



PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to guide both councillors and officers of the Council in their relations with the Press and Media, in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

This policy does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media.

Above everything else, councillors must observe the Council's Code of Conduct whenever they conduct the business of the authority, conduct the business of the office to which they have been elected/appointed or act as a representative of the authority.

Confidential Matters at Meetings of Council and Committees

As provided in the Council's Standing Orders both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion.

Clerk and Officers of the Council

- The Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue press statements on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Chairman.
- In the absence of both of the Clerk and the Chairman, enquirers must be referred to the Vice Chairman who will act as the spokesperson for the purposes of this element of the policy.
- All communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk the enquirer must be referred to the Chairman / Vice Chairman or the Council as considered appropriate.
- No other officer of the Council, unless authorised by the Clerk or the Chairman, is permitted to speak or communicate with the Press and Media on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

Councillors

- A councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on Council or Committee agendas or at any other private briefing.
- A councillor must act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council. Should the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, then legal advice should be sought before any response is made.
- When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media, councillors must make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. That is, as councillor or as private individual.
- Councillors must never use the prefix "Councillor" when writing to the press as an individual or refer to their position on the Council: doing so implies a statement on council policy. A copy of any written material sent to the Press and media by a councillor as a representative of the Council, must be copied to the Clerk.
- Particular care must be taken by councillors if the press or media approach for comment on a controversial subject, to ensure they are not led into stating something unauthorised inadvertently. When unsure about any particular policy, the prescribed statement is "no comment", with press asked to contact the Clerk.
- Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors must be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the council. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.
- A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.

When speaking to the Press both councillors and officers must

- Be informed and certain of all facts
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Council they are aware what Council Policy is and that comments reflect that policy.
- Be calm
- Ensure that comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.

When using Social Media

Councillors and Officers must at all times observe the general principles stated in this policy in their use of social media (Facebook, Twitter email, etc)

Policy Review: Annually