



BISHOP'S CASTLE TOWN COUNCIL PRESS POLICY

This includes press, radio, television and electronic communication.

1. Introduction

How the Council communicates and how the communication is received and perceived is important to the reputation of the Council. If it is not managed in a clear and effective way, confusion can arise over who is talking to whom, about what and on whose behalf. As well as reflecting poorly on the Council, poor communication may create tension within the Council.

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and welcomes opportunities for effective communications through the local media.

This policy defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media to manage the Council's reputation in a positive and corporate way.

The media are important channels to convey information to the community; thereby increasing public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

Nothing in this policy is designed to prevent individual members from expressing their views to the media PROVIDING it is made clear that these are private views and not those of the Council as a whole. Members may say that they disagree with a Council decision, but he or she is bound by a collective decision.

Councillors must treat anything said in a closed session of a meeting or working parties which need to report back to full council as confidential and not divulge either as a Councillor or in any other capacity. Councillors should take care that they make no comments that bring themselves or the Council into disrepute or make comments that may be defamatory or lead to any other legal action.

2. The Legal Framework

The Council's media relationships must be consistent with the provisions of:

- The law governing communications set out in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988
- The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Practice
- The Code of Conduct for Councillors as adopted by the Council
- The Council's Standing Orders

In dealing with media, the Clerk and members should always be aware of the need to comply with data protection requirements and to observe confidentiality.

The Council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

3. Pro-Active Media Relations

The Council will supply copies of agendas for monthly meetings to the local newspapers at least three clear days before the date of the meeting; and agendas and minutes to all other media groups on request.

The local media are encouraged to attend Council meetings. Seating and workspace will be made available for them.

The Clerk will act as the Council's Media Officer and will seek opportunities to engage with the local media to provide information on Council decisions, policies and activities or to respond to negative publicity.

The Clerk will be responsible for issuing all Council Media Releases.

Prior to issue, the Clerk will clear all releases with the Mayor.

In all appropriate cases, media releases should include a quote from the Mayor or a relevant Councillor, which is consistent with Council decisions and policy.

In all appropriate cases the Mayor or an appropriate Councillor will act as the Council's spokesperson with the broadcast media.

4. Re-Active Media Relations

If contacted directly by the media, Councillors should NOT give an immediate response UNLESS they wish to do so in a personal capacity and in this is made clear. In this case the person who has contacted them must be referred to the Clerk.

Where a response is being sought from someone acting as a spokesperson for the Council, the Clerk should be advised as soon as possible of who is asking what and the timescale for a response. The Clerk will then advise on the Council's response, liaising with the Mayor or other Councillors as appropriate.

In the interests of accurate reporting, Council responses should be issued by the Clerk in writing.

The Clerk will monitor references to the Council in the local media and seek opportunities to correct any inaccuracies and respond to negative publicity.