

TENBURY TOWN COUNCIL



PRESS, MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

PRESS AND MEDIA

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Tenbury Town Council (“the Council”) is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to set out the procedure for dealing with media enquiries and for making use of social media.
- 1.3 The Town Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and understands it plays an important role in the democratic process. Both the media and Social Media can be useful for promoting the Town Council and encouraging community engagement.
- 1.4 The ‘media’ can be anything related to written periodicals, newspapers, television and audio radio transmissions. Social Media relates to social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, podcasts, blogs and discussion forums.

2.0 LEGAL POSITION

- 2.1 This policy is subject to the Council’s various statutory obligations such as those set out in:
 - Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
 - Local Government Act 1972 (the holding of parish council meetings)
 - Local Government Act 1986 (rules on local authority publicity)
 - Freedom of Information Act 2000
 - Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
 - The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014
 - The Council’s Standing Orders
- 2.2 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011) includes the following relevant information:

Publicity by local authorities should:

- Be lawful
- Be cost effective
- Be objective
- Be even-handed
- Be appropriate
- Have regard to equality and diversity
- Be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

- 2.3 The Council, its Councillors and employees must always consider the long-term reputation of the Council when dealing with the media. Information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law must not be disclosed. Some but not all relevant obligations that Councillors are subject to are contained in the Members' Code of Conduct, a copy of which can be assessed via the Council's website.

3.0 MEETINGS

- 3.1 All meetings are open to the public, unless an item of discussion relates to a confidential matter when the public and press will be asked to leave. During the allocated time for public participation, the media/public may speak and ask questions on items on the agenda. Public participation is regulated by the Council's Standing Orders.

- 3.2 The Town Council's Standing Order 3n relates to the presence of the press in meetings:

3(n) The press shall be provided with reasonable facilities for the taking of their report of all or part of a meeting at which they are entitled to be present.

- 3.3 The Town Council's Standing Orders 3l and 3m relate to the recording of meetings by the general public:

3(l) A person who attends a meeting is permitted to report on the meeting whilst the meeting is open to the public. To "report" means to film, photograph, make an audio recording of meeting proceedings, use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear the meeting as it takes place or later or to report or to provide an oral or written commentary about the meeting so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later to persons not present.

3(m) A person present at a meeting may not provide an oral report or oral commentary about a meeting as it takes place without permission.

- 3.4 Recording of a meeting following the exclusion of the public to allow for the discussion of confidential matters is not allowed. (The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014).

4.0 INTERVIEWS, STATEMENTS AND ARTICLES

- 4.1 The media shall contact the Town Clerk if they want to:

- (i) Interview Councillors or staff about its business decisions and actions and/or
- (ii) Obtain a verbal or written statement from the Council about its decisions and actions.

- 4.2 Any verbal or written statement given by the Town Clerk to the media represent the corporate position and views of the Council, not the individual views of its Councillors or employees held in their official capacity.
- 4.3 The intention of media to interview Councillors or employees in their official capacity about the Council's business, decisions and actions must be circulated to all Members of the Council prior to any such interview. Questions by the media about the personal views of the Councillors or employees in their private capacity will not be acceptable. Councillors and staff cannot communicate their personal views about the Council's business, decisions and actions, other than the views they hold in their official capacity. Councillors and staff are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council, or to damage the reputation of others in the Council or the Council itself.
- 4.4 The Council's Town Clerk may contact the media if the Council wants to give an interview, provide a verbal report or written statement to the media or publish an article using the media about its business, decisions and actions.
- 4.5 Councillors and staff, other than the Town Clerk in accordance with paragraph 4.1 above, cannot in their official capacity, provide verbal or written statements to the media, or write articles for publication using the media about the Council's business decisions and actions without the Council's prior knowledge.
- 4.6 Councillors or staff cannot communicate their personal views whilst acting in their official capacity, thus Councillors are not permitted to use their title 'Councillor' and staff are not permitted to use their job title when communicating in a private capacity.
- 4.7 Members should take particular care if the press or media approach them for comment on a controversial subject and should not be led into stating something they did not really mean to say. If unsure about any policy, a "no comment" statement will suffice. The press should then be asked to contact the Town Clerk for further response
- 4.8 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 they relate to matters of Council business or not. 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.
- 4.9 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.
- 4.10 Prior to any press or media interview the interviewer will be given a copy of this policy.

SOCIAL MEDIA & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The use of digital and social media and electronic communication provides a way for the Town Council to interact in a way that improves the communication both within the Council and between the Council and the residents, businesses and agencies it works and serves.
- 1.2 The Council currently has a website and a Facebook page, and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.
- 1.3 The Council Facebook page is intended to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the Town and promote the community positively.
- 1.4 The following risks are identified with the use of Social Media:
- Damage to the Council's reputation
 - Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation
 - Disclosure of confidential information/breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal data
 - Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection/social engineering attacks (sometimes known as 'phishing')
 - Potential effect on ICT network performance
 - Bullying or witch-hunting

2.0 COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL

- 2.1 Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:
- Be civil, tasteful and relevant
 - Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offence
 - Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere for which we do not own the copyright unless quoting the source

- Not contain any personal information
- Will be moderated by the Town Clerk
- Remain politically neutral
- No confidential or sensitive information will be shared, even in private forums
- No political advertising will be allowed.

2.2 If the Council's Facebook page is opened up to discussion, then to ensure that all discussions on the page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, participants will be asked to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated
- Differing opinions and discussions of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council Members or staff will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to sell products.

2.3 The site is not monitored 24/7 and it is not always possible to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Participants are asked to exclude any personal or private information in social media posts to the Town Council.

2.4 Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Town Clerk and/or Members of the Council by emailing.

2.5 We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content

- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Information that is in breach of Council policy or the law.

2.6 The Council's response to any communications received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given the limited resources available.

2.7 Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. The Council may post a statement that "*A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed.*" If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

3.0 EMPLOYEE AND COUNCILLOR GUIDANCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

3.1 The following applies to all employees and Councillors regardless of whether Council or personal equipment is used or when **personal social media accounts** are access or postings are made:

- Any views stated are personal views
- Ultimately, you must comply with your responsibilities under the Council's Code of Conduct and may be required to remove social media postings that are deemed to be in breach of this policy
- Discussing the Council, work, clients, partner organisations or people you work with on social networks should not be considered private, even in a forum with restricted access (such as on someone's Facebook wall). It is not the same as having an offline discussion among friends or a one-to-one email conversation. Social networks are designed to make sharing as easy as possible, so anything you say may be circulated to a wider audience and could be brought to the attention of Council colleagues, Councillors and customers.

- You are personally responsible for anything you post online
 - You should not do or say anything that may harm the reputation of the Council or undermine your role as a representative of the Council
 - You should always show proper consideration for the privacy of the people you work with.
- 3.2 Be mindful that any online activities/comments made in the public domain, must be compatible with their position within the Council, and safeguard yourself in a professional capacity.
 - 3.3 Protect your own privacy. Ensure that your social network account does not compromise your professional position, ensure that your privacy settings are correct.
 - 3.4 Do not discuss work-related issues online. Even when anonymised, these are likely to be inappropriate. In addition, doing this in the presence of others may be deemed as bullying and/or harassment.
 - 3.5 Do not under any circumstances accept friend requests from a person if you believe it may conflict with your employment/position.
 - 3.6 Be aware that other users may access your profile and if they find information and/or images it contains offensive, make a complaint about you to the Council.
 - 3.7 Ensure that any comments and/or images cannot be deemed defamatory, libellous or in breach of copyright legislation.
 - 3.8 You can take action if you find yourself the target of complaints or abuse on social networking sites. Most sites will include mechanisms to report abusive activity and provide support for users who are subject to abuse by others.
 - 3.9 If you do find inappropriate references and/or images of you posted by a 'friend' online you should contact them and the site to have the material removed.
 - 3.10 Do not bring the Council into disrepute for example by criticising, making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations/groups or posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
 - 3.11 Do not breach confidentiality by referring to confidential information about an individual or the Council. It is vital that all privileged information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of some information to which they have access and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures.

- 3.12 Do not do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, bullying or harassment of, any individual or group of individuals, and in contravention to the Council's procedures.
- 3.13 Do not contravene Council policy for example The Code of Conduct.

4.0 TOWN COUNCIL WEBSITE

- 4.1 In line with the Freedom of Information and Publication Scheme, we may direct those contacting the Council for information to the Town Council's website or forward a question to a Councillor for consideration. We may not respond to every comment received particularly if we are expiring a heavy workload.

5.0 TOWN COUNCIL EMAILS

- 5.1 The Officers of the Council and all Councillors have their own Town Council email addresses.
- 5.2 The office email accounts are monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday and we aim to reply to all questions as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.
- 5.3 Email addresses should only be used for official Council business.
- 5.4 The Town Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to Members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will normally come from the Town Clerk and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Town Clerk.
- 5.5 All new emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a Data Consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.
- 5.6 Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and copied to the Town Clerk. Any emails copied to the Town Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.
- 5.7 Do not forward personal information onto other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookies identifiers.
- 5.8 Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipient on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that unnecessary email trails have been removed.
- 5.9 When sending a message to several recipients at the same time avoid listing individuals email addresses where they can be seen by others. If appropriate, email yourself and BCC recipients.

- 5.10 Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations in all their work on behalf of the Council.
- 5.11 It is vital that all privileged information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information to which they receive and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as breach of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Date of next Review: May 2020