



TIDWORTH TOWN COUNCIL

Press and Social Media

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Revision 2	Aug 26	04/08/26	26/109	Title change.
Revision 3				

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Press and Social Media Policy

Responses to the press relating to matters discussed by Tidworth Town Council (hereafter referred to as the Council) shall be dealt with in the first instance by the Town Clerk.

The Chair, and if they are absent the Vice-Chair, are both also authorized to give the views of the Council to the press on any non-confidential subject discussed by the Council. An exception to this being social media (see Section 7 and Appendix A).

Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting. At no time shall the personal views of either members or officers of the Council be given to the press in a way which could be interpreted as a view of the Council as a whole.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 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.

1.2 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

2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, and internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community. Accordingly, 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.

2.2 It is important that the press have access to the Town Clerk/ Council members 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.

3 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

3.2 The Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.



4 CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

4.1 The Town Clerk and Council members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in their dealings with the media.

4.2 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 will be taken.

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

4.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Town Clerk and Council members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the town clerk before any response is made to the media.

4.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Town Clerk, the Council Chair or ~~the~~ chairs of committees are authorised to make contact with the media.

4.6 Statements made by the Council Chair or chairs of committees or the Town Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.

4.7 Other Council members can talk to the media but must ensure **that it is clear that the opinions given are their own** and not necessarily those of the Council.

4.8 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.

5 ATTENDANCES OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

5.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.

5.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace is to be made available.

5.3 Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Town Clerk and the chair of the meeting (see Standing Order 1n)



6 PRESS RELEASES

6.1 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 Council members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

6.2. The Town Clerk or any Council member may draft a press releases, however they must all be issued by the Town Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in Section 3 (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press releases can be monitored.

7 SOCIAL MEDIA

7.1 Access to Social Media accounts (e.g. Facebook), will be given to the Town Clerk and Admin Officers)

7.2 Updates to the page will be restricted to official accounts only and from within the office (no posting with personal accounts). If a councillor wishes to have a post put on the page they are to request that this is done by either the Town Clerk or an Admin Officer.

7.3 Council members are to only reply to comments on 'groups' if necessary and the response must always be professional, spell checked and using appropriate grammar and language. The comment or post must be signed off with their role title.

7.4 If Council members posts regarding a matter that may involve or implicate the Council on their personal social media or within any groups/pages they must adhere to point 4.7 (above).

7.5 Councillors use of Social Media is set out below – Appendix 1.



Appendix A

Social Media Protocol

Introduction

Social media is the term used for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This Protocol covers social media issues over the internet and by email, smart phones, social networking sites, blogging, and tweeting. Social media increases our access to audiences and improves the accessibility of our communications. It enables us to be more active in our relationships with residents, partners and stakeholders, and encourages people to be involved in local decision making, enabling better engagement and feedback, ultimately helping to improve the services we provide.

For the purposes of this Protocol, the term “social media” covers sites and applications including, but not restricted to, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, blogs, discussion forums, and any other sites which may emerge after the creation of this Protocol where the Council could be represented via online participation. The Council acknowledges social media as a useful tool. However, clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media sites to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that their use does not expose the Council to security risks, reputational damage or breaches of the GDPR.

This Protocol provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems or networks. Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, in line with the Council’s Press and Media Policy. They must ensure that their use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council’s reputation and credibility.

Purpose

This Protocol applies to Council members and staff. It gives guidelines on how to use social media, sets out how the Council can effectively manage social media usage and indicates how any risks or pitfalls can be minimised or mitigated.

The following risks have been identified with social media use (but this is not an exhaustive list):

- Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Damage to the Council’s reputation.
- Social engineering attacks (also known as “phishing”).
- Bullying or “trolling”. An internet “troll” is a person who starts arguments or upsets people by posting inflammatory or off-topic messages online with the deliberate intent



of provoking readers into an emotional response, or of otherwise disrupting normal discussion, often for their own amusement.

- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.
- Breach of the Council's Code of Conduct through inappropriate use.
- This Protocol aims to ensure appropriate use of social media, that Council information remains secure and is not compromised through use of social media, and that the Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

Responsibilities

1. Social media must not be used in a way that might lead to a complaint or claims that you have breached the Council's Code of Conduct.
2. It is recommended that you have separate social media profiles for your role as a Council member/staff and for your private life.
3. You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a libel action for which you will be personally liable; no indemnity from the Council will be available.
4. Do not use the Council's logo, or any other Council related material on a personal account or website.
5. Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure that you are confident of the nature of the information you publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without your consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed.
6. Make use of stringent privacy settings if you don't want your social media to be accessed by the press or public. Read the terms of service of any social media site accessed and make sure you understand their confidentiality/privacy settings.
7. Do not disclose personal details such as home addresses and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's GDPR policies.
8. Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are often misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a duty to report these.
9. Do not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or exempt reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985).



10. Copyright laws still apply online. Placing images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.

11. Be aware of your own safety when placing information on the internet and do not publish information which could leave you vulnerable.

Principles for Using Social Media

You should follow these five guiding principles for any social media activities:

Be respectful – set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language.

Be cordial, honest and professional at all times - make sure that you respect people's confidentiality – do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others.

Be credible and consistent – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure that what you say online is consistent with your other communications.

Be honest about who you are – it's important that any accounts or profiles that you set up are clearly and easily identifiable. Be clear about your own personal role.

Be responsive – make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you cannot. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner.

Think twice! Think carefully about all your social media posts. Once published it will be too late to change your mind. Follow these rules and seek further guidance if you need it.