



## **PRESS AND MEDIA PROTOCOL**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Leighton-Linslade Town Council welcomes enquiries from the press and media and recognises that our relationship with the Press helps us communicate with our residents.
- 1.2 The aim of this protocol is to ensure consistency in the Council's dealings with the media (printed and online) and that Council communications are professional, consistent and objective.
- 1.3 This protocol should be read in conjunction with the Council's Social Media Procedure (officers) and Code of Conduct (councillors).

### **2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

- 2.1 The Council has a duty to provide information in an open and transparent manner. A range of information is freely available on the Council's website, as set out in its Publication Scheme. This includes all meeting agendas, reports and minutes of Council/Committee meetings except for matters deemed confidential.
- 2.2 The Council is obliged to comply with various legislation including the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018.
- 2.3 The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council's Standing Orders or Financial Regulations, under contract or by common law.
- 2.4 If information is requested from the media on an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor and/or insurer before any response is made.
- 2.5 The Council's Standing Orders set out that "Requests from the press or media for an oral or written comment or statement from the Council, its councillors or staff shall be handled in accordance with the Council's policy in respect of dealing with the press and/or other media".

- 2.6 Town Council officers and councillors will not generally be referred to as individuals by name except where this is relevant to a position they hold (e.g. Mayor, Leader, Committee Chair, senior officer).
- 2.7 Personal information such as contact details for individual officers or councillors will not usually be included in any press communication unless deemed appropriate for a specific purpose, but it is recognised that councillor contact details are published in the public domain.
- 2.8 The Town Council recognises the distinction between communications with the media from the body/organisation and communications with the media from councillors as individuals.
- 2.9 Communications activity must adhere to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (March 2011) – **see Appendix A.**

### **3. MEETINGS**

- 3.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request. All Town Council meeting documentation is freely available on its website, other than matters deemed confidential.
- 3.2 Facilities will be provided at meetings for the press to take notes of proceedings at which they are entitled to be present (Standing Order 3 (n)).
- 3.3 A meeting of the Council or its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting would be prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.
- 3.4 Arrangements regarding reporting, filming, photographing or recording meetings are set out in law and in the Council's Standing Orders 3 (l) and 3 (m).

### **4. PRESS RELEASES ISSUED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL**

- 4.1 The purpose of a press release is to make residents aware, through the media, of news and information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue.
- 4.2 Press releases, statements or communications may be drafted by senior officers or by councillors but must be approved by the Town Clerk as Proper Officer or by his/her deputy. No other officer is authorised to speak or communicate with the media on any matter affecting the Council or its business, without specific approval as above.

- 4.3 Press releases will all follow a standard template format which includes Town Council branding.
- 4.4 The Town Clerk is authorised to issue press statements on behalf of the Council as instructed by the Council, a Committee or as s/he considers appropriate.
- 4.5 All communications issued to the media will relate to the stated business, day to day operations, projects and activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Town Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters which have not been considered by the Council or a committee. Where such questions are put to the Town Clerk, s/he should refer the enquirer to the Leader, Group Leaders, Mayor or the Chair of Committee as considered appropriate.
- 4.6 In the absence of the Town Clerk and his/her deputy, any urgent media communications should be referred to the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council.
- 4.7 Town Council officers are expected to consult senior Members (Leader, Mayor or Committee Chairs) on any press matter concerning the key current initiatives or objectives of the Council. Where appropriate, press releases/statements will include a quotation from the relevant Councillor.
- 4.8 Official press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation of any Member(s) quoted.
- 4.9 The Council's communications with the media (including its own publications and media channels) will seek to represent the corporate position based on the resolutions made by a majority of elected members present and voting at Council/committee meetings.
- 4.10 In an election year, during the period between the issue of the Notice of Election until the day of the Election (known as "purdah"), officers will issue no releases/statements quoting Council Members; any quotes will be from officers.
- 4.11 Press releases issued to the media will also be uploaded to the relevant page of the Town Council's website.

## **5. COUNCILLOR INTERACTIONS WITH THE PRESS**

- 5.1 This protocol does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity. Subject to the obligations on councillors not to disclose information referred to in paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their personal position and views.

- 5.2 If the views of individual councillors differ from the corporate position, they will make clear in any media communications that this is a personal view (either as a town councillor or as a resident/private individual).
- 5.3 In any personal communications with the media such as statements, press releases or letters to the editor, councillors should make clear in which capacity they are providing information or comment (e.g. as Leader, Group Leader, Mayor, Committee Chair, individual councillor, spokesperson for a political group or as a private individual).
- 5.4 Councillors are reminded of the duty conferred upon them to comply with the Nolan Principles of public life, as set out in the Code of Conduct, as well as their collective duty of care as the employer of Town Council members of staff.
- 5.5 Council Member releases/statements must not use the Town Council's logo, or use the Council or an officer as a point of contact.
- 5.6 It may be considered beneficial or courteous for copies of intended releases/statements/letters to be provided to the Town Clerk.

## **6. SOCIAL MEDIA**

- 6.1 The above principles may also be broadly applied to social media communications. Official Town Council social media communications will be branded, based on Council resolutions/policy, politically neutral and issued by those officers authorised to do so by the Town Clerk. Official Town Council social media communications will be moderated.
- 6.2 All Town Council employees are required to comply with any relevant Council policies and in particular, the adopted Social Media Procedure.
- 6.3 Town Councillors are exempt from the Social Media Procedure but may find its principles useful in determining whether to post or comment on social media. It should be clear that any posts or comments are made on a personal basis and not on behalf of the Council. Councillors should comply with the Code of Conduct for elected Members and the Nolan Principles.
- 6.4 Town Councillors are personally responsible for any social media content they publish.

**Adopted by Leighton-Linslade Town Council (insert date)**