



NORTH WALSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Press and Social Media Policy

Adopted by the Council at its meeting held on 15.12.20

Purpose

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to both Councillor and Officers of the Council in the relation with the Press/Media and Social Media in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

Council Meetings

Meetings of the Council and its committees are open to the public and press and include an opportunity for them to speak under the item Public Participation, unless the meeting resolves to exclude them due to the confidential nature of the business to be discussed. This is regulated by the Council's Standing Orders

In the interests of openness and transparency, members of the public and press may film, record, photograph or use social media in order to report on the proceedings of a meeting of the Council or its committees when they are open to the public. This does not extend to live verbal commentary. Filming and photography are permitted from the area designated in the meeting room. No flash photography or additional lighting should be used without prior consent.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or Committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission

Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted

Press Releases

The Clerk

Is authorised to receive communications for the Press/Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Chair. In the absence of both of these officers, enquirers will be referred to the Deputy Clerk.

The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk the enquirer should be referred to the Chair /Vice Chair or a Councillor as considered appropriate. No other officer of the Council, unless authorised by the Clerk or the Chair, is permitted to speak or communicate with the Press/Media on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

Councillors

Must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on Council or Committee agendas. A Councillor should always act with integrity.

When speaking or providing written material to the Press, Councillors should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information. For example: – as Chairman, as an individual

Never use the prefix “Councillor” when writing to the press as an individual or refer to your position on the Council. This implies you are stating Council policy. A copy of any written material sent to the Press by a Councillor, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Clerk.

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 press or social media. Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the council. Whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it in an open meeting, they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.

A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.

Social Media

This is a collective term used to describe any forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) such as but not limited to the following:-

Council website

FaceBook page

Blog

email

Twitter

Youtube

Posts will be clear and use language accessible and suitable for the platform on which they appear. Language will be informal in tone, but reflect the Parish Council as a credible public body. Updates will be timely, addressing current topics of interest. Updates will be informative to members of the public and other statutory and non-statutory bodies with links to our website.

Social media may be used to post:-

- Agendas, minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- New stories
- Links from other authorities
- Vacancies
- Surveys
- Temporary Road Closures
- Anything else deemed appropriate by the Clerk or the Chair

The Council will appoint a nominated person to post and monitor content

Until such time as instructed by Full Council, commenting must be turned off for all posts on Facebook (Council meeting 25.6.19, item 6h)

A permanent link will be posted on facebook to access agenda & minutes website page (Council meeting 26.6.18, item 6j)

Purdah

In the six week run up to an election – local **or** general, councils have to be very careful not to do or say anything that could be viewed in any way to support any political party or candidate. The period is known as Purdah. The Council will continue to publish important information and announcements using the press and social media