

ROYSTON TOWN COUNCIL



MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Royston Town Council's relationship with the community is vital to its work and its decision-making. Therefore, effective media relations are an important part of establishing such a relationship between the Town Council and the community.

It is not the intention of the policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations, but to create an effective working relationship with the media.

The council has to be seen to be taking the opportunity to talk the media and to promote positively the council's activities.

2. KEY AIMS

2.1 The council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. In this respect the media can play a crucial role in increasing public awareness of the work of the council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

2.2 The media, itself, has a vital role to play in holding the council to account for its policies and actions.

2.3 It is important that the media has access to officers and members and to information as a whole unless it is deemed confidential.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The law governing communications in local authorities comes under the Local Government Act 1986 and the Local Government Act 1988. The council, too, has to respect the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

4.1 The Town Clerk is responsible for issuing press releases in consultation with the relevant councillor: such as Chairman of the Council or a Chairman of a committee.

4.2 Other councillors can talk to the media, but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions / comments given were their own and not necessarily those of the council.

4.3 Indeed, these guidelines are not to be interpreted as preventing members from expressing a personal opinion through the media, but members should take care not to misrepresent the council and be aware of their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.

4.4 Councillors should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the council.

4.5 Letters submitted to the media for publication must make it clear that the views expressed are their own and do not reflect the views of the council or any of its members.

ROYSTON TOWN COUNCIL

5. ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

5.1 Under the Local Government Act 1972, the media is allowed to receive agendas, reports and minutes of meetings, and are encouraged to attend council meetings where workspace will be made available.

5.2 Under new arrangements both the press and the public are now allowed to use social media, to record and film proceedings during council meetings.

5.3 Where a reporter(s) does not attend a meeting and seeks details of the proceedings, all inquiries should be directed to the Town Clerk, as should any request for clarification.

6. PRESS RELEASES

6.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story or event involving the council, to provide public information or to explain the council's position on a particular issue.

6.2 The press release will be the responsibility of the Town Clerk working in conjunction with the appropriate member(s).

7. MONITORING

7.1 It is important to monitor the media for items about the town council in order to know a) whether press releases and statements issued by the council are used effectively and b) what members of the community are saying about the council.

8. NON-COUNCIL RELATED MEDIA

8.1 Members of the council who have contact with the media as a member of non-council related organisations must not refer to their council posts and make it clear that they are speaking in a capacity on behalf of the non-council related organisation.

9. NEGATIVE ISSUES

9.1 Members must alert the Town Clerk to negative issues which might attract media interest as soon as possible.

9.2 Members and the Town Clerk must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements while other research into the issue is carried out.

10. CORRECTING INACCURATE REPORTING

10.1 There may be occasions when the media does publish inaccurate information and it is essential that the council takes a quick decision on any action necessary for correction.

10.2 This could be through a press release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, or an approach to the editor to ensure that a correction is published.

10.3 In the case of minor inaccuracies which have limited impact, it can at times be counter-productive to complain: each case needs to be judged individually.

10.4 Occasionally, the council will get something wrong and in these cases damage limitation is the key. This can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake and stating that the council will learn from the mistake.