

# Leigh-on-Sea Town Council

## PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Leigh-on-Sea Town Council (known as 'the Council') for working with the press and media (known as '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.

### **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 media have access to the Town Clerk and Members 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 Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 3.2 The Council's Standing Orders should adhere to this.

### **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
- 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 was responsible and appropriate action 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 the Council's solicitor 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, disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision.

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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, Chair of the Council and Chairs of Committees are authorised to make contact with the media.
- 4.6 Statements made by the Chair of the Chair of Committees and the Town Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.
- 4.7 Other Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council.
- 4.8 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 letter should be kept brief and balance in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Town Clerk.

## **5. Attendance of Media at Council or Committee Meetings**

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

## **6. Press Releases**

- 6.1 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 Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- 6.2 Any Member may draft a press release, however, they must all be shown to 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.
- 6.3 A template will be provided to all Members.
- 6.4 All Press Releases will be provided on the Council's website.

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