



Sudbury Town Council

Press and Media Policy

Preamble

This policy applies on those occasions when the Town Council, as a corporate body, is asked for a statement, a comment or information from the media, or as a corporate body issues a press release, or information to factually clarify/correct other comments published in the media. Media is defined as any activity “reporting” on the Town Council.

This policy does not, and is not intended to, apply when individual Councillors are contacted directly by the media for a personal comment or statement, nor when individual Councillors contact the media with a personal statement. In such cases it should be made clear that it is the individual’s own opinion or comment, not that of the Town Council.

In general, the Town Clerk provides factual information on behalf of the Council. The Mayor or a delegated Committee Chair may be asked to provide details of the corporate decisions that have been made at official meetings. If a Councillor is unsure about the circumstances of a particular issue he should contact the Town Clerk before communicating with the media, including social media.

Policy Statement

Sudbury Town Council wishes to be open and transparent in the way it considers information and takes decisions. As a Town Council we will therefore proactively seek opportunities to publish information about our activities with the intention of raising awareness about what the Town Council is doing.

Personnel

When the Mayor is unavailable the Deputy Mayor will take on any of the Mayor’s specified tasks and responsibilities.

When the Town Clerk is unavailable the Deputy Town Clerk will take on any of his specified tasks and responsibilities.

1. Requests from the Media

- 1.1 All members and staff should make the Town Clerk aware of any approaches from the media for interviews, statements or information.

1.2 Any request from the media will be considered by the Town Clerk and he will try to identify if the Council has already agreed a policy position on the subject. The Town Clerk will then contact the most appropriate person (usually this will be the Mayor, or the Committee Chair where the matter has been delegated), to agree a response on behalf of the Town Council.

1.3 Prior to releasing a statement or giving an interview, the Town Clerk and the Mayor or Committee Chair should agree bullet points to cover the broad content of any response. This may be supported by other, more detailed documents when appropriate.

2. Response to Media Articles, Published Letters, Online Comments, Tweets, Facebook items

2.1 Every situation must be carefully assessed, and, in many cases, a corporate response will not be appropriate.

2.2 Any officer or member who sees an article or item and thinks that a corporate response may be appropriate should inform the Town Clerk.

2.3 In assessing whether or not a corporate response is appropriate the following will be considered:

- Is the article or item in question factually accurate?
- Is the article or item expressing a personal view – and if so is that clearly stated?
- Would further discussion on the subject be constructive?

2.4 Any potential corporate response will be considered by the Town Clerk and then forwarded to the most appropriate person to prepare a draft response on behalf of the Town Council.

2.5 Prior to releasing any corporate response, the Town Clerk and the Mayor or delegated Committee Chair should agree the written content. This may be supported by other, more detailed documents when appropriate.

3. Media Releases

3.1 The Town Clerk, Mayor and Committee Chairs should identify issues and stories that have the potential to be of interest to the public.

3.2 The Town Clerk will draft corporate media releases in consultation with the Mayor and Committee Chairs, or any individual Councillor, as appropriate.

3.3 An information copy of the final corporate media release will be sent to the Mayor and any Councillor who is quoted in the text.

3.4 Corporate media releases will be sent to relevant media outlets as determined by the Town Clerk following consultation with the Mayor.

3.5 A copy of the corporate media release will be posted on the Town Council's website.

3.6 A copy of the corporate media release will be sent to Councillors and staff.

4. Media training

4.1 Opportunities will be made for all Councillors and the Town Clerk to attend media-related training.

5. Decision making

5.1 This Press and Media Policy is the relevant policy referred to in the Town Council's Standing Order No 22 on relations with the press and other media.

5.2 Any decision about the content of corporate media releases or information to be supplied to the media or any response to any media item will be taken by the Town Clerk following consultation with the Mayor. (This accords with the legal position that no individual Town Councillor can make a decision on behalf of the Council).

6. Social Media Policy

6.1 Official social media accounts operated by the Town Council will be used to help keep local residents, businesses, interested parties and visitors to the town informed of important Town Council related news, events and updates.

6.2 The official accounts will be managed by the Deputy Town Clerk, on behalf of the Town Council, who will seek to ensure that any legal obligations or best practice guidelines are adhered to.

6.3 Members of the public can expect the Town Council's official social media to have updates covering some or all of the following:

- Alerts such as news, publications, events, publicity campaigns, Council/Committee meetings and new content on our other digital channels.
- Invitations to provide feedback on specific issues on which we are consulting.
- Information about or from our partners or other local groups about what they're doing
- Occasional live coverage of events

6.4 The Town Council may follow or subscribe to social media accounts from other users. This does not imply endorsement of any kind.

6.5 The official accounts will be updated and monitored during working hours only and will not be political. Political posts will be removed and the Town Council will not engage on issues of party politics at any time.

- 6.6 Inappropriate language or anything that might contravene libel, defamation, copyright or data protection laws will be removed.
- 6.7 Online social media sites may occasionally be unavailable and the Town Council accepts no responsibility for lack of service.
- 6.8 Feedback and ideas are welcomed from all sections of the community and the Town Council will endeavour to join the conversation where possible. However, it may not be possible to reply individually to all messages.
- 6.9 Emerging themes or helpful suggestions will be passed to the relevant persons.
- 6.10 Councillors may have their own personal social media accounts and it is helpful to have guidance on what is and is not acceptable usage as an elected or co-opted member. This guidance complements the general rules under the Suffolk Code of Conduct for Members. If your social media account identifies you as a member of the Council, others will presume that you are speaking as a member and you will need to adhere to the Code. It is often safer to state explicitly in the text that you are *'speaking in an entirely personal capacity'* and that your views are *'not the views of the Town Council'*.
- 6.11 Staff should avoid mentioning Town Council business in their personal social media accounts and must never comment on policies or individual members.

7. Correspondence

- 7.1 Councillors must not normally communicate in the name of the Council with any outside body or person. All such communications should be carried out by the appropriate member of staff as delegated by the Town Clerk. Staff may draft letters for signature by the Mayor or a Committee Chair when delivering policies agreed by the Council or a delegated Committee.
- 7.2 It may be appropriate in some circumstances for a letter to be sent in the name of a Councillor, for example in response to a letter of complaint regarding the Town Council sent direct to that Councillor, but this should be the exception rather than the norm. When this is required, the letter will be drafted by the staff and approved by the Town Clerk before being offered to the member for signature.
- 7.3 Letters which create contractual, legal or other obligations or which give instructions on behalf of the Council must never be sent out in the name of a Councillor.
- 7.4 Staff should consider when providing information to one Councillor, whether others should be informed e.g. in relation to a ward or local matter. Normally all members will be copied on a response to a councillor, unless there are good reasons for not making the information more widely available.