



WESTGATE-ON-SEA TOWN COUNCIL

PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

ADOPTED 6th MARCH 2017

This policy applies to all councillors, employees and those acting on the Council's behalf.

Policy Statement

Westgate-on-Sea Town Council welcomes enquiries from the press and media and recognizes that its relationship with the press helps communication with residents. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the Town Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members Code of Conduct and Data Protection Policy. Under the 'Public Bodies and Admissions to Meetings Act 1960' the Press are invited to attend all meetings of Council and its committees. They are not, however, invited to attend any working group meetings which are informal fact finding sessions only and are not official council meetings.

1. Approach

- 1.1 The Council's approach to the media will be:
 - Open, honest & with integrity
 - Proactive
 - Responsive and timely
 - Informative

2. Official Council Releases

- 2.1 Official Council press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk and/or Chairman in consultation with other councillors as required, and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Town Council. They will be non-party political and will normally include a quote from the relevant Councillor(s), usually the Chairman of the Council, Committee Chairman or County/District Councillors.
- 2.2 The general principle is that 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 takes and the services it provides, are to be initiated through the Town Clerk.
- 2.3 Members of the Council who identify a media opportunity should discuss this with the Chairman and Town Clerk who will, in consultation with other Members as appropriate, decide how this will be followed up.

- 2.4 If a Member or 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. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Chairman, in consultation with other councillors where necessary, about the format and content of any response.

3. Councillor Press Releases

- 3.1 It is the prerogative of individual Councillors to make their own statements relating to local issues. Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or to prevent, a councillor from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example, if they are contacted by the press, by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. Councillors must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council policy, are their own personal views and should be recorded as such. However, councillors should always have due regard for the long term reputation of the Council and take care not to misrepresent or bring the Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Council's Code of Conduct.
- 3.2 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 nor telephone number should be included as a point of contact.
- 3.3 Councillors are solely responsible for the writing and distribution of all personal Councillor press releases and any letters to the media.
- 3.4 Where a journalist wishes to find out what was said by individual Councillors during a meeting, the reporter will be referred by the Town Clerk to the Councillor(s) direct. If journalists require any clarification of proceedings at a meeting, they should be referred to the Town Clerk.

5. Freedom of Information Requests

- 5.1 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. If it is believed that valid reasons exist to withhold disclosure then the Town Clerk will consult with Members as necessary to determine an appropriate course of action.

6. Data Protection

- 6.1 Care should be taken when dealing with personal data. The Data Protection Act 1998 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by residents. Likewise, confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports,

papers and private correspondence should not be disclosed to the media.

- 6.2 Officers and councillors must not disclose any personal or confidential information about other officers or councillors. This includes the release of personal information, such as home addresses and telephone numbers, disciplinary procedures and long term sickness absences.

7. Official Council Press Release Protocol

- 7.1 The protocol for official Council press releases is as follows:
- 7.2 The Town Clerk is responsible for issuing official press releases on behalf of the Town Council as a whole.
- 7.3 All official press releases will normally include a quote from the relevant councillor(s) including, as appropriate, quotes from County/District councillors.
- 7.4 All official press releases are to be issued on a template which includes the Town Council logo.
- 7.5 Official press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation of any councillor(s) quoted in the release.
- 7.6 The Town Clerk and Chairman, in consultation with councillors as appropriate, will decide what is newsworthy for official press releases and will make the final decision on whether a press release will be issued, unless otherwise directed by the Council or Committee.
- 7.7 When the media seeks information on 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.
- 7.8 In the years when elections occur, during periods from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day of the election, officers will issue no releases quoting Members. During this time any quotes will be from officers.
- 7.9 The role of officers is to provide support and advice to the Council in its communication activities.
- 7.10 Councillors are reminded that they must not misuse Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes.
- 7.11 All press releases and other materials are to be copied and filed for reference by the Town Clerk.

- 7.12 In general, the Town Clerk will be responsible for interpretation of the Protocol.
- 7.13 This Media Policy may be altered at any time by a Full Meeting of Westgate-on-Sea Town Council.