Appleby-in-Westmorland Town Council

Media Policy

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Appleby-in-Westmorland Council for working with the media and dealing with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

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.

Key Aims

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – newspapers, radio, TV, online (website and social media) – 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.

It is important that the press have access to the Town Clerk and Councillors 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.

The Legal Framework

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

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

Contact with the Media

The Town Clerk and Councillors should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

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 was responsible and appropriate action taken.

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 the Council's solicitor before any response is made.

There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Town Clerk and Councillors that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Councillors' contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Town Clerk before any response is made to the media.

When responding to approaches from the media, the Town Clerk, Mayor, Chairs of Committees and Tourist Information Centre Manager are authorised to make contact with the media.

Statements made by the Mayor, Chairs of Committees and the Town Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.

Other Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure they make it clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

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.

Attendance of the Media at Council meetings

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that 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.

Any filming or recording of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Town Clerk (see Standing Order 3.l).

Press Releases

The purpose of a 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 Councillors to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

The Town Clerk or any Councillor may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Town Clerk 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.

Social Media

The Council uses social media to communicate information. It does not use it for discussion, debate, or political purposes. Councillors are encouraged to “like” or “follow” the Council’s social media pages, however, caution should be exercised when replying or commenting.

As individuals, Councillors are responsible for what they post via their own personal social media accounts, however, they should always make it clear that any comments or views shared are personal and not necessarily the collective view of the Town Council.

Councillors are reminded that the Code of Conduct applies to online activity as it does to all other forms of communication and behaviour.

Policy Review

This Policy will be reviewed bi-annually by Appleby-in-Westmorland Town Council at a Full Council Meeting.

This policy has been agreed and approved by Appleby-in-Westmorland Town Council.

Cllr P Davidson

Cllr Pamela Davidson
Chair of Appleby-in-Westmorland Town Council

Adopted by Appleby-in Westmorland Council on 19th March 2025
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