



Newhaven Town Council

PRESS & MEDIA POLICY

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Purpose of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Newhaven Town Council (NTC) for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

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. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members Code of Conduct. NTC's approach to the media should be:

- Open and honest
- Proactive
- Responsive and timely

The scope of this policy.

It applies to all staff, whether full time, part time or temporary workers and councillors.

Legal Framework

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. NTC must also have regard to the governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. 3.2

NTC's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

Policy

Types of Press Release

There are two types of press release:

- **Official Council Press Releases**
An official NTC 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 Chair.
- **Councillor Press Releases**
Councillor's press releases are personal and are written by the Councillor responsible. This release may or may not be political and should not include the name of an NTC Officer, or an NTC telephone number as a point of contact. However, they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in the Legal Framework section above are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored. Councillors seeking advice should contact the Town Clerk.

Press Release Protocol

The following forms the Protocol for NTC Members and Officers:

- All official NTC 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 NTC 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 NTC members in their communication activities.
- NTC Members are solely responsible for the writing and distribution of all councillor press releases and any Editors Letters to the media.
- NTC Member releases must not use the Town Council's logo or use the Council or an Officer as a point of contact.
- NTC Officers and Members must act reasonably and responsibly.
- NTC Members are reminded that they must not misuse Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes. Should NTC 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.
- 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 NTC's solicitor before any response is made. Whenever possible any information given to the press shall be given in writing so as not to leave interpretation open to misunderstanding and misreporting.
- 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 NTC 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.

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

The Clerk is 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 NTC. 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. The format and levels of interaction vary greatly from one to another. Whenever NTC 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 NTC to security risks or reputational damage.

Social media offers immense potential for building relationships and improving the services that NTC 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)
- Disclosure of confidential information
- Damage to the reputation of the Council
- Phishing 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

These guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of NTC.

Responsibilities of Members

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

Councillors must 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 NTC.

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

Responsibilities of Officers

As members of the public may recognise officers as employees of NTC 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 NTC, the town council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual officer. NTC 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 and must not cite or reference customers, partners, or suppliers without their approval.

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.

Date of policy:	20/11/2024
Approving committee:	Promotion, Partnership & Finance
Date of committee meeting:	10/12/2024
Supersedes (name of old policy and reference):	Press & Media Policy v2
Policy version reference:	PPMP03
Policy adopted by Full Council on:	14/01/2025
Date for next review:	January 2027