



Press and social media policy

Filename and version	Status	Date adopted	Review date
Gov_2023-24PressandmediapolicyV2	Adopted	23 May 2023	28 May 2024

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

1 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.

2 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.

3 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.

4 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 unless necessary.

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

5 Social media

5.1 Engaging with the council on social media

Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council encourages members of the public, local organisations and community groups, members of the press, local councillors and others in our wider community to follow and engage with the council through social media accounts.

We also encourage everyone in our community to share content from our corporate social media accounts with their own social media networks. This is especially important during emergency situations or where sharing timely information is essential.

Councillors may choose to engage with the community on their own 'councillor' social media accounts.

Individuals and organisations are responsible for the content that they choose to post to their social media accounts. This includes content created by others that individuals or organisations choose to report, retweet or share.

5.2 Conduct on social media

The Town Council will treat everyone with courtesy and respect on its social media channels, and we therefore ask for the same in return from those who choose to engage with us.

We ask that council staff and councillors are treated courteously. Council staff and councillors should never be subjected to bullying or other forms of abuse or harassment

Council staff and councillors have the right to carry out their civic duties and work without fear of being attacked and abused. Any behaviour whether that be verbal, physical or in writing, which causes either councillors or staff to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or threatened is unacceptable.

5.3 Reporting a civility and respect-related issue

Council staff and others operating the council's social media accounts will always be mindful of the council's relevant policies, procedures and processes, including the codes of conduct for councillors and officers.

The council will record and report abuse directed at the council. The council may for example create screenshots of comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications and may take further action as appropriate.

Council staff and councillors should not have to put up with abusive or threatening behaviour. When subjected to such behaviour the council reserves the right to enact its relevant social media policies and may for example, delete content, block individuals or report individuals to social media platforms when appropriate to do so.

The council reserves the right to report criminal matters it notices on social media to the police. For instance, hate crime/speech or threats of violence.

Please contact the council if you feel that a councillor, member of staff or user of our social media has failed to act in a civil and respectful way on our social media.

You can contact:

John Fairclough

Support Services Manager, Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council

John.fairclough@bletchleyfennystratford-tc.gov.uk

01908 649469

6 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 via the Monitoring Officer 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 and through in house training.

7 Civility and Respect

In January 2023 Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council pledged to support the Civility and Respect project run by the National Association of Local Councils, the Society of Local Council Clerks and One Voice Wales.

The town council has adopted the Social Media Civility and Respect Guide produced by Breakthrough Communications for and on behalf of the Civility and Respect project. This guide is adopted for use by all councillors and employees in support of the council's commitment to promoting civility and respect..