

# Hebden Royd Town Council - PRESS & MEDIA GUIDANCE

## Introduction

1. Hebden Royd Town Council (“the Council”) is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. Where this information is not available via the Council’s publication scheme, please contact the Town Clerk or, in their absence, the Deputy Town Clerk.
2. The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet (“the media”).
3. This policy explains how the Town Council may work with the media to meet the above objectives in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

## Legal requirements and restrictions

4. This policy is subject to the Council’s obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, other legislation which may apply and the Council’s standing orders and financial regulations. The Council’s financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council’s publication scheme.
5. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council’s standing orders, under contract or by common law.

Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council’s publication scheme.

The Council’s Data Controller may receive requests under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and these regulations must also be adhered to.

## Meetings

6. A meeting of the Council and its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution. In accordance with the Council’s standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council and its committees, if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.
7. Where a meeting of the Council and its committees include an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council’s standing orders.
8. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes e.g. using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings or (iii) paragraphs 9 and 10 below apply.
9. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable individuals at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.

10. Council meetings will be formally minuted in writing, this will provide a definitive record of the decisions taken and the position of the Council. The minutes will be published on the Town Council website and be available for inspection if requested. When reporting decisions made with care being taken to report the decisions accurately quoting from the minutes being the preferred approach.

11. The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, provide reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.

12. The Council's standing orders will confirm if attendance by the public, their participation, photographing, recording, filming or other reporting is permitted at a meeting of a sub-committee.

### **Other communications with the media**

13. This policy does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity.

14. The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. If the views of councillors are different to the Council's corporate position and views, they will make this clear.

15. The Town Clerk, or in their absence, the Deputy Clerk may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information, a statement or other material about the Council.

16. Subject to the obligations of councillors not to disclose information referred to in paragraph 5 above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their position and views.

### **Councillors, their responsibilities regarding the media, dealing with the media and issues to be aware of:**

17. Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing a Councillor from expressing their personal opinion through the media, for example writing to a newspaper or posting an item on the internet, or on a social media site, **but!** Councillors must make it clear that any views expressed are their own personal views and that they do not represent the views of the Town Council.

18. Never use the prefix "Cllr" when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy. It is your responsibility as a Councillor to make it clear that it is your own personal opinion.

19. Councillors should take great care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Town Council into disrepute and must give due regard to their responsibilities under the Town Council's Code of Conduct.

20. All Councillors should be particularly cautious if using social media sites so that they do not respond in haste and repent at leisure.

21. A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed as a confidential item (in closed session) on the Council's or Committees' agenda or at any other private briefing.

22. Take particular care if the press or media make an approach for comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure, simply state "no comment" and ask the press to contact the Town Council Office.

23. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.

24. A Councillor should never raise matters or make comments on subjects relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer/Employee at meetings held in public or to the media. Any comment of this nature must be raised with the Town Clerk or in their absence the Deputy Clerk

25. Hebden Royd Town Council chooses not to engage in Party Politics and individual Councillors should observe and apply Town Council policies irrespective of any Party-Political opinions.

### **Talking to the Media in the role of a Councillor**

In response to a Town Council press release:

- Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Town Clerk.
- No-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion with the Town Clerk, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.)

In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist, reporter or any author of an article likely to be placed in the public domain, including enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations:

- The views of the Town Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above.
- The Town Clerk should be informed so that they are fully apprised of the communication that has taken place.

### **Monitoring**

It is important to monitor the media for items (web pages, social media posts, reports, articles, and letters) about the Town Council in order to know:

- Whether press releases, social media posts and statements issued by the Town Council are effective and serving the intended purpose and the intended audience.
- What the community is saying about the Town Council? To ensure the reputation of the Town Council.

Councillors and Officers / Employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Town Council in all media and to share these with the Town Clerk.

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