



THORNABY

TOWN COUNCIL

PRESS & MEDIA POLICY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.
- 1.3 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena and to promote the Council positively.

2 KEY AIMS

- 2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
- 2.2 The media themselves have vital roles to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Officers and members and to background information as a whole after approval by the Council unless it is deemed confidential to assist them in this role. To balance this, the Council and Council Officer will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

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 governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Some aspects of the Code are relevant to this policy:
- “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, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be disclosed to the media. If such disclosures do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and the appropriate action taken.
- 3.4 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then legal advice should be taken before any response is made.

- 3.5 Officers and Members must not disclose any personal or confidential information about other Officers or Members. This includes the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number, disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. Members details are available in the public domain and through their Members Register of Interest declaration.
- 3.6 The Town Clerk is responsible for issuing formal press releases that have been composed and agreed by the Council

4 CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1 Statements made by the Chairman, or in the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chair or the Town Clerk, should reflect the Council's accurately agreed opinion.
- 4.2 After consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, other 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.
- 4.3 Councillors and officers should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.
- 4.4 Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. Letters representing the views of the Council should only be submitted by the Chairman or the Clerk on behalf of the Council. If other members choose to use the letters column to express their own opinions on Council policies, they must make it clear that the views expressed are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council or any of its members.
- 4.5 At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.
- 4.6 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.

5 ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA and PUBLIC AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

- 5.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request, five working days prior to the meeting.
- 5.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.
- 5.3 Unless the council meeting has resolved to exclude the public, any person who attends a meeting of the council is permitted to report on its proceedings. "Reporting" of meetings is defined to include:

Filming, photographing or making an audio recording of proceedings at a meeting for example using a mobile phone, tablet, filming for a TV broadcast, or recording for a radio broadcast.

More information about recording and reporting on council meetings can be found in the "Recording and Reporting on Council Meetings Procedure"

6 PRESS RELEASES

- 6.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of 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 Officers and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- 6.2 Any Officer or Member may draft a press release with Council approval, however they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

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