MAULDEN PARISH COUNCIL
PRESS & MEDIA POLICY

Adopted: May 2016
Next Review Date: Annually

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Maulden Parish Council's (MPC's) relationship with the community is vital to their work and the decisions they take. The community in this sense includes all residents and elected representatives, businesses, schools, shops, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, groups and associations. An open and constructive dialogue between MPC and the community is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying attitudes and measuring satisfaction.

1.2 MPC strive to be open and accessible to the media at all times since effective media relations is one way of establishing a good relationship between MPC and the community. As members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for MPC to present information about their activities and aspirations in a consistent way.

1.3 This document sets out the framework for MPC councillors and staff to follow if contacting the media, and informing the public about MPC activities, the decisions they take and the services they provide.

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), the internet and social media, and a wide range of printed media (eg newspapers, freesheets, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters and printed matter affixed to noticeboards).

2.2 MPC use external communication with the media for a number of purposes (see list below). MPC's external communication with the media is intended to be objective and balanced, and will be presented not to affect public support for any particular political party. External communications will be used to:

- Broaden and strengthen local democracy through a well-informed community.
- Raise awareness in the community of MPC's policies, services and functions.
- Publicise meetings and decisions of MPC, and/or their other decision-making working groups.
- Promote MPC's as community leaders.
- Publicise MPC's role in partnership initiative with other bodies.
- Enable local people to have an effective, well-informed dialogue with MPC about services, policies, and the needs of individuals and the community.
- In an emergency, to highlight public safety messages and keep people informed.

2.3 The role of Communications Officer will be carried out by MPC's Chair, Vice-Chair and/or Clerk.

2.4 The Communications Officer will update noticeboards and maintain MPC's website and social media pages, with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Clerk liaising as appropriate to provide a useful means of informing residents of MPC's services and their activities.

3. MAKING CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

3.1 The general principle is that MPC's Communications Officer will act as MPC's Press Officer. Any contact by MPC Councillors with the media concerning MPC's policies, the decisions they take and the services they provide, is to be directed through the Clerk.

3.2 Press releases and statements will be prepared by MPC's Chair, Vice-Chair and/or Clerk as MPC's Communications Officer in association with other MPC Councillors as required, and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by MPC. All press releases and other materials are to be kept for reference.

3.3 Other MPC Councillors or employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to MPC's Communications Officer so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.

3.4 If a MPC Councillor or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to MPC, it should be referred to MPC's Communications Officer. A decision will then be made by MPC's Communications Officer, in consultation with other Councillors where necessary, about the format and content of any response.

3.5 Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a MPC Councillor from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. MPC Councillors must make it clear that any views expressed are their own personal views. However, MPC Councllors should take care not to misrepresent MPC policy and/or bring MPC into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the MPC Councillors' Code Of Conduct.

3.6 Controversy on some issues is inevitable – indeed it is a healthy part of the democratic process. In these circumstances MPC's policies may need defending in a manner which may be robust but which must still be reasonable.

4. SPEAKING TO THE MEDIA

4.1 When dealing with the press, MPC Councillors should be confident about the issue raised and MPC's policy or response to any particular activity, service or issue. It is important that quotes made on behalf of MPC are factual and standards and ethics are maintained.

4.2 In response to an MPC press release:

a) Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to MPC's Communications Officer.

b) No one apart from MPC's Communications Officer should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc).

4.3 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations):

a) The views of MPC may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.

b) MPC's Communications Officer should be informed so facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.

5. MONITORING

5.1 It is important to monitor the media for reports, articles, letters, and social media posts about MPC to know:

a) Whether press releases and statements issued by MPC are picked up and used effectively.

b) What members of the community are saying about MPC.

5.2 MPC Councillors are encouraged to look out for items referring to MPC in the media – press cuttings and social media links should be sent to MPC's Clerk.

5.3 Anyone taking part in a radio or television broadcast should try to arrange for it to be recorded and a copy sent to MPC's Communications Officer. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcast's contents should be sent.