



VERWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

Press, Media & Social Media Policy

This Procedure applies to all staff, part time and full time and Councillors.

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 Verwood Town Council's Code of Conduct whenever they conduct the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which they have been elected/appointed or acts as a representative of the authority.

Town Clerk and Officers of the Council

The Town Council have appointed a Press & P.R. Councillor who, with the Town Clerk 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 appointed Councillor and/or Town Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Assistant Town Clerk. All communications made by the appointed Councillor or Town Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Councillor or Town Clerk are not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Councillor or Town Clerk, the enquirer should be referred to the Town Mayor or Council as considered appropriate. No other officer of the Council, unless authorised by the Town Clerk or the Chair, 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 any 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 should always act with integrity when representing or acting on behalf of Verwood Town 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, a Councillor should make clear the capacity, in which they are providing the information. For example: - as Chairman or as an individual (i.e. letter to press for publication).

Never use the prefix "Councillor" when writing to the press as an individual or refer to the position on the Council. This implies that the Councillor is stating Council policy. A copy of any written material sent to the press and media by a Councillor, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Town Clerk. A Councillor must take particular care if approached by the press or media approach for comment on a controversial subject. If unsure about a particular policy, the Councillor should simply state "no comment" and ask the press to contact the Council Office.

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 should 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 are 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.

Dealing with the Press.

When dealing with the Press verbally, members and officers should:

- Be informed and certain of all the facts
- Ensure that, when making comments on behalf of the Town Council, all comments reflect Council 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.

Social Media

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

Meetings of Council and Committees.

Facilities will be provided at meetings for the Press to take notes of the proceedings. Further guidance can be found under 'Protocol for the Reporting at Meetings of the Council or 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. [Note: The Town Council as a Parish Council is governed by the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, 1960.]

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Responsible Committee	Full Town Council
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