



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

PRESS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.
- 1.2 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
- 2.2 It is important that the press have access to the Clerk and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.
- 2.3 The Town Council welcomes enquiries from the press and media and recognises its relationships with the press helps communication with residents. The Council seeks to be as transparent as possible, cooperating at all times with the press and using the opportunities of the media to publicise events being organised.
- 2.4 The press is permitted to attend all meetings of the Council and its committees, unless excluded under the Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960. They are not, however, invited to attend informal Council meetings which are fact finding sessions only and are not scheduled official Council meetings.

3. Legal Framework

- 3.1 The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988, The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Transparency Code 2015, as a minimum. The Council must also have regard to the government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 3.2 The Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

4. Press protocol

- 4.1 The Town Clerk is responsible for issuing official press releases on behalf of the Town Council.

- 4.2 When the media seeks information on an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice will be obtained from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.
- 4.3 All press releases and other materials are filed for reference by the Town Clerk.
- 4.4 During an election year, from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day following election (purdah), Officers will not normally issue press releases.
- 4.5 Confidential documents, reports, papers, and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who is responsible and appropriate action taken.
- 4.6 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.
- 4.7 Should a Member decide to submit a letter to the press on any subject, they should not use the term 'Town Councillor' (or other role within the Council), or give the impression, directly or implied, that they are writing on behalf of the Council.

5. Press releases

- 5.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- 5.2 All press releases must be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section 3 (legal framework) are adhered to, that there is a consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.
- 5.3 The Town Clerk will act as the Council's Press Officer. Any official contact with the media concerning the Council's policies, the decisions it makes and services it provides are to be initiated through the Town Clerk.
- 5.4 Members who identify a media opportunity should discuss this with the Town Clerk who will, in consultation with other Members as appropriate, decide how this will be followed up.
- 5.5 If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Town Council, it should be referred to the Town Clerk

6. Councillor press correspondence

- 6.1 Individual councillors can make their own statements relating to local issues and this policy is not designed to prevent any Member expressing a personal opinion through the media. Members must make it clear however, that any view expressed which differs from Council policy, are their own personal views and should be recorded as such.

6.2 Such releases, should bear no reference whatsoever to the Council or any Officer and must not use the Council logo. Neither the Council address, telephone number, website nor Facebook page should be included as a point of contact.

6.3 Where a journalist wishes to confirm what was said by an individual councillor during a Council meeting, they will be referred to the Town Clerk.

7. Freedom of Information requests

7.1 All requests received under the Freedom of Information Act must be referred to the Town Clerk who will arrange for the request to be satisfied in accordance with the legislation.

Revision History:

Date Adopted	February 2019	
Date reviewed	March 2024	Updated and Member Personal Devices 7.2 removed