



MEDIA PROTOCOL & ADVICE

Letting residents know what their Councils are doing for them, what they get for their money and who's responsible for the services they use, underpins what good local government communication is all about.

The media plays a vital role in cementing the communication link between our residents and the council and managing our media relations can prove most effective to help us uphold and improve our reputation.

This protocol provides advice to councillors and puts procedures in place to give clarity and accountability to how we work with our media.

If you need any advice on these guidelines, please contact the Clerk or General Manager.

Communications and the law

Whatever methods we use to communicate we are regulated by the law. In particular we are governed by the Local Government Acts 1972 & 1986 as well as the updated Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity published in March 2011. This provides us with a framework to ensure proper use of public funds for publicity.

Publicity is defined in section 6(4) of the 1986 Local Government Act as "any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public or a section of the public."

The government's objective for the code is: *"For the community to be a healthy local democracy, local understanding of the operation of the democratic process is important, and effective communications is key to developing that understanding. Local authority publicity is important to transparency and to localism, as the public need to know what their local authority is doing if they are to hold it to account."*

The code sets out seven key principles. Publicity must:

- be lawful
- be cost-effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

Overall the code allows Councils to:

1. Increase public awareness of Council services and functions,
2. Let local people and other stakeholders have a real and informed say about issues that affect them,

to respond on specifics in their committee area. All Councillors need to be aware that they are part of a corporate body where responsibility for decision making is shared and the reputation of the Council can be affected by what they say or do.

Please note: Nothing in this protocol precludes Members or political groups from speaking or contacting the media. Members must, however, make it clear to the media whether they are speaking/writing:

- a) Officially on behalf of their Council - in this case the Town Clerk must be kept informed; or
- b) Officially on behalf of their particular political group; or
- c) Personally or as a town, or borough or county councillor.

Statements and press releases

It's important to distinguish between a statement and a press release.

- A statement is sent to a media organisation in response to a question they ask us. A statement is put together by officers, liaising with relevant Members.

- A press release is a ready-made news article which is used as a basis, but more often in its entirety, for a story in our local media. The press release can be anything from promoting a service initiative to explaining a decision made by our Council.

Press releases and photographs

To help the Council communicate and create a stronger identity with its local residents it is vital that we take every opportunity to communicate to them what we are doing, especially good news stories. An excellent way of doing this is through issuing press releases.

The main purpose of a council press release is to:

- Increase public awareness of services provided
- Explain to residents and Council Tax payers the reasons for particular policies
- Improve local accountability
- Publicise forthcoming events

Please do be aware of taking photographs of children and young people. Formal permission must be sought from the parent or guardian responsible for the child/young person. With older children (16 - 18 year olds) it is good practice to seek their permission directly as well as asking their parent or guardian. Consent forms are available in **Appendix A**.

Use of Embargoes

Embargoes will only be used when considered essential:

- When news releases are linked to an event or specific date,
- When an issue of confidentiality requires it; or
- When it is required by a third party.

Note: Embargoes are not legally enforceable and are set by a general local agreement between the Council and the media.

Where are our press releases sent?

Press releases from the Council are emailed to various groups of media depending on the topic.

Public Meetings

The Openness of Local Government Regulations 2014 give rights to the press and public to use modern technology and communication methods such as filming, audio-recording, blogging and tweeting to report the proceedings of the meetings of their Councils.

The Council will:

- Provide a designated press area for the media at all Council public meetings.
- Where it decides to make recording of its meetings, keep the recording until the minutes are adopted at the next meeting. The recordings will not be used to make verbatim records of the meetings.

The Council requests attendees to abide by its adopted protocol and also to:

- Let us know if you wish to film or audio-record so we can make any necessary and reasonable arrangements to facilitate this.
- Not to use any flash photography or excessive movement that might disrupt the meeting.
- Note that the Chairman of the meeting has the power to veto or curtail filming at any time if s/he believes there is a risk of it disturbing the democratic process of the meeting.
- Observe the rules which say that no oral commentary is permitted during the meetings (which would be disruptive to the order of the meeting).
- Be aware that while those attending meetings are deemed to have consented to the filming, recording or broadcasting of meetings, those exercising the rights to film, record and broadcast must respect the rights of other people attending under the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Not to edit the film or recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings, or infringe the core values of the Council. This includes editing an image or view that may ridicule or show lack of respect towards those being filmed or recorded.

Partnerships

Elected Members involved in partnership organisations may be required to speak to the media on behalf of a partnership. This should be led by the partnership but please keep the office aware and forward on any information and be clear in your communications as to whether they are made as a member of the partnership or as a councillor.

Emergencies

When the Council is working in an emergency situation, arrangements are put in place with other agencies involved. A Communications Officer from one or more of the agencies will be put in place to deal with media. During an emergency, clear guidance on who the media contacts are will be issued to Members where appropriate

Interpretation

- i. This advice is only for Councillors. Other documents may contain (a) the formal Media Policy of the Council and (b) instruction to the Council staff (as a section within in the Staff Handbook).
- ii. This advice is intended for Councillors only when acting as and/or purporting to speak or write as Councillors, (eg whenever using the title "Councillor" or using Council note paper or equivalent).
- iii. Councillors obligations to one another include the need to
 - accept collective responsibility, so that when a policy has been agreed by a majority of councillors, not to speak against it in public.
 - observe the agreed Code of Conduct, so far as it bears on the councillors' behaviour in public,
 - Not to prejudge an issue before hearing the official advice and also the arguments pro and con.
 - Not to disclose issues classified by councillors in Council as "confidential" – Part 2 matters.
 - Not to discuss in public the Council's commercial and personnel matters.
 - Not to discuss fellow councillors in public.
- iv. This advice is helpful because
 - Using public media has many pitfalls – the number of parliamentary candidates who have had to withdraw illustrates the problems.
 - When using social media as well as traditional media outlets Councillors are constantly interacting with the public,
 - the law is complicated and an explanation of it is desirable,
 - Councillors have obligations to the public which it is helpful to record,
 - Councillors have important obligations to each other if the Council is to have an acceptable public image and it is helpful to record them.
- v. Some of the more significant legal obligations concern:
 - Regulations under Local Government Acts,
 - Defamation – libel and slander,
 - Discrimination – in its many forms,
 - Data Protection – surprisingly complex,
 - The protection of vulnerable people and children,
 - Copyright.
 - Bias and pre-determination.
 - Any other law that bears on public expression.
- vi. Councillors obligations to the public, include the need to be
 - clear and 'transparent',
 - open and accessible,
 - straight and honest,
 - open-minded and ready to listen to different points of view,

- and to accept that making a statement in public before Council decision on an issue means that subsequent contributions at Council may not be thought to be impartial.

Appendices

Appendix A

Social Media Guidelines

i. Introduction

The use of social media as a means of communication has increased significantly in recent years. Where Council IT is provided it shall be used in accordance with Council rules and procedures and shall not, in any event, be used for political activities.

ii. Risks

As with any online activity there are some risks associated with using social media.

The following types of risk have been identified:

- Damage to the reputation of the Council – This could be through postings/photographs of staff, members or third parties pretending to represent the council.
- Level of monitoring – The Council can currently only monitor its social media sites during office hours.
- Virus or other malicious software infection – This could include infection from social media sites into Council ICT systems or hacking of Council social media accounts.
- Disclosure of confidential information or breach of data protection – Either deliberately or inadvertently through information/photographs posted.
- Breach of Safeguarding – Either regarding children, young people and vulnerable adults who may use social media.

iii. Risk Management

Councillors who use or operate social media sites should exercise suitable control and management of them and have strong anti-virus and malware protection on their PCs.

Where appropriate a disclaimer should be included on social media sites which set out the parameters for use and control.

Councillors should seek to keep sites they maintain under review and remove libellous, offensive or defamatory posts at the earliest opportunity and be aware of safeguarding issues.

iv. Principles of social media use

- Compliance with the laws of libel, copyright and data protection.
- Social media content is subject to the same rules of fairness, openness and transparency as the council uses in all its communications.
- Social media should not be used in a way that breaches any of the Councils other policies.

- Councillors will be aware of safeguarding issues regarding children and vulnerable adults when using social media (see www.devonsafeguarding.org) and potential problems like cyber-bullying and other online anti-social behaviour.
- Photographs of people will only be used when all individuals pictured have given permission, in advance.

v. General

Members should be familiar with the Councils' guidance on social media and Media Protocol. They should ensure their use of social media does not put the Councils' information and security systems at risk, or damage the reputation of the Council. It is recommended that Members also include a statement on their social media profiles along the lines of:

"The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Tavistock Town Council."

Members may use social media such as Twitter during meetings but must adhere to the Media Protocol and Members' Code of Conduct when it comes to their social media communications.

vi. Further advice

Members who need further guidance or information about social media should contact the Office on 01822 613529

Appendix B – Photographic Consent Form for children and adults
Photographic Consent Form

Councillors sometimes take photographs or video film for publicity purposes. These images may appear in printed publications, on our website, in social media or both. We may also send them to the news media.

Before taking any pictures, we need your permission. Please circle an answer to each of the following two questions and then sign and date the form where shown.

May we use your image(s), or those of your child/children if under 18, in publicity material produced by Councillors, including printed publications, videos and our website?	Yes / No
We regularly send publicity material about our services, including photographs where appropriate, to the news media, especially the local press. Can we use your photograph, or your child's, in this way?	Yes / No

Please note that websites can be viewed throughout the world, not just in the United Kingdom where UK law applies. This form is valid for five years from the date of signing unless consent is withdrawn.

Please print -

Name:

Name of child / children:

Address:

Telephone N^o:

Signature:..... Date:

Your details are protected under the Data Protection Act 1998

<p><i>For photographer use only</i></p> <p>Photographer:Event:Date:</p> <p>Councillorsignature:</p>
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This form, when completed, should be passed to the Assistant to the Town Clerk or Mayors Secretary

