



WINCANTON TOWN COUNCIL

Press and Media Policy

This policy should be considered in conjunction with Wincanton Town Council's Social Media Policy.

1. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to provide clear and simple guidance for Councillors of Wincanton Town Council (WTC) and the Town Clerk on how to manage Press and Media contacts and publicity. The overriding principle is to avoid confusion around WTC policy, which is developed in formal meetings of the Council, and to comply with Standing Orders and accepted good practice.

From time to time the Press and Media will want to know WTC's view on specific matters (e.g., planning applications). When this happens the response on behalf of the Council should be in accordance with decisions taken in formal meetings. The scope of these protocols includes the national and local press, the national and local media, social media, publicity and correspondence. These protocols do not infringe on the right of elected or co-opted Councillors from communicating with the press or media as members of the public or creating publicity, or expressing their own opinions on matters, providing it is made clear that this is being done in a personal capacity.

2. Guidelines on Press and Media

The Press and Media should be referred to the Clerk in the first instance with any enquiries that relate to WTC, its processes, conduct, decisions or initiatives. This will enable the Council to keep accurate records of all contacts and responses issued.

3. Press Releases and Articles

Press releases on behalf of the Council should be drafted by the Clerk. However, if agreed by the Council, routine articles can be written by the Clerk, Chairman, Chairman of the Open Spaces Committee and Parish Council representatives, providing they fall within their areas of responsibility and reflect agreed Council policy or events. Articles written by different Councillors should avoid duplications and contradictions. All WTC press releases, and other articles need approval of the Parish Council, which may be delegated to the Clerk, before being released. Councillors with other responsibilities within the town can write articles under the banner of their non-Town Council function. Unless the Council has given approval, such articles should not indicate or give the impression that they are written on behalf of, and under the authority of the Town Council.

4. Responding to Comments in the Press and Media

WTC will consider responding to comments in the Press and Media or other publicity that refers to the Council. The final approval for all responses resides with the Town Council, delegated to the Clerk.

5. Media visits/Interviews/Press Conferences

Pre-planned conversations with reporters, photographic sessions, media interviews and press conferences should be organised through the Clerk. The Chairman or another councillor may be nominated to represent the Council; whenever possible this should be done at a full council meeting where policy issues should be agreed.

6. Publicity

Publicity and correspondence in the name of WTC must be approved by the Town Council, delegated to the Clerk before being issued and delivered into the public arena.

7. Meetings of the Council

The agenda and minutes for meetings of WTC will be placed on WTC's website and noticeboards. If requested, facilities should be provided at meetings for the Press and Media to take notes of the proceedings. As stated in WTC's Standing Orders, both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in relevant legislation) are under discussion.

8. Guidance for Councillors

Take particular care if the Press or Media approach you for comment on a topic. If "doorstepped" by the press, care should be taken to give responses in line with Council policies. Do not be led into saying something you did not really mean to say. If unsure about any policy, simply ask the press to contact the Clerk. When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media Councillors should make clear the capacity in which they are providing information. For example: Chairman, Councillor, Representative. A Town Councillor talking or writing independently to the press or communicating with the media on a matter (e.g., planning application) may be viewed as having "predetermination" and may be requested by the Chairman to refrain from taking part in any subsequent debate and vote on the matter.

Adopted by Full Council Monday 25th July 2022

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