of general interest to the community.

### **Website**

**13.1** Brent Knoll Parish Council will maintain the village website. All Council business, together with diary changes, will be published by the Clerk. The Council will regularly monitor the website to ensure it is accurate, informative and current.