



Tiverton Town Council

Press, Media and Social Media Policy

Policy Name	Press and Media Policy
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Approved by	Full Council
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1. Introduction

This document has been prepared as a guidance note for Members. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with the Press and Media, as well as personal conduct with regards to use of social media. Tiverton Town Council welcomes enquiries from the Press and Media and recognises that its relationship with the press helps communication with residents. This document has been prepared to ensure that there is continued consistency in the Councils approach and ensure that an appointed person is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council. The aim of the protocol is to ensure that the Council is at all times communicating in a professional and objective manner and establishing effective relationships with the media to publicise events or communicate key information to the community.

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. They are not, however, invited to attend any working group meetings which are informal fact finding sessions only and are not official council meetings.

2. Purpose

The aim of the policy is to ensure that Tiverton Town Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner and reflect, as far as possible, 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 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.

3. Scope

The Press and Media Policy includes:

1. Official Council Releases
2. Councillor Press Releases
3. Freedom of Information Requests
4. Press Protocol
5. Social Media Protocol

4. Policy

1. Official Council Releases

- a. Official Council press releases and statements will be prepared by the Town Clerk in consultation with other Members as required.
- b. The Town Clerk will act as the Councils Press Officer. Any official contact with the media concerning the Councils policies, the decisions it makes and services it provides are to be initiated through the Town Clerk.
- c. 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.
- d. 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. No other officer of the council, unless authorised by the Town Clerk, can speak to or communicate with the media on any matter relating to or affecting the town Council or its business. Any officer may draft a press release; however, they must be issued to the Town Clerk for approval and for submission to the media. Media relations are the responsibility of the Clerk, who can authorise other Officers and/or Chairman to provide factual information to the media.

2. Councillor Press Releases

- a. When Councillors are speaking to or providing written material to the media, they must make it clear in what capacity they are providing the information. For example ;
 - As a Chair of the Council
 - As a Chair of a committee or working group party
 - As an individual (i.e personal opinion/viewpoint)
 - As a spokesperson or press officer for a political party

- b. Individual Councillors can 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 are their own personal views and should be recorded as such.
- c. Such releases 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.
- d. Where a journalist wishes to confirm what was said by an individual councillor during a Council meeting, they will be referred to the Town Clerk.

3. Freedom of Information Requests

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

4. Press Protocol

- a. The Town Clerk is responsible for issuing official press releases on behalf of the Town Council.
- b. Official press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation of any Member(s) quoted in the release.
- c. When the media seeks information on an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be obtained from the Councils solicitor before any response is made.
- d. During election year, from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day following the election, Officers do not normally issue press releases (Purah).
- e. All press releases and other materials are copied and filed for reference by the Town Clerk.

5. Social Media Protocol

- a. Members should be aware of the Councils Code of Conduct and any legal implications if they are posting comments or views on social media about other Members. Responsibility for comments or views shared on social media lie with the Member and as such, care must be taken to be mindful of content shared. If referring to work carried out as a Councillor in the community, use of a disclaimer such as “The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Council”, can be helpful to ensure that personal comments or views shared on social media are not misinterpreted as the views of the Council as a whole or its business. Members are the public face of the Council and careful consideration should be taken to views shared on social media platforms; which include but are not limited to;

Facebook, Instagram, & Twitter. Therefore, Members must be mindful of any content published online into the wider community.

- b. Social Media should not be used as a platform to discuss Council Policy and Members who wish to challenge the Council's procedures must refer their concerns to the Town Clerk in the first instance.
- c. Members are not permitted to share the outcomes of closed working groups or fact-finding sessions on social media.
- d. Be aware of your language and conduct. The rules governing member and staff conduct such as the Acceptable Behaviour and Equality and Diversity policies still apply. Also, as in all publishing, you should be aware of issues such as libel, defamation and slander.
- e. Do not share inappropriate or harmful comments about other Members on social media.
- f. Never share confidential or sensitive information. Be aware of Data Protection and information sharing policies.