

Wimborne Minster Town Council Publicity and Media Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this Policy is to provide guidance on engaging with the media and set out the roles and responsibilities for the councillors and employees of Wimborne Minster Town Council (the Council) .
- 1.2 The Council recognises the important role the media plays in informing residents, businesses and visitors about its work and the decision-making process. The Council is committed to developing and maintaining a positive working relationship with all professional media organisations. Providing a consistent approach to media relations will help to enhance and protect the Council's reputation.
- 1.3 The Town Clerk is responsible for coordinating the Council's publicity and media communications activities, managing requests for quotes or interviews received from media outlets, and will aim to:
 - share the Council's successes and any updates on key policies and services so that residents feel informed about the Council's work
 - ensure the Council is recognised as being open, transparent, and accountable
 - handles requests for information in a timely way
 - manages risks to the Council's work and reputation via pro-active media management
- 1.4 This Policy reflects the guidance contained in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity and complements the Council's Social Media Policy.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

- 2.1 The Town Clerk is responsible for signing off press releases and media statements in conjunction with the Chairman of the Council.
- 2.2 The Town Mayor, Deputy Town Mayor and committee chairman are responsible for signing off relevant councillor quotes in Council press releases and any statements issued.
- 2.3 Councillors will be invited to any photo opportunities taking place in the parish of Wimborne Minster (the Town), alongside the Town Mayor and / or Deputy Town Mayor, relevant committee chairman and officer.
- 2.4 It is acknowledged that Councillors may sometimes be approached directly by the media about issues within the Town, in which case it should be made clear that they are providing their personal view rather than the corporate view of the Council. Councillors should notify the Town Clerk if they are contacted by the media, so the Town Clerk is able to monitor press contact and be aware of any developing issues.

3. Scope

This Policy includes and covers:

- a) Press releases
- b) Media enquiries and interviews
- c) Identifying newsworthy items
- d) Correcting inaccurate reporting
- e) Media activity ahead of council meetings
- f) Publicity during elections
- g) Community groups / partnerships
- h) Events
- i) Photographs / videos

a) It is recognised that local press and radio stations trawl social media for stories. In most cases, the easiest way to disseminate general news is to publish a positive social media post. As not all residents use social media, local media organisations form a bridge between social media and residents.

Press releases help publicise more formal Council announcements and will reflect the Council's corporate view and values. Press releases should be used for more detailed items where there is value derived from providing a longer format to the media.

These releases will be drafted by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and/or other councillors as required and issued to the media in a timely way. They will be shared with Town Mayor at the point of release to the media and added to the Council website as soon as it is practical to do so. Releases will include relevant facts and a quote from the appropriate councillor. In certain circumstances, a quote from a Council officer will be used when the public would reasonably expect an operational viewpoint to be put forward.

If a councillor or an employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Council, it should be referred to the Town Clerk. Releases will not promote the views of political groups or publicise the activities of individual councillors. They will not seek to persuade the public to hold a certain view unless part of an agreed marketing campaign. Additional restrictions will be in place to comply with legal requirements before an election, known as the "pre-election period" (see below).

Where a release is not considered to be the best way to publicise a news item or event, the Town Clerk will advise on an alternative, such as a social media post.

b) Media enquiries received about the Council's work will be coordinated by the Town Clerk in liaison with the Town Mayor Chairman and/or other councillors as required to ensure responses are prioritised within deadlines and relevant spokespeople are sourced and briefed on any emerging interview bids.

Quotes from "a spokesperson" will be avoided where possible, however, in some instances it may be beneficial. The use of this term is common during the pre-election period.

Employees put forward for interviews should not provide a personal opinion on a matter. As the subject matter expert their role is to provide factual knowledge in support of the Council's approved policies.

In the event of an emergency requiring a county-wide response, the Town Clerk will liaise with Dorset Council and other key partners. In the event of an emergency, it is paramount that the Town Clerk and Town Mayor manages the Council's interactions with the press to avoid any confusion and provide clear information to the public and partners.

Individual councillors may make their own statements relating to local issues and this policy is not designed to prevent any councillor expressing a personal opinion through the media. Councillors must make it clear however, that any view expressed which differs from Council policy is their own personal view and should be recorded as such. Councillor comments which may or may not be political, should bear no reference whatsoever to the Council or any officer and must not use the Council logo. Neither the Council address, telephone number or website should be included as a point of contact. If a journalist wishes to confirm what was said by an individual councillor during a Council meeting, they will be referred to the Town Clerk.

- c) Ensuring the Town Clerk is made aware of any potential news items at the earliest opportunity is crucial to maintaining effective media relations, at least two weeks in advance wherever possible. This will help manage drafting any supporting communications including press releases, photo call notices, sourcing any quotes and images, and planning any social media content to complement the story.
- d) Where the Council has been significantly misrepresented in media coverage, the Town Clerk will liaise with the media outlet to request a correction. In the case of minor inaccuracies, the Town Clerk will decide whether any action should be taken. If, on occasion, the Council gets something wrong, it will acknowledge any errors in a timely way, and address how it will put things right.
- e) The Town Clerk will make Council or a committee aware of any newsworthy items that are due to be considered at upcoming meetings. Where appropriate, the Town Clerk will prepare news releases and / or statements to support decisions taken at Council meetings.

Agendas for Council meetings will be published on the Council's website and made accessible to journalists in advance of any meetings. Council meetings held in the Council Chamber will be open to journalists to attend and report on. Councillors, officers, and members of the public who speak at a public meeting may be quoted during the course of the committee meeting. Any requests to interview officers or Councillors after the meeting should be referred to the Town Clerk to manage.

The press are permitted to attend all meetings of the Council and its committees, unless excluded under the Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960; however the press and the public may be excluded to attend working group meetings or any meetings which are informal fact-finding sessions and not official Council meetings.

- f) The rules on publicity change when an election is called. From the notice of election to the election itself (pre-election period) all proactive publicity that includes candidates or other politicians temporarily ceases. Council related publicity during this time should not deal with any new projects or controversial issues. Officers may be quoted in this instance. This is to ensure

fairness, and make sure no party or individual candidate gains an unfair advantage by appearing in Council produced publicity, which extends to the use of social media.

Events organised during the election period must not feature councillors standing for election.

- g) Where the Council is involved in a project involving a community group or partnership, any arrangements for proactive publicity must be agreed in advance by both parties.

Where the Council is the lead organisation, the Town Clerk will draft news releases and request a quote from the relevant external organisation and issue the final / approved news release to the media.

Where the community group or partnership is the lead organisation, the community group or partner organisation should lead on the communications activity and contact the Town Clerk to request a relevant quote for inclusion in their news release. A copy of the final / approved news release should be shared with relevant parties and issued by the community group or partner.

Where the Council does not have direct involvement in a community or partner project, the community group or partner organisation is responsible for managing its own communications activities. In some cases, these activities may be shared on the Council's social media channels at the discretion of the Town Clerk.

- h) The Town Mayor will usually be quoted in releases covering Council events. In the Mayor's absence, the Deputy Town Mayor will be quoted. The Town Clerk will advise on whether an event requires a news release or social media post to help publicise the activity.
- i) A photo / video consent form should be used when sourcing images and videos commissioned by the Council for publicity purposes.

4. Other matters

- 4.1 Defamation is the act of making a statement about a person or a company that is considered to harm reputation. If the defamatory statement is written (in print or online) it is known as libel. Defamatory statements are most likely to constitute a breach of the adopted Code of Conduct. If a councillor or officer publishes an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation, they may take a libel action against the Council.
- 4.2 Placing images or text on media or web sites from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos), without obtaining permission, is likely to breach copyright laws when permission has not been granted.
- 4.3 Personal data of individuals must not be published unless their express permission has been obtained.
- 4.4 Councillors should not use social media to comment on planning, licensing or other quasi-judicial decisions as this may be viewed as bias and pre-determination on an issue that is due to be formally decided upon.
- 4.5 The Town Clerk will monitor media coverage about the Council.

[End]