



Newhaven Town Council

Press/Media Policy

Newhaven Town Council welcomes enquiries from the Press & Media and recognises that our relationship with the press helps us communicate with residents. The Council recognises the need for this and this should be reflected in how we deal with the press. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the Town Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members Code of Conduct.

The Council's approach to the media should be:

- Open and honest
- Proactive
- Responsive and timely

There are two types of press release:

Official Council Releases

An official Council release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole, this will be written by an Officer and issued by the Town Clerk. It is non-party political and includes a quote from the relevant Councillor(s). This is usually the Chair of the Council or Committee Chairman.

Councillor Press Releases

Councillor's press releases are personal and are written and issued by the Councillor responsible. This release may or may not be political and should not include the name of a Council Officer, or a Council telephone number as a point of contact. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases, especially those of a factual nature, to be provided to the Town Clerk. Councillors seeking advice can either contact the Town Clerk or Deputy Clerk.

Press Release Protocol

The following forms the Protocol for Council Members and Officers:

- All official Council press releases will include a quotation from the relevant Councillor. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to also include the Ward Councillor or other Councillor promoting the scheme.

- In line with service standards all official Council press releases are to be issued on a template provided by the Town Clerk. This template includes the Town Council logo.
- Official press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation of any Member(s) quoted in the release.
- The Town Clerk is the first line of decision making in terms of what is newsworthy for official press releases, and shall make the final decision on whether a press release shall be issued, unless otherwise directed by the Council or Committee.
- In the years when elections occur, during periods from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day of the Election, Officers will issue no releases quoting Council Members. During this time any quotes will be from Officers.
- The role of Officers is to advise and provide support and advice to Council members in their communication activities.
- Council Members are solely responsible for the writing and distribution of all councillor press releases and any Editors Letters to the media.
- Council Member releases must not use the Town Council's logo, or use the Council or an Officer as a point of contact.
- Officers and Council Members must act reasonably and responsibly.
- Council Members are reminded that they must not misuse Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes. Should the Council receive a Freedom of Information request on a topic on which there is correspondence (email or written) from or with Members, normally that correspondence would have to be disclosed, unless it was exempt. The fact that the disclosure of the correspondence may prove embarrassing would not, of itself, prevent disclosure. In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data. The Data Protection Act 1998 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents.
- In general, the Town Clerk will be responsible for interpretation of the Protocol.

Speaking to the media:

Unless a Councillor has been specifically authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

Adopted by the Policy & Resources Committee on 24th June 2014

When speaking to members of the public, unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the council, they must make it clear that they are expressing a personal view.

The Clerk and Head of Strategic Development are authorised to speak to the media when asked for comment or background information. The information given will be factual and accurate and any comments will be non-party political and represent the agreed view of the council. If council has not taken an agreed view of the matter concerned, the press will be directed to a relevant Councillor for a personal comment.

Social Media:

There are far too many social media sites to list but some of the most popular examples are; Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube. The format and levels of interaction vary greatly from one to another. Whenever Council representatives use such sites they should familiarise themselves with the guidance that is set out in this policy.

It is important that social media sites are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that their use does not expose the Council to security risks or reputational damage.

Social media offers great potential for building relationships and improving the services that the town council provides. This policy will clearly set out how social media can be managed effectively and how any risks or pitfalls can be avoided or mitigated.

As with any online activity there are risks associated. The following types of risk have been identified with social media use:

- Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Damage to the reputation of the Council.
- Social engineering attacks (*this is the act of manipulating people into disclosing confidential material or carrying out certain actions. Social engineering is often conducted by individuals fraudulently claiming to be a business or client*).
- Civil or Criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Newhaven Town Council:

Responsibilities of Members

Councillors must remember that they are personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media.

Adopted by the Policy & Resources Committee on 24th June 2014

It is good practice for councillors to clearly separate professional, personal, or political aspects of their communication.

Councillors must ensure that they are familiar with the guidance that is set out within this policy and that their use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the authority.

Councillors must adhere to the Members' Code of Conduct and be aware of the risks of action for defamation and the need to respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws.

Councillors must not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable elsewhere. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.

Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important that councillors are confident about the nature of the information they publish. They must not publish or report on meetings or discussions that are meant to be private or internal to the Council.

Councillors must not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their approval.

Responsibilities of Officers

Officers using social media in a personal capacity must ensure that this use is strictly personal, and not professional or political.

As members of the public may nevertheless recognise officers as employees of the Council it is important that officers ensure that their personal use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the Council. They must not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable elsewhere. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.

If an officer receives any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the public through their use of social media then they must report such incidents to the Clerk.

Where officers use social media in a professional capacity to represent the town council, the town council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual officer. Town council email addresses will be used. The use will be non-party political.

Officers using social media in this way must respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws. They must be aware of the risks of action for defamation.

Officers must not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their approval.

Adopted by the Policy & Resources Committee on 24th June 2014

Officers must not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace or elsewhere. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.

Officers must not download any software, shareware or freeware, unless this has been approved and authorised by the Clerk.

Failure to comply with the guidelines could result in disciplinary action being taken.