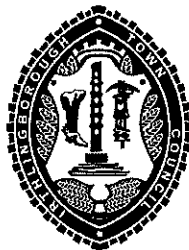


IRTHLINGBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL



PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH PRESS/MEDIA and SOCIAL MEDIA

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.
- 1.3 Social media is rapidly growing in popularity and is used by many members of society, regardless of age or background. The most popular examples of social media networks are web-based and include sites such as Facebook, Twitter, My Space and You Tube. Irthlingborough Town Council may choose to use social media to provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents and businesses in Irthlingborough and to impart information to those with an interest in the Town.

2. Key Aims

- 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 Town Clerk/Chairman 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.

3. The 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 governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 3.2 The Town Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

4. Contact with the Media

- 4.1 The Town Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media and social media.
- 4.2 Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, 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 responsible and appropriate action is taken.
- 4.3 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from an appropriate legal representative before any response is made.

- 4.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Town Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting services provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Town Clerk before any response is made to the media.
- 4.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Town Clerk with the Chairman, are authorised to make contact with the media. In specific cases the Town Clerk with the Chairman may authorise other Member(s) to respond to media requests.
- 4.6 Statements made should reflect the Council's opinion and not the opinion of an individual.
- 4.7 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 Town Clerk.
- 4.8 Should a Member decide to submit a letter to the press on any subject they should not use the term 'Town Councillor' or give the impression, directly or implied, that they are writing on behalf of the Council.

5. Attendance of Media at Council Meetings

- 5.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, report and minutes are sent to the media on request.
- 5.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

6. Press Releases

- 6.1 The purpose of the 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 Town Clerk and Chairman to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- 6.2 All press releases must be issued by the Town Clerk with the Chairman, in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

7. Social Media

Members should not make reference to Council business on their own private social media accounts.

All users should use the following practices:

- Social Media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to be set up and administrated by the Clerk. Irthlingborough Town Council website to be administered by the Clerk.
- In the absence of the Clerk, another nominated member of the Town Council will be asked to administer the site.
- All content to be added to the site must be approved by the Clerk or other nominated member.
- If there is any doubt, the Clerk should check with the Chair or other nominated member prior to posting.
- Post only what you would like the world to see. Once you post something, it may continue to be available to view, even after it is removed from the site.
- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise policies or personnel.
- Do not post images that include young people without first obtaining parental permission.
- Acknowledge queries posted to the Town Council on the Facebook or Twitter site publicly but respond privately in message form.
- Only respond publicly if you have the agreement of the person who has posted the query.

- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libellous. Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions and derogatory remarks or characterisations.
- If anyone places a post on your site that does not adhere to the rules above, remove as soon as practicably possible. If they continue to place posts that do not adhere to the rules above, use two strikes and you're out policy, and remove the person from your list of followers and block them to prevent them following again.
- Weigh up whether putting a particular post puts your effectiveness at Irthlingborough Town Council at risk.
- To reduce security risks, do not install without permission any external applications that work with the social networking site.
- Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites may place on your computer.
- Be careful not to fall for phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall providing a link for you to click, leading to a fake log in. Remove such posts immediately.
- If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines, report it as required by law.