



POLICY FOR DEALING WITH THE PRESS AND MEDIA

Introduction

This policy is to guide both Councillors (including co-opted committee members) and Officers of the Council in their relations with the news media in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

The policy outlines the procedures and arrangements for dealing with the news media and the actions Councillors and Officers should take if approached by the press or media, or if involved in a situation that will attract media attention.

The Council is accountable to the electorate for its actions and shall therefore be proactive in making all reasonable efforts to make its decisions and policies known to the electorate and acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information under the Freedom of Information Act. The Council is keen to maintain a good rapport and work proactively with the press and media whilst ensuring that appropriate confidentiality and the legal requirement to reflect only official Council policy are maintained at all times

Policy

The Council shall allow all reasonable access to news media organisations and will make every effort to respond without delay to requests for information.

All written news releases made on behalf of the Town Council, with the exception of those generated by the Events Committee to promote their events, will be authorised by the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Council after consultation with the Town Clerk. In the case of contact from the press or media direct to a Chairman of Committee, the Chairman of that Committee is authorised to make a statement within the remit of the Terms of Reference of that Committee, the Chairman of the Council should be informed that an interview has taken place, and the Town Clerk should also be informed.

Any approach to individual Councillors should be notified to the Committee Chairman involved before a reply or interview is given to maintain continuity. Councillors may talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the news media whether or not they relate to matters of Council business.

Councillors have an obligation to respect Council policy once made, while it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he/she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session) they should not seek to undermine a decision through the news media.

Councillors and Officers must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature, this includes any discussion with news media organisations of any item that has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's agenda. It is noted that the outcome of confidential discussions may well not be confidential.

Councillors must not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public, and especially where news media are present.

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.

The Council recognises that personal data, (including photographs) relating to Councillors or Clerks are protected under the Data Protection Act and this personal data will not be disclosed to the media without the consent of the person concerned.

If any request for information involves a conflict of interest for a Councillor or Clerk, they must declare his/her interest and avoid comment or interest in that matter.

This Policy will be reviewed annually and any changes made approved by the full Council

Adopted by Winslow Town Council on 6th October 2011