



Queen's Park Community Council

Press and Media Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Queen's Park Community Council communicates to the wider world in a professional and objective manner. The Council welcomes enquiries from media organisations and recognises that our relationship with the press helps us communicate with residents. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications.

The Council's approach to the media will be:

- Open and honest
- Proactive
- Responsive and timely
- Informative.

This policy should be applied in conjunction with the Council's Social Media Policy, and both shall be reviewed in conjunction.

1. Press releases

1.1 The purpose of a press release is to alert media sources to a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of all Councillors and Officers to identify opportunities where issuing a press release may be appropriate.

1.2 A Community Council Press Release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole and prepared by the Chief Officer. It is non-party political and may include quotes from relevant Councillors, usually the Chair of the Council.

2. Protocol for press releases

2.1 Press releases will be issued by the Council Chief Officer.

2.2 Press releases will not identify any political party or group affiliation of any member(s) quoted.

2.3 Statements made must reflect the Council's position on the issue covered.

- 2.4 If a Councillor communicates individually with media sources it is their responsibility to ensure that it is clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council.
- 2.5 Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to an editor for publication in newspapers or comments on websites. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a view, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. However, such contributions should be kept brief and balanced in tone, and correspondence should not be drawn out over a lengthy period of time.
- 2.6 At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

3. The legal framework

- 3.1 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 Government's [Recommended code of practice on local authority publicity](#). Some aspects of the Code are quoted here:
- 'Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims [and the provision of services] should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.'
 - 'Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimplify facts, issues or arguments.'
 - 'Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.'
 - '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.'
- 3.2 In particular, Officers and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.
- 3.3 Confidential documents such as exempt minutes, reports, papers or 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 take appropriate action in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders and Code of Conduct.
- 3.4 When media sources wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from a solicitor before any response is made.

3.5 Personal privacy issues must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the Council's policies on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. These issues include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number.

4. Attendance of media at council or committee meetings

4.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes be sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting. Such papers will also be published on the Council's website.

4.2 Representatives of media organisations are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

5. Elections

5.1 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for councillors, for individuals standing for election, and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual members unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council.

6. Notices

6.1 Council agendas and minutes will be published on the Council's website and noticeboards. The website will also be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly.

7. Social media

7.1 The principles in this policy apply to use of social media, but given the complexities associated with the personal use of social media, the Council has prepared an additional policy which applies in conjunction with the present policy.

8. Urgent situations

8.1 In the case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a Council meeting, or in the absence of the councillors or officers with specific roles and responsibilities, this may be issued by the Chief Officer with the agreement of the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Council or (if neither is available) at least two other councillors.

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