



WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL

Press Policy

History of Policy Changes

Date	Version	Author	Origin of change e.g. change in legislation	Changed by

This policy applies to Weston-super-Mare Town Council.

Date policy adopted	18 th August 2025
Approved by	Finance and General Purposes Committee (18.08.25)
Review cycle	Bi -Annually
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1. Overview

When working with the media it's important to have clear, defined roles and responsibilities. This policy sets out clear guidelines for how Weston-super-Mare Town Council communicates with the media. It aims to ensure accurate, consistent, and professional engagement, while protecting the reputation and integrity of the Council.

This policy should be read in conjunction with and an awareness of:

- a. Recording and Filming of Meetings Policy
- b. Public Participation at Meetings Policy
- c. GDPR Data Protection Policy
- d. Standing Orders

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Weston-super-Mare Town Council Staff, Councillors and Volunteers.

The media (Press, Radio, TV, Internet, Vloggers, Bloggers, Podcasters, Social Media Influencers, Photographers etc.) are a form of two way communication and vital to spread the word of what we are achieving as a Town Council. It is a crucial tool for communicating with our residents, therefore maintaining positive working relationships with the media is important. We can work with them to increase public awareness of our services and facilities, decisions made and the impact this has on our Town.

Ensuring the information provided to the media, is accurate and up to date, is of the utmost importance. It is our responsibility to ensure they are properly informed of all the relevant facts.

3. Guidelines

Council Representation - All public statements must reflect the agreed, corporate position of Weston-super-Mare Town Council. Only the CEO/Town Clerk (or Deputy Town Clerk in their absence) is authorised to issue official statements or correspondence on behalf of the Council.

Individual Member Communication - Councillors may speak to the media in a personal capacity, but they must make it explicitly clear that the views expressed are their own and not those of the Council.

The Councillors' Code of Conduct applies to all media communications. Even when speaking personally, it is likely the public will perceive comments as being made in an official capacity. Members are strongly advised to verify facts with the CEO/Town Clerk before commenting publicly.

Never use an individual's name without their written consent.

Letters to the Press - The Council may issue letters to clarify policy positions or correct misinformation. Such correspondence must be issued by the CEO/Town Clerk. Letters must be brief, accurate, and neutral in tone. Ongoing public exchanges should be avoided. Personal letters from Members must be clearly distinguished from official Council stance.

Reputation Management - You must always consider how media interactions may affect the long-term reputation of Weston-super-Mare Town Council. All statements must be respectful and professional. Content that could mislead, misrepresent, or discredit the Council or others should be avoided.

Media Enquiries - All enquiries from media outlets should be directed to the CEO/Town Clerk. If the matter is straightforward, the Clerk may provide an immediate response or delegate this to the Communications & Visitor Experience Manager to draft. Otherwise, a formal statement will be issued within 24 hours. Media representatives should clearly outline their request to allow time for consultation with the Mayor or relevant Ward Councillor(s), if needed. If the matter has not been discussed by the Council, this must be made clear. A response will be given once appropriate consultation has taken place. A 'no comment' response may be issued where necessary.

Official Statements - Only the CEO/Town Clerk may give official verbal or written responses on behalf of the Council. Statements must reflect Council stance and not individual opinions of Members, Officers or Volunteers.

Confidentiality and Legal Compliance - Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, and private correspondence must not be shared or leaked to the media. If a breach occurs, the matter will be investigated, and appropriate action taken in line with the Council's Standing Orders and Code of Conduct. If an enquiry relates to a matter that is, or may become, subject to legal proceedings, no response should be made until the Town Clerk has obtained legal advice.

Data Protection and Privacy - Personal or sensitive data must be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and our Town Council GDPR Policy. Never give out personal details such as home addresses or telephone numbers of Councillors, Officers, or members of the public. Do not refer to individuals in any media content unless written permission has been obtained. Permission must also be secured for the use of photographs or video footage, from the individuals or organisations featured.

Photographs, Videos, and Social Media - Any use of images or recordings in media communications must comply with relevant permissions and privacy standards. Care must be taken to avoid misrepresentation or publishing content that may be seen as disrespectful or misleading.

4. Pre - Election Period

In the six week run up to an election councils have to very careful not to do or say anything that could be seen in any way to support any political party or candidate. Weston-super-Mare Town Council will continue to publish important service announcements but not anything deemed overtly party political.

5. Media Interviews

Taking part in an interview can help inform the public about your role. It can help promote understanding and create trust among your community and others in the field. Press interviews can also raise awareness of the positive steps you and the Town Council are taking.

Preparation is everything. You don't want to be stumbling over questions in the interview itself. Be prepared with facts and figures and rehearse your messages/answers. Set your own agenda for the interview and stick to it.

- Decide on your 'key message'. What is the message that you want to get across in the interview?
- Identify a maximum of three messages that you would like to get across.
- Think of examples and anecdotes that are short and relevant, and ensure you know all the details
- Remember to keep it simple and don't be side-tracked.
- Prior to the interview, ask for a list of questions the reporter will ask (but they may not supply it!) or a note of the broad areas for discussion. In the case of TV or radio interview if it is a live interview.
- It's a good idea to think about the difficult or challenging questions that could be asked and prepare a response for how they could be tackled.
- Council Staff & Councillors should not engage with the media if they are tired, unwell or under the influence of alcohol or any medication/substances that may affect their response.

6. Press Releases

Press releases issued on behalf of the Town Council must be factual, accurate and non-political. Each press release should include a quotation from the Mayor, Leader or Committee Chairman as appropriate.

Press releases will include the release date and additional information relating to any 'embargoed' date.

Press releases must be sent in advance to the CEO/Town Clerk and Communications Team for CEO/Town Clerk's final approval.

Following approval, the Communications Team is responsible for the circulation of the release.

Press releases will be emailed to all listed news/media and councillors on the same day.

Press releases will be posted on the Town Council website where appropriate and social media on the same day as they are released to the press.

7. Policy Review

The working of this policy will be reviewed by Weston-super-Mare Town Council bi-annually. As well as examining the specific review data, the policy statement will be checked for continuing relevance against any changed statutory requirements.