

Draft Media Policy

Author: Louise Harrison, Town Clerk, Ferndown Town Council, 24 March 2021.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework in which the communications work of Ferndown Town Council (Council) can be undertaken in a consistent, professional and transparent manner.

2. Context

Council recognises the important role the media play in informing the public and helping Council communicate with the public and other stakeholders.

Everyone who works for, or on behalf of the Council – officers, members, volunteers, contractors – have a role in protecting its reputation. Media communications are one tool to present decisions, services and policies effectively and to protect the Council's reputation.

Communications with the media can be an important part of a Member's or an Officer's role. In any media contact, Member's and the Town Clerk should always have regard to the reputation of the Town Council. Generally, Members provide comments and views and the Town Clerk provides factual information. This factual information may well include explaining the Town Council's policy on a particular issue. If any Member is unsure about the facts of any issue he/she should contact the Town Clerk or other Officer to do so. Members should avoid being seen to anticipate decisions of the Town Council or its Committees and should not criticise the Town Clerk or any member of the Town Council staff in the media.

When the Town Clerk is approached by the media he/she will provide factual information on matters of public record. Where the media are seeking a comment on Town Council policy or ask a question, the Town Clerk will liaise with the Chairman (and the Chairman of the appropriate Committee) in formulating a response (if the Town Clerk is unavailable, his/her delegated deputy/assistant will liaise and respond to the media). The Town Clerk and his/her delegated deputy/assistant are the only Town Council Officers empowered to speak to the media on behalf of the Town Council.

Members are reminded of their obligations under Standing Orders and Council's Code of Conduct regarding any limitations in relation to their conduct and activities.

3. Principles

Underpinning this Policy is the general principle, enshrined in government legislation, that the Council will not involve itself in any publicity which appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. In addition Council's communications will comply with relevant legal requirements (and conform to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity, issued by the Secretary of State in March 2011 which highlights factors to be borne in mind when taking decisions on publicity (see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1878324.pdf>) paragraphs 16 and 34 are particularly relevant:

16 Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities

should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy. It is acceptable for local authority publicity to correct erroneous material which has been published by other parties, despite the fact that the material being corrected may have been published without intention of influencing the public's opinions about the policies of the authority. Such publicity should seek to explain the facts in an objective manner.

34 During the period between notice of an election and the election itself, local authorities should not publish any publicity on controversial issues of report views or proposals in such a way that identifies them with any individual members or groups of members. Publicity relating to individuals involved directly in the election should not be published by local authorities during this period unless expressly authorized by or under statute. It is permissible for local authorities to publish factual information which identifies the named, wards and parties of candidates at elections.

4. Media Liaison

Officers should be aware of journalists' tight publication deadlines and endeavour to meet these. With instant online news fast responses are necessary. All news /press releases are subject to sign off by the Town Clerk as Proper Officer for Council.

5. Quotations

Quotations from Members purporting to speak on behalf of the Council or officers should meet the requirements of the Code of Conduct of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. They should be factual, non-political and objective. Quotations should be concise and appropriate to the context of the news release.

6. Comment on Confidential Reports

Reports made in Exempt Business contain confidential information meeting the criteria of Local Government Act 1972 schedule 12A. Any discussions undertaken within the meeting regarding the report are strictly confidential and MUST NOT be disclosed.

7. Individual Members

The principal of even-handedness enshrined in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (March 2011) has the effect that publicity about the Council does not seek to affect support for a single councillor or group. The Code does however recognise that at times it is acceptable to associate publicity with a single member of the Council, where, for example one Member has been the face at a particular campaign.

When speaking to the media, Members must make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the Town Council, and should indicate in what capacity they are speaking, e.g. in a personal capacity, on behalf of their political group, or as the Chairman of a Committee. It may be useful to advise the Town Clerk of the discussion.