



Fakenham Town Council

Fakenham Connect
Oak Street
Fakenham
Norfolk
NR21 9DY

Tel: 01328 853653
e-mail: info@fakenhamtowncouncil.gov.uk
website: fakenhamtowncouncil.gov.uk

Press & Media Policy

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1. Introduction

1. Fakenham Town Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions.
2. The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.
3. 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.
4. This policy sits alongside the social media and electronic communications policy.
5. When reference is made to the Clerk, this is delegated to the Deputy Clerk in their absence. Where reference is made to the Chairman of the council this is delegated to the Vice Chairman in their absence.
6. Councillors must observe the Council's Code of Conduct whenever they conduct the business of the council to which they have been elected or appointed to act as a representative.

2. Key Aims

1. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
2. It is important that the press have access to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

3. The Legal Framework

1. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
2. The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014
3. The Council's adopted standing Orders should be adhered to.

4. Contact with the media

1. The Clerk and Councillors should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media. Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers, and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action taken.
2. 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 a solicitor before any response is made.
3. There are several issues for the Clerk and Councillors that must be handled carefully and sensitively to comply with GDPR. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Councillor contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.
4. When responding to approaches from the media, the Clerk and Chair are authorised to contact the media. Councillors, if approached by the media for comment as a Council spokesperson, first checks with the Clerk before going 'on the record'.
5. Statements made by the Chair and the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.
6. Other Councillors may talk to the media in a personal capacity but not in their councillor capacity.
7. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.

5. Attendance of media at Council Meetings

1. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports, and minutes are sent to the media on request.
2. The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating, and workspace should be made available.
3. Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chair of the meeting (see Standing Orders).
4. The public and press may be temporarily excluded from a meeting under the provisions of section 1(2) of the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960.

6. Press Releases

1. The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue.
2. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Councillors to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
3. The Clerk or any Councillor may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Clerk or Chairman to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

Reviewed at Policy & Resources 18th March 2025

Ratified at Full Council 26th March 2025