



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

Version 2.0

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and governs 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 impose strict rules. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise in dealing with the media.
- 1.3 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, which can only be achieved through effective two-way communication. The media, including press, radio, television and online, are important in conveying information to the community. The Council will therefore maintain positive, constructive media relations to increase public awareness of its services and facilities and to explain its policies and priorities.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all Members of the Council, the Town Clerk, and all Officers and employees of the Council. It applies to all contact with the press and media, whether initiated by the Council or by the media.
- 2.2 This policy covers the Council's relationship with external press and media. The Council's own communication channels, including its website and social media accounts, are governed by the Social Media Policy 2025, which should be read alongside this policy.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 "The media" means press, radio, television, online and other channels through which information is reported to the public, and journalists and reporters acting on their behalf.
- 3.2 "Press Officer" means the Town Clerk, who acts as the Council's single point of contact for the media.
- 3.3 "Pre-election period" means the period from the publication of the Notice of Election until the day after the relevant election, during which restrictions apply to council publicity. This was formerly referred to as "purdah".

4. Legal Framework

- 4.1 The law governing communications by local authorities includes the Local Government Act 1986, the Local Government Act 1988, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, as a minimum. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 4.2 The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 give the press and public the right to film, photograph, record and report on meetings of the Council and its committees that are open to the public. The Council supports this right (see section 6).



- 4.3 The Council must handle personal data in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 (as amended by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025). Where a media enquiry or Freedom of Information request involves personal data, the Council will apply the relevant exemptions, including section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and will act in line with its privacy notice.
- 4.4 The Council's adopted Standing Orders must be always adhered to.

5. Press Protocol

- 5.1 The Town Clerk acts as the Council's Press Officer and is responsible for issuing official press releases on behalf of the Council. Any official contact with the media concerning the Council's policies, decisions or services must be initiated through the Town Clerk.
- 5.2 If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Council, it must be referred to the Town Clerk.
- 5.3 When the media seeks information on an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, advice will be obtained from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.
- 5.4 All press releases and related materials are filed for reference by the Town Clerk.
- 5.5 During the pre-election period, Officers will not normally issue press releases, save where necessary for the ordinary business of the Council and consistent with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 5.6 Confidential documents, reports, papers and private correspondence must not be disclosed to the media. If such a disclosure occurs, an investigation will take place to establish who is responsible and appropriate action will be taken. For Officers, this will be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedure; for Members, under the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 5.7 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter to the press, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone, correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks, and all such correspondence must come from the Town Clerk.

6. Attendance, Filming and Recording at Meetings

- 6.1 The press and public are permitted to attend all meetings of the Council and its committees, except where they are excluded by resolution under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 for confidential or exempt business.
- 6.2 In accordance with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, the press and public may film, photograph, audio-record and report on any part of a meeting that is open to them. Those wishing to do so are asked to advise the Town Clerk in advance where practicable, and to do so in a way that does not disrupt the meeting. Recording must stop for any item from which the press and public are excluded.
- 6.3 The press is not invited to attend informal sessions which are fact-finding only and are not scheduled official meetings of the Council.



7. Press Releases

- 7.1 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 an issue. The Town Clerk and Members should look for opportunities where issuing a press release may be beneficial.
- 7.2 All press releases must be issued by the Town Clerk to ensure that the legal framework in section 4 is adhered to, that there is consistency of style, and that the use of press releases can be monitored.
- 7.3 Members who identify a media opportunity should discuss it with the Town Clerk, who will, in consultation with other Members as appropriate, decide how it is to be followed up.

8. Members' Press Correspondence

- 8.1 Individual Members may make their own statements relating to local issues. This policy is not designed to prevent any Member expressing a personal opinion through the media. Members must make clear that any view which differs from Council policy is their own personal view, and it should be recorded as such.
- 8.2 When writing or speaking in a personal capacity, a Member should not use the term "Town Councillor" (or another Council role) in a way that gives the impression, directly or by implication, that they are writing on behalf of the Council. Such statements must bear no reference to the Council or any Officer, must not use the Council logo, and must not give the Council's address, telephone number, website or social media accounts as a point of contact.
- 8.3 Where a journalist wishes to confirm what was said by an individual Member during a Council meeting, they will be referred to the Town Clerk.
- 8.4 Members' use of social media in connection with their role is governed by the Social Media Policy 2025 and the Members' Code of Conduct.

9. Freedom of Information Requests

- 9.1 All requests received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 must be referred to the Town Clerk, who will arrange for the request to be handled in accordance with the legislation and any applicable exemptions.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

- 10.1 The Town Clerk acts as Press Officer, is the single point of contact for the media, issues all press releases, and maintains the record of media materials.
- 10.2 Members refer media enquiries to the Town Clerk, distinguish personal views from Council policy, and comply with the Code of Conduct in all dealings with the media.
- 10.3 Officers and employees refer all media enquiries to the Town Clerk and do not issue statements to the media on the Council's behalf.



11. Compliance

- 11.1 A breach of this policy by an Officer may be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedure. A breach by a Member may be referred under the Members' Code of Conduct to Central Bedfordshire Council's Monitoring Officer.

12. Monitoring and Review

- 12.1 This policy is owned by the Governance & Resources Committee. The Town Clerk is responsible for its day-to-day operation.
- 12.2 This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if there is a relevant change in legislation or practice.

13. Related Documents and Legislation

Related Council policies and documents:

- Social Media Policy 2025
- Filming at Council Meetings Policy 2026
- Standing Orders
- Publication Scheme and Freedom of Information arrangements
- Privacy Notice
- Members' Code of Conduct
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy

Legislation and guidance:

- Local Government Act 1986 and Local Government Act 1988
- Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Local Government Transparency Code 2015
- Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014
- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018
- Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (DUAA)
- Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity

Version History

Version No	Date Approved/ Reviewed	Author/ Owner	Summary of Changes	Responsible Committee	Review Date
1.0	February 2019	Town Clerk	Original policy adopted.	Governance & Resources	—
1.1	March 2024	Town Clerk	Updated; clause 7.2 (Member Personal Devices) removed.	Governance & Resources	—
2.0	July 2026	Town Clerk	Restructured to standard format. Added filming and recording (Openness Regulation 2014) and data	Governance & Resources	July 2028



			protection clauses. Modernised pre-election period terminology. Named disciplinary and Code of Conduct routes for breaches. Added Definitions and Related Documents, cross-referencing the Social Media Policy 2025.		
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