



# MEDIA POLICY

**DATE IMPLEMENTED:** Full Council **18 July 2023**

**Signed: Mayor**

**Date**

**Date of review**

# **MEDIA POLICY**

## **1. AIMS**

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Town Council (Council) for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media. The Council recognises that appropriate use of the media promotes the efficient operation of Council business.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

- a. To improve residents' understanding of the work of the Council and to provide public information.
- b. To enhance the reputation of the Council by promoting and celebrating success and the achievements of the Council and its partners.
- c. To ensure a co-ordinated response from a single point of communication, namely the Town Clerk (or the Deputy Town Clerk in absence).
- d. To reduce the risk of negative publicity resulting from non-response to enquiries.
- e. To defend the Council from unfounded criticism by ensuring the public are properly informed of all relevant facts.

## **3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Council's policy is to deal with all media enquiries centrally through the Town Clerk. This will ensure that a consistent message is given. Any statement given by the Town Clerk must not be party political.

## **4. MEETING PRIVACY**

The press (and public) is free to attend all meetings, except for any part in Confidential items under the Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960 (Confidential). Councillors and the press are permitted to record meetings unless under Confidential, but it is courteous to inform the Town Clerk if a person wishes to independently record it.

All matters discussed under Confidential during Council Meetings, must remain confidential and should not be leaked in any form to the media. If notes are taken during Confidential these should be left behind.

Disciplinary action will be considered if Councillors or staff are found to have "leaked" any confidential information.

## **5. PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION INTERVIEWS**

Councillors and staff may be approached by the media or may wish to comment through them. Councillors and staff dealing with the media, by using their own social media accounts, must remember that they are legally responsible for the content of any messages or comments. Also, that the requirements and principles associated with the adopted Code of Conduct shall remain in force for Councillors.

Councillors and staff must not make public representation in the name of the Council unless authorised.

Councillors and staff have the right to express personal opinions on local issues using the media, but they should make it clear that such comments do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Council. Councillors and staff should be mindful to ensure that they do not bring the Council into disrepute. Be aware that, in practice, any remarks made in the media by Councillors or staff may be taken as an official statement of the Council.

If a Councillor or member of staff is unaware of Council policy on any matter, they should seek the advice of the Town Clerk.

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

## **6. MANAGEMENT OF NEGATIVE PUBLICITY**

It is important that this is done well and points adhered to. Inaccurate reporting in the media should be discussed by the Town Clerk and a minimum of two Councillors who shall be The Mayor and Deputy Mayor (along with those Councillors invited to give their views where appropriate) before a course of action is decided on. Any press statement will be written by the Town Clerk and approved by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

## **7. SOCIAL MEDIA**

Downham Market Town Council has its own Facebook page. Any official information or statements regarding the Council will be posted on that page and only by administrative employee's of the Council.

In addition, the facility will be used to provide other information specifically agreed by the Council for release on the Council's Facebook page, or information deemed appropriate by the Town Clerk for the public.

Council staff will not engage in commenting on Facebook posts. Facebook will be used as a notification method not as a form of 2-way communication.

The use of social media should not replace other forms of communication, but should be complementary to it.

Councillors and staff should remember that all social media sites are a public forum and that they are personally responsible for the content published. It must be made clear by Councillors that any comments or statements they make (unless quoting Council policy) are their own personal views and not that of the Council. This being the case, they should not use the prefix Councillor.

No defamatory, derogatory or offensive comments should be posted on the internet about colleagues or matters which have come in front of the Council. Any employee acting in contravention of this protocol may be subject to misconduct/disciplinary action and Councillors to a breach of the Code of Conduct.

## **8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSITY**

These must be respected and adhered to at all times, when dealing with any form of media. The Council shall not publish any material which in whole, or in part, appears to be designed to support a political party.

## **9. PRESS CONFERENCES**

Can be convened in the event of a major incident or an emergency in the town. All press conferences held need to be pre-planned so that press statements can be prepared. All press conferences should be run to an agreed framework and lead by the Town Clerk.

**END**