

Lowestoft Town Council

Media Policy

Introduction

This policy applies on those occasions when the Town Council, as a body corporate, issues a press release or information to factually clarify/correct comments published in the media or is asked for a statement, a comment or information from the media.

Media is defined as any activity “reporting” on the Town Council.

This policy does not, and is not intended to, apply when individual Councillors are contacted directly by the media for a personal comment/statement nor when individual Councillors contact the media with a personal statement. In such cases it should be made clear that it is the individual’s own opinion/comment, not that of the Town Council.

Policy Statement

Lowestoft Town Council wishes to be open and transparent in the way it considers information and takes decisions. As a Town Council, we will therefore proactively seek opportunities to publish information about our activities with the intention of raising awareness about what the Town Council is doing.

Procedures

The Town Clerk is permitted to issue routine communications with the media on behalf of the Council on routine matters and in emergencies as the Proper Officer and accountable staff member.

Other matters, where reasonably possible, will be dealt with in line with the policy below

When the Chair is unavailable the Vice Chair will take on any of the specified tasks and responsibilities.

Any relevant publicity will comply with the latest version of the Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity.

Requests from the Media

All staff should make the Town Clerk aware of all approaches from the media for interviews, statements or information. The Town Clerk (or other member of staff in the absence of the Clerk) and Chair should ensure that the other is advised of any approaches made to them.

Any request from the media will be discussed by the Town Clerk and Chair and the decision will be made who will be the most appropriate person to make the response on behalf of the Town Council.

In cases where the response is being made by someone other than the Town Clerk or Chair, prior to its release, the Chair and Town Clerk should be made aware of and agree at least the broad content of any response.

Response to Media Articles, published letters, on-line comments, tweets, facebook postings etc

Every situation must be carefully assessed and in many cases a corporate response will not be appropriate.

All councillors and staff seeing an article / item which affects the Council's interests and/or which might require a corporate response should inform the Chair and the Town Clerk.

In assessing whether or not a corporate response is appropriate the following will be considered:

- Is the article / item in question factually accurate?
- Is the article / item expressing a personal view – and if so is that clearly stated?
- Would further discussion on the subject be constructive?

Any potential corporate response will be discussed by the Town Clerk and the Chair for a decision on the most appropriate person to make the response on behalf of the Town Council.

Prior to its release the Chair and Town Clerk should be made aware of the broad content of any corporate response where they were not involved in its preparation.

Media Releases

The Town Clerk, Chair and Committee Chairs will identify issues and stories that have the potential to be interest to the public.

The Town Clerk will draft corporate media releases consulting with the Chair and Committee Chairs or any individual Councillor as appropriate.

An information copy of the final corporate media release will be sent to the Chair and any Councillor who is quoted in the text.

Corporate media releases will be sent to relevant media outlets by the Clerk, taking into account the likely level of interest (local or national).

A copy of the corporate media release will be posted on the Town Council's website.

A copy of the corporate media release will be sent to Councillors and staff.

Media Training

Opportunities will be made for councillors and the Town Clerk to attend training in dealing with the media.

Decision Making

In relation to the Town Council's Standing Orders, this policy is the relevant Media Policy.

Any decision about the content of corporate media releases or information to be supplied to the media or any response to any media item will be taken by the Town Clerk, following consultation with the Chair where appropriate. (This delegation complies with the legislative restriction that an individual Councillor cannot make a decision on behalf of the Council.)

Social Media Policy

Any social media accounts developed and managed by Lowestoft Town Council (the Town Council) will be used to help keep local residents, businesses, interested parties and visitors to the Town informed of important Town Council related news, events and updates.

Any such accounts will be developed and managed by the Town Clerk on behalf of the Town Council who will seek to ensure that any legal obligations or best practice guidelines are adhered to.

Members of the public can expect that any social media presence developed and managed by the Council will include some or all of the following:

- Alerts such as news, publications, events, publicity campaigns, Council/Committee meetings and new content on our other digital channels
- Invitations to provide feedback on specific issues on which we are consulting
- Information about or from partners or other local groups about what they're doing
- Occasional live coverage of events
- Information about local emergency situations, where these are severe and disruptive to the community, where possible

The Town Council may follow or subscribe to social media accounts from other users. This does not imply endorsement of any kind.

General guidelines

Any social media accounts will be updated and monitored during working hours only and will be non-political. Political posts will be removed and the Town Council will not engage on issues of party politics at any time.

Inappropriate language or anything that might contravene libel, defamation, copyright or data protection laws will be removed.

Online social media sites may occasionally be unavailable and the Town Council accepts no responsibility for lack of service.

Feedback and ideas are welcomed from all sections of the community and the Town Council will endeavour to join the conversation where possible. However, it may not be possible to reply individually to all messages.

Emerging themes or helpful suggestions will be passed to the relevant persons.