



Needham Market Town Council

Press and Media Policy



Town Council Policy Document

Purpose

The aim of this policy is to outline the roles and responsibilities of Needham Market Town Council in its interactions with the media, addressing the day-to-day relationship between the Council and media representatives.

This policy does not seek to limit freedom of speech or impose rigid rules. Instead, it offers guidance on handling potential issues that may occur in media interactions.

Key aims

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, which can be achieved through effective two-way communication. Media outlets—such as the press, radio, TV, and the internet—play a vital role in disseminating information to the community.

Therefore, the Council must foster positive and constructive relationships with the media to enhance public awareness of its services and facilities, as well as to clarify the rationale behind specific policies and priorities.

It is essential for the press to have access to the Town Clerk and Council Members, along with relevant background information, to help them provide accurate information to the public.

In turn, the Council will defend itself against any unfounded criticism and ensure that the public is adequately informed of all pertinent facts, utilising additional communication channels if necessary.

Media contact

The Town Clerk and Members must always consider the long-term reputation of the Council in their interactions with the media.

Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers, and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If leaks do occur, an investigation will be conducted to identify those responsible, and appropriate action will be taken.

If the media seeks to discuss an issue that is, or may become, subject to legal proceedings, advice from the Council's solicitor should be obtained before any response is given.

There are various personal privacy concerns for the Clerk and Members that must be addressed with care and sensitivity. These include the release of personal information, such as home addresses and phone numbers (noting that Member contact details are public unless stated otherwise), as well as issues related to disciplinary actions and long-term



sickness absences affecting service provision. In these situations, advice from the Clerk should be sought before responding to the media.

When responding to media inquiries, only the Town Clerk is authorised to contact the media. Any Members approached directly for comments should direct enquires to contact the Town Clerk via the Clerk's email address.

Statements made by the Town Clerk and Members should accurately represent the Council's views.

There are times when the Council may need to submit a letter to explain important policies or correct factual inaccuracies in letters from others. Such letters should be concise and balanced in tone, and correspondence should not extend over several weeks. All letters must be sent from the Town Clerk.

If a Member chooses to write a letter to the press on any topic, they should avoid using the term "Town Council" or suggesting, directly or indirectly, that they are writing on behalf of the Council.

Legal Framework

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.

The Town Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

Press releases

The purpose of a press release is to inform the media of a potential story, provide important public information, or clarify the Council's stance on a specific issue. It is the duty of the Town Clerk and Members to seek out opportunities for issuing press releases when beneficial.

All press releases must be distributed by the Town Clerk to ensure compliance with the principles outlined in section four (Legal Framework), maintain consistency in style across the Town Council, and enable monitoring of press release usage.

Any comments made during Town Council or Committee Meetings, or otherwise, should be communicated to the press/media in a personal capacity and not as a representative of Council Policy. This distinction should be clearly communicated to the press/media at that time.



Media attendance at council meetings

The Local Government Act 1972 requires the agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.

The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating, and workspace will be made available.

Approval

Approved by: Governance and Finance Committee

Date of Approval: 3rd December 2024

To be Reviewed: December 2025

Policy Number: NMTC/015