



Press and media policy

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Gov_2022-23PressandmediapolicyV1	Adopted	24 May 2022	May 2023

Introduction

Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council welcomes enquiries from the press and media and recognises that its relationship with the press helps communication with residents. The town council seeks to be as transparent as possible, always cooperating with the press and using the opportunities of the media to publicise events being organised. Members of 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.

Purpose

The aim of the policy is to ensure that Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner and reflect 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 councillors who communicate their thoughts and views through social media channels.

Scope

The press and media policy includes:

- official council news releases
- individual councillor comments to the press
- freedom of information requests
- press protocol
- social media protocol

Official council news releases

Responsibility for preparation and release of all official council news statements rests with the town clerk in consultation with the chair and/or other councillors as required. The town clerk will act as the council's senior 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. Councillors who identify a media opportunity should discuss this with the town clerk who will, in consultation with other councillors as appropriate, decide

how this will be followed up. If a councillor 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.

Councillors' press and media comments

Individual councillors may make their own statements relating to local issues and this policy is not designed to prevent any councillor expressing a personal opinion through the media. Councillors must make it clear however, that any view expressed which differs from council policy is their own personal view and should be recorded as such. Councillor comments which 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. If a journalist wishes to confirm what was said by an individual councillor during a council meeting, they will be referred to the town clerk.

Freedom of information requests

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.

Press protocol

The town clerk is responsible for issuing official press releases on behalf of the town council. Official press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation of any councillor(s) quoted in the release. When the media seeks information on an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then legal advice should be obtained before any response is made.

During election year, from the issue of the notice of election until the day following the election the town council will not normally issue press releases.

All press releases and other materials are copied and filed for reference by the town clerk.

Social media protocol for councillors*

Councillors should be aware of the council's adopted code of conduct, the council's member/officer protocol and any legal implications if they are posting comments or views on social media about individual councillors or employees of council or sharing information

about the council. Social media should not be used as a platform to discuss council policy and councillors who wish to challenge the council's procedures must refer their concerns to the town clerk in the first instance.

Councillors are not permitted to share the outcomes of closed working groups or fact-finding sessions on social media.

Defamation is the act of making a statement about a person or a company that is considered to harm reputation. If the defamatory statement is written (in print or online) it is known as libel. Defamatory statements are most likely to constitute a breach of the adopted code of conduct and the council may refer members to the Standards Committee of Milton Keynes City Council if it becomes aware of any defamatory statements made by members in their capacity as councillors.

*NB Social Media protocol for employees is dealt with in the employee handbook.