



Okehampton Town Council welcomes enquiries from the Press and Media and recognises 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 the activities of the Council.

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.

Introduction

The aim of the policy is to ensure that Okehampton Town Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner and reflects the corporate view of the Council.

The policy defines the roles and responsibilities within the Town Council for working with the media and 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.

Keys Aims

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media, including press, radio, television and the internet, are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

It is important that the press has access to the Town Clerk, Councillors and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

It should be noted that whilst the Town Clerk is the Press Officer, the spokesperson for the Council shall ordinarily be the Mayor or in his/her absence, the Deputy Mayor.

1. Official Council Press 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 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;

- 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.

2. Councillor Press Correspondence

- a) 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 is their own personal view and should be recorded as such and Cllr/Councillor should not be used, and neither should the Members council email.
- b) Such releases, political or non-political, should bear no reference whatsoever to the Council or any Officer and must not use the Council logo. The Council address, telephone number, website should not be included as a point of contact.
- c) 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 received under the Freedom of Information Act must be referred to the Town Clerk who will arrange for the request to be satisfied in accordance with the legislation.
- b) Members should be aware that any Council-related information that they hold on personal devices can be the subject of a FOI request.

4. Press Protocol

- a) The Town Clerk is responsible for issuing official Press releases on behalf of the Town Council;
- b) When the Media seeks information on an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then legal advice will be obtained before any response is made;

5. Publicity during Elections

The rules governing publicity change when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself all proactive publicity about candidates and other politicians is halted. This applies to scheduled local, national or European elections.

During this period Council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual Members or groups of Members. This is to make sure that no individual Councillor or political party gains an unfair advantage by appearing in corporate publicity. In these circumstances, where a quote is required this may be provided by the Clerk, in accordance with national guidelines.