

Llangollen Town Council.

Title:	Press and Media Policy.
Purpose:	To detail the Council's policies and procedures in respect the press and media including social media.
Owner:	Town Clerk.
Approved by:	Town Council.
Date:	2015.
Version Number:	1.0
Status:	Draft
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Next review date:	2017

1.0 Introduction.

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to guide both Councillors and Officers of the Council in their relations with the press and media (including social media) in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.
- 1.2 This policy does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the press and media.
- 1.3 Above everything else, a Councillor must observe the Town Council's Code of Conduct whenever he/she conducts the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which he/she has been elected/appointed or acts as a representative of the authority.

2.0 Town Clerk.

- 2.1 The Town Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the press and media and to issue press statements on behalf of the Town Council. All communications made by the Town Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Town Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council.
- 2.1 No other officer or Member of the Council, unless authorised by the Town Clerk, is permitted to speak or communicate with the press and media on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

3.0 Members of the Council

- 3.1 A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on Council or Committee agendas or at any other private briefing.
- 3.2 A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of Llangollen Town Council.

- 3.3 Councillors must comply with equality laws contained within the Equality Act 2010, associated legislation. They must not publish anything that might be considered sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith.
- 3.4 When speaking or providing written material to the press and media, Members should make clear the capacity, in which they are providing the information. For example: -
- as Mayor
 - as Chairman of a Committee
 - as an individual (i.e. letter to press for publication)
 - as spokesperson or as Press Officer for a political party
- 3.5 Never use the prefix “Councillor” when writing to the press, or posting on social media, as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy. A copy of any written material sent to the press and media by a Member, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Town Clerk for approval prior to publication.
- 3.6 Take particular care if the press or media approach you for comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure about any particular policy, simply state “no comment” and ask the press to contact the Council Offices.
- 3.7 Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.
- 3.8 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public, before the press or on social media.
- 3.9 Councillors using social media should make use of stringent privacy settings if they do not wish them to be accessed by the press and public. In any biography where the Councillor is identified as a Councillor, the account should state that the views are those of the Councillor in question and may not represent the views of the Council. Use of the Council’s logo on a personal account or website should only occur with the written permission of the Town Clerk.
- 3.10 Councillors are personally responsible for the content which they publish on any form of social media. Publishing – or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) – an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may amount to libel. Councillors must treat others with respect, avoid personal attacks and not make disrespectful, rude or offensive comments.
- 3.11 Councillors must be aware of their own safety when placing information on the internet and should not publish information which could give details which could leave them vulnerable.

3.12 Any Councillor receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to Town Clerk and/or the police.

4.0 Dealing with the Press

4.1 When dealing with the Press verbally, members and officers should be aware of the following:

- Be informed and certain of all your facts.
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Town Council that you are aware what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy.
- Be calm.
- Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.

4.2 Councillors and officers not used to dealing with the press may be surprised when they see that statements made in all innocence look very different in print than they did when they were spoken. It is advantageous to write out a statement or position beforehand.

5.0 Meetings of Council and Committees

5.1 Copies of agendas and reports sent to Members for meetings of the Council or its Committees will be e-mailed to the press. Facilities will be provided at meetings for the press to take notes of the proceedings. As provided in the Council's Standing Orders both the press and public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion.

6.0 Press Releases

6.1 All press releases made on behalf of the Town Council will be prepared or overseen by the Town Clerk following any meetings of Committees, Sub-Committees, Working and Steering Groups.

6.2 The Town Clerk, in consultation with the Town Mayor, is also authorised to publish press releases on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a council meeting.

7.0 Town Council Social Media sites

8.1 The Town Clerk will have control of any social media sites set up for the Council as a corporate body. It is recommended that in the case of Facebook and similar sites, Councillors wishing to keep their personal life and official capacities separate should create separate accounts.

9.0 **Elections.**

9.1 In the six week run up to a local election Councillors who, blog or use social networking sites in connection with their work should take extra care during this period and comply with the following guidance:

- Please explain that you are governed by purdah in a period before an election. It may be helpful to tweet or post a link to an explanation of purdah for guidance.
- Do not tweet, post or share updates from political parties, politicians or political opinion.
- Do not tweet or post on matters which are politically controversial;
- Do not tweet, post or share images of political parties, politicians or subjects which are politically controversial;
- Do not stage a significant online campaign unless it can be demonstrated that this is both necessary and non-political;
- Monitor your page and delete any content which is politically controversial with an explanation that this has been done because of the rules that govern purdah linking to this advice;

9.2 The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature - and this includes web advertising. There are additional requirements, such as imprint standards, for materials which can be downloaded from a website. Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk. Accounts may need to be closed for a defined period before local and national elections in order to comply with legislation which affects local authorities.

9.2 Political blogs cannot be linked from the Council's website and the Council will not promote Councillors' Twitter accounts during the election purdah period.

10.0 **Breaches of this Policy.**

10.1 Failure to comply with this policy may result in a formal complaint being made to the Monitoring Officer to be dealt with under the Council's Standards Procedures.

10.2 Other violations of this policy, such as breaching the Data Protection Act 1988, could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved. The Council reserves the right to request the closure of any applications or removal of any content published by Councillors deemed inappropriate or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council, or put it at risk of legal action.

