

ARRETON PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy sets out how Arreton Parish Council will respond in writing to questions from the media outside of public Parish Council meetings and the procedures to be followed in circulating newsletters and e-mails to residents. The aim is to ensure that any responses on controversial issues have the support of all councillors and, where this is not so, to ensure the press release identifies this. Urgent email communications will need to be treated differently.

The Government has prepared a "Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity" (dated 31 March 2011) together with an explanatory memorandum. The code is voluntary. These documents relate to publicity originated by a Council and do not specifically address responses to Press questions. They do not specifically address ad hoc emails covering specific items of local interest or concern but these are covered in general terms in paragraph 2 which defines publicity as: *"any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public"*. Paragraph 16 of the code requires that: *"Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy."* The Code allows Parish Councils to publish newsletters monthly.

2. PUBLICITY ORIGINATED BY THE PARISH COUNCIL

Arreton Parish Council may produce newsletters and also e-mail residents to inform them of issues the Council considers to be of local interest.

Arreton Parish Council will comply with the code in not producing newsletters more frequently than monthly but may include information of local current interest on its website and may e-mail residents to inform them of issues of local interest, such as upcoming public meetings, and road and footpath closures.

Newsletters shall be circulated in draft form to councillors for comments and approval prior to issue. In the event of any councillor strongly objecting to the wording of an item in the draft, the wording shall be revised and agreed before issue. Minor comments shall not prevent a newsletter being issued after taking any comments received into account.

Information e-mails will be circulated and reviewed depending upon the urgency of the information contained. Urgent e-mails may be issued after review by the Clerk, the Chairman or the Vice Chairman.

3. WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM THE MEDIA

When questions from the media are received at Parish Council meetings these will be responded to in one of two ways. Simple questions relating to non-contentious issues may be responded to at the meeting. All other questions should be responded to promptly in writing in accordance with this Policy. Similarly, where the media submits a question to the Parish Council in writing,

the response shall be prepared in accordance with this Policy. All verbal questions should be referred to the Clerk in writing.

The drafting of written responses shall be the responsibility of the Chairman or Vice- Chairman, although this does not preclude other councillors drafting text for the response. Written responses shall be issued by the Clerk after approval by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman. Statements made must reflect the Council's opinion.

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. Likewise, any letters to the local papers representing the views of the Council should only be issued by the Clerk following agreement by the Council. Letters from individual councillors must make it clear that they do not necessarily represent the views of the Council as a whole.

Written responses must be circulated in draft form to councillors for comments and approval prior to issue. In the event of any councillor strongly objecting to the wording of a draft response, the wording shall be revised and agreed before issue. Minor comments shall not prevent a written response being issued after taking any comments received into account.

4. ATTENDANCE OF THE MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting. The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

5. NOTICES

The Council's website will be used to display information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Clerk. Draft minutes of meetings will also be placed on the website shortly before the next full Parish Council meeting.

The Council's notice boards will be used to display notices of meetings, agendas, audit,-other Council information and local events or information. The Clerk shall normally be responsible for the placing and removal of items on the notice board.

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