

Louth Town Council

MEDIA POLICY

Aims: Louth Town Council aims to build and maintain a positive reputation and will have a proactive approach to dealing with the media with enquiries being dealt with, wherever possible, within two working days. This approach will ensure an open and transparent approach which is helpful to the media and is positive and honest.

Objectives: 1) To improve residents' understanding of the work of the Council and to provide public information. 2) To enhance the reputation of Louth Town Council by promoting and celebrating success and the achievements of the Council and its partners. 3) To ensure a co-ordinated response from a single point of communication, the Town Clerk (or her assistant in her absence). 4) Reduce the risk of negative publicity resulting from non-response to enquiries. 5) To defend the Council from unfounded criticism by ensuring the public are properly informed of all relevant facts. 6) Adhere to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority publicity.

Roles and Responsibilities: The Council's policy is to deal with all media enquiries centrally through the Town Clerk. This will ensure that a consistent message is given. Any statements given by the Town Clerk must not be party political.

Meeting Privacy: The press is free to attend all meetings, except for any part which is in Closed Session. Recordings are taken of each meeting by the Town Clerk. Councillors and the press are permitted to record meetings (unless Closed Session), but it is courteous to inform the Town Clerk if a person wishes to independently record it. All matters discussed in Closed Session during Council Meetings must remain confidential and should not be leaked in any form to the media. If notes are taken during Closed Session these should be left behind (face to face meetings) and all pink papers handed in. In online conferencing meetings, notes taken during Closed Sessions should be immediately shredded and any pink papers either shredded if printed or removed from your device if in electronic file format. When meeting online, please ensure that no other person can either hear or see your screen during Closed Sessions items. In both types of meetings, mobile phones and any type of recording device must be switched off during Closed Session items.

Disciplinary action will be considered if Councillors are found to have leaked any confidential information.

Press, Radio and Television Interviews: All elected members should be sensitive to the fact that they are perceived to be speaking on behalf of the Council. If Councillors are making comments or statements that are not in accordance with Council Policy, they should make it clear that it is their own personal view and not that of the Council's. This being the case they should not use the prefix of Councillor. Out of courtesy, the Town Clerk should be informed of any radio or television interviews/statements/comments made by Councillors so that she can be aware of the situation.

Management of Negative Publicity: It is important that this is done well and points adhered to. Inaccurate reporting in the media should be discussed by the Town Clerk and the Mayor (along with those Councillors invited to give their views where appropriate) before a course of action is decided on. Any press statement will be written by the Town Clerk.

Social Media: Louth Town Council has its own Facebook page. Any official information or statements regarding the Council will be posted on that page. Councillors and staff should remember that all social media sites are a public forum and that they are personally responsible for the content published. It must be made clear by Councillors that any comments or statements they make (unless quoting council policy) are their own personal views and not that of the Council. This being the case they should not use the prefix of Councillor. No defamatory, derogatory or offensive comments should be posted on the internet about colleagues or matters which have come in front of the Council. Anyone acting in contravention of this protocol may be subject to misconduct and disciplinary action.

Equal Opportunities and Diversity: These must be respected and adhered to at all times, when dealing with any form of media. The Town Council shall not publish any material which in whole, or in part, appears to be designed to support a political party.

Embargoes: To be used where deemed necessary and, all press releases should carry the embargoed logo on the top sheet. The Town Clerk, the Mayor and Councillors will convene a meeting to decide on a course of action should any media break the Council's stated embargo.

Press Conferences: Can be convened in the event of a major incident or an emergency in the town. Any press conferences held need to be pre-planned so that press statements can be prepared. All press conferences should be run to an agreed framework.

Election Years

During an election year, from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day following the election, only the Town Clerk should issue press releases.