

PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

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.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

2. Key Aims

The Council recognises that appropriate use of the media promotes the efficient operation of Town Council business.

3. Contact with the Media

Members may be approached by the media or may wish to comment through them. *Members dealing with the media or using their own social media accounts must remember that they are legally responsible for the content of any messages or comments and that the requirements and principles associated with the adopted Code of Conduct shall remain in force.*

Members must not make public representation in the name of the Council unless authorised.

Members have the right to express personal opinions on local issues using the media but they should make it clear that such comments do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Council or its Committees. Members should be mindful to ensure that they do not bring the Council into disrepute.

Be aware that, in practice, any remarks made in the media by Members may be taken as an official statement of the Council.

If a Member is unaware of Council policy on any matter they should seek the advice of the Town Clerk.

Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action taken.

When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.

Statements made by the Town Mayor and the Town Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.

There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Town Clerk.

Should a Member be delegated to write a letter on behalf of the Town Council then the member is permitted to use the title Town Councillor, prior to submission to the press the member must obtain prior approval of the contents from the Town Clerk and Chairman of the committee before submitting the letter /article to the press.

4. Press Releases

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 the Town Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

All press releases must be issued by the Town Clerk in order to ensure that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

The Town Council will maintain formal Facebook accounts to promote the services and functions of the Town Council to encourage greater public awareness and involvement

2. Administration

The day to day administration and use of the facility shall be the responsibility of the Town Clerk and Council Officers to address the following key target areas:

- Promotion of Council events and public meetings;
- To inform the public of progress with works to street furniture and equipment owned and maintained by the Town Council;
- To be able to upload other groups/organisations events to the Town Council Facebook Page;
- To be able to post events and items of interest on the South Woodham Ferrers Facebook Page;
- To share the Town Council posts to other South Woodham Ferrers Facebook pages to increase engagement;

In addition, the facility will be used to provide other information specifically agreed by the Council or its Committees for release on the Council's Facebook page. Town Council staff / officers will not engage in commenting on Facebook posts due to resources, Facebook will be used as a notification method not as a form of 2-way communication.

The use of social media shall not replace other forms of communication, but should be complementary to it.

The account will be updated and monitored as and when required and care will be exercised to avoid risks associated with conflict with current legislation including the Data Protection Act 1998, Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010.

The facility will not be used to represent the political views of any individual member or group or members of the Council and any negative comment received through social media links be responded to with factual information. On-line arguments are to be avoided.

Members' Own Accounts – Members of the Council may wish to provide their own media accounts and comments. Members must remember that they are legally responsible for the content of any messages and that the requirements and principles associated with the adopted Code of Conduct shall remain in force.

Think before you post, is it true, is it necessary, is it kind.

Responsible Officer	Town Clerk	Date effective from	February 2021	Review date	February 2022
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