



SAFFRON WALDEN TOWN COUNCIL

Publicity & Media Policy

Version	Policy Adopted Date	Minute Reference	Review Date
1	September 2015	FC 181	September 2016
2	June 2016	FC 020-16	June 2017
3	June 2017	FC 264-17	June 2018
4	June 2018	FC441-18(a)	June 2019

Introduction

Saffron Walden Town Council welcomes enquiries from the Press and Media and recognises that its relationship with the press helps communication with residents. The Council seeks to be as transparent as possible, cooperating at all times with the Press and using the opportunities of the media to publicise events being organised. 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.

The press and the public may be excluded to attend Working Group meetings, Neighbourhood Plan meetings or any meetings which are informal fact-finding sessions and not official council meetings.

Purpose

The aim of the policy is to ensure that Saffron Walden Town Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner and reflect the corporate view of the Council. The Council wishes to respond to the growth of social media channels and recognises that posts and comments made by Members and Officers of the Council could reflect directly on the organisation. This policy sets out the required protocol for Members who communicate their thoughts and views through social media channels.

Communications with the media can be an important part of a Councillor's or the Town Clerk's role. In any media contact, Councillors and the Town Clerk should always have regard to the reputation of the Town Council. Generally, Councillors provide comments and views and the Town Clerk provides factual information. This factual information may well include explaining the Town Council's policy on a particular issue. If any Councillor is unsure about the facts of any issue he/she should contact the Town Clerk or ask the media representative to do so. Councillors should avoid being seen to anticipate decisions of the Town Council or its Committees and should not criticise the Town Clerk or any member of the Town Council staff in the media

When speaking to the media, Councillors must make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the Town Council, and should indicate in what capacity they are speaking, e.g. in a personal capacity, on behalf of their political group, or as the Chairman of a Committee. It may be useful to advise the Town Clerk of the discussion.

If the Town Clerk is approached by the media he/she should provide factual information on matters of public record. Where the media are seeking comment or opinion on Town Council policy, the Town Clerk will refer them to the Chairman of the appropriate Committee. The Town Clerk should also, at the earliest opportunity, inform the Chairman of the appropriate Committee and the Mayor of questions received from the media.

If the Town Clerk is unavailable, his/her delegated deputy may speak to the media on his/her behalf. The Town Clerk and his/her delegated deputy are the only Town Council Officers empowered to speak to the media on behalf of the Town Council.

Scope

The Press and Media Policy includes:

- a) Official Council Releases
- b) Individual Member Comments to the Press
- c) Freedom of Information Requests
- d) Press Protocol
- e) Social Media Protocol

Official Council press releases

Official Council press releases and statements will be prepared and released by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and/or other Members as required. The Town Clerk will act as the Council's Press Officer. Any official contact with the media concerning the Council's policies, the decisions it makes and services it provides are to be initiated through the Town Clerk. Members who identify a media opportunity should discuss this with the Town Clerk who will, in consultation with other Members as appropriate, decide how this will be followed up. If a Member or an employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Town Council, it should be referred to the Town Clerk.

Individual Member Comments to the Press

Individual Members may make their own statements relating to local issues and this policy is not designed to prevent any Member expressing a personal opinion through the media. Members 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.

Member 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 Member during a Council meeting, they will be referred to the Town Clerk.

Freedom of Information Requests

All requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act are to be referred to the Town Clerk or the Data Controller who, in routine cases will arrange for the information request to be satisfied in accordance with the legislation.

Press Protocol

The Town Clerk is responsible for issuing official press releases on behalf of the Town Council

Official press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation of any member(s) quoted in the release. When the media seeks information on an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then legal advice should be obtained before any response is made;

During election year, from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day following the election the Town Council will not normally issue press releases and the Town Council will have regard to the “purdah” period and appropriate best practice.

All press releases and other materials are copied and filed for reference by the Town Clerk.

Social Media Protocol

Members should be aware of the Council’s adopted Code of Conduct and any legal implications if they are posting comments or views on social media about individual Members or employees of Council or sharing information about the Council

Social Media should not be used as a platform to discuss Council Policy noting that the principles as set out above apply to all and any forms of media communication. Members who wish to challenge the Council’s procedures must refer their concerns to the Town Clerk in the first instance enabling queries to follow a due process.

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.