

HEYBRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL Internal Procedure and Protocol

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRESS

1. The purpose of this note is to establish a clear understanding of how the Parish Council conducts its relationship with the press, and in particular deals with enquiries from the press.
2. The importance of the role of the press in reporting on local issues is acknowledged. It is however important that the Parish Council's work is reported fairly and accurately.
3. In the absence of a representative of the local press attending and reporting on Parish Council meetings, the press will normally be reliant on the Parish Council News brief prepared by the Clerk for inclusion in the village news section. That brief is, subject to space, always reproduced by both the Maldon Standard and the Essex Chronicle.
4. In the absence of the press being present at a meeting, it is likely that a reporter will follow up a particular item in the brief to develop a separate story. On-going items of interest to the press may be the subject of casual enquiries from reporters periodically. There will then be those occasional items often unrelated to the business of a Parish Council meeting on which a comment is requested, e.g. the circus.
5. It is suggested that the local press should be advised that the normal point of contact with the Parish Council will be the Clerk. The Clerk can be a point of contact where information or clarification of certain facts is sought. The Chairman or Vice Chairman will be available to comment after the initial point of contact. It has to borne in mind however that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman are working people. . The press will have to work within those constraints and from the official published directory information. Individual Parish Councillors should be discouraged from responding to press enquiries simply because the official contacts are unavailable at the time.
6. In terms of official approaches to the press, it would seem that the Parish Council would be best served by a press release issued by the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman (or in his/her absence the Vice-Chairman) with further consultation with any other individual Parish Councillor that may have a particular positive interest in the matter concerned. Official press releases would either state to whom any enquiries should be addressed or otherwise the procedure as set out in paragraph 5 would apply.
7. In any other instance, unless authorised by the Parish Council, an individual Parish Councillor should not (in that capacity or using that status) approach or communicate with the press with information, or to express a view, for fear of this being interpreted as the official view of the Parish Council. This is vital to avoid the work of the Parish Council, its Members and Officers, being compromised in any way.
8. The Parish Council is invited to endorse a simple procedure embodying the above principles.

Adopted 11/08

Amended 3/12 Adopted 22 March 2012 Reviewed May 2016