



THORNE MOORENDS TOWN COUNCIL

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Media Policy

Introduction

1. How the Council communicates and how that communication is received and perceived is important to the reputation of the Council. If not managed in a clear and effective way, confusion can arise over who is talking to whom, about what, and on whose behalf. As well as reflecting poorly on the Council, poor communication may create tensions within the Council.
2. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and embraces opportunities for effective communications through the local media.
3. This policy therefore defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media to manage the Council's reputation in a positive and corporate way.
4. The media – print, radio, TV, internet – are important channels to convey information to the community; thereby increasing public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and the reasons for policies and priorities.
5. Nothing in this policy is designed to prevent individual members from expressing their individual views to the media providing it is made clear that these are personal views and not those of the Council as a whole.

The Legal Framework

6. The Council's media relations must be consistent with the provisions of:
 - a) The law governing communications in local authorities contained in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988
 - b) The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity
 - c) The Council's Code of Conduct and Civility and Respect Pledge
 - d) The Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

7. In dealing with the media, the Town Clerk and members should always be aware of the need to comply with data protection requirements and to observe confidentiality.
8. The Council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information under the Freedom of Information Act.

Pro-Active Media Relations

9. The Council will supply copies of its agenda and minutes to the local media on request.
10. The local media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available for them.
11. The Town Clerk will act as the Council's Press Officer and will seek opportunities to engage with the local media to provide information on Council decisions, policies, and activities.
12. The Town Clerk will be responsible for issuing all Council press releases.
13. Prior to issue, the Town Clerk will clear most press releases with the Chairman of the Council or the Chairman of any relevant committee.
14. In all appropriate cases, press releases should include a quote from the Chairman of the Council or other relevant councillor which is consistent with Council decisions and policies.
15. In all appropriate cases, the Chairman or other relevant councillor will act as the Council's spokesperson for interviews with the broadcast media.
16. All press releases issued will also be posted on the "News" section of the Council's website.

Re-Active Media Relations

17. If contacted direct by the media, councillors should not give an immediate response unless they wish to do so in a personal capacity and this is made clear.
18. Where a response is being sought from someone acting as a spokesperson for the Council, the Town Clerk should be advised as soon as possible of who is asking what and the timescale for a response.

19. The Town Clerk will then advise on the content of the Council's response and who should be responding; liaising with the Chairman and/or other councillors as appropriate.
20. In the interests of accurate reporting, Council responses will normally be issued by the Town Clerk in writing.

Rules for using social media

21. In the interests of accurate reporting, Council responses will normally be issued by the Town Clerk in writing or will be approved by the Town Clerk prior to them being posted.
22. Councillors and staff members are free to talk about the Town Council on media outlets but must not allow their posts/comments/interaction to bring the Council into disrepute, threaten confidentiality or harm the Council's reputation in any other way. Councillors and staff members must not let their posts/comments/interactions damage their working relationships with others and must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory, or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses, and agencies that the Council works with and serves. Such instances as named above and failure to adhere to the policy may constitute gross misconduct and could result in disciplinary action.
23. Staff should also make it clear in Social Media postings that they are speaking on their own behalf, write in the first person and use a personal e-mail address when communicating via social media. If a staff member's duties do at any time, require them to speak on behalf of TMTC in a Social Networking environment, that staff member must still seek approval for such communication from either the Clerk or the Office Manager. Staff must comply with the Council's policies when using social media. Staff must not disclose confidential information relating to the business of the Council.

If staff are in any doubt about something that they are about to post, then should refrain from posting anything and remember that everything shared on social media could potentially be shared and remain in the worldwide public domain and be seen or used by someone it was not intended for even if it appears to be 'private' or is in a closed profile or group.

24. If councillors and staff members write personally, and not in their role within the council, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council.
25. The Council appoints two nominated persons to act as moderators: the Town Clerk and Office Manager, who will be responsible for the posting and monitoring of the content on Council and will ensure compliance with the Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. The Staffing and Complaints Committee will act as moderators should the two nominated moderators be deemed to be in breach of the policy.

26. The Council will appoint a nominated ‘Webmaster’ to maintain and update the Town Council website.

The website may be used for the purposes of things such as: posting notices and minutes of meetings, advertising events and activities, posting relevant news stories, links to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council’s expectations of conduct, advertise Council vacancies, share information from partners i.e. police, library, local authority etc, announce new information appropriate to the Council, post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, scouts, sports clubs and community groups, post other items as the Council sees fit.

Facebook and other social media platforms may be used to support the website and its information as above.

27. Town councillors and staff members are responsible for everything that is posted and, or, shared on their media platforms/outlets and are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published email address which is used for Council business. All councillors are strongly advised to separate council and personal email addresses for GDPR compliance. All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.

28. When participating in online communication relating to the Council, councillors and staff members must:

- Adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#), Civility and Respect Pledge principles and Council’s policies.
- Be responsible and will keep the tone of comments and posts respectful, informative, never condescending or ‘loud’ (such as use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points)
- Will never make intentionally false or misleading statements
- Will not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to themselves, the Council, councillors or staff members
- Will protect and promote the good reputation of the Council
- Will be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council
- Consider all personal and cultural differences and possible interpretations and refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to [protected characteristics](#)
- Will avoid personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications

Failure to Comply with Policy

29. Councillors and staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it.

The moderators may use their professional judgement to determine whether to enforce this policy and moderate posts which are deemed to have breached policy.

Any person may raise concerns that a social media post has breached this policy and can refer to the Council's Complaint's Procedure which explains the way the Council will handle complaints. If a complaint refers to an alleged criminal offence, the complainant may contact the police, if the complaint refers to the conduct of a councillor the complainant may refer the matter to the Monitoring Officer, and if the complaint relates to a member of the Council's staff, the complaint should be addressed to the Town Clerk of the Council, or if the Complaint refers to the Town Clerk, the Mayor of the Council, who can follow the Council's Grievance/Disciplinary Policies.

Breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether the breach is committed during working hours, and regardless of whether Council equipment or facilities are used for the purpose of committing the breach. Any staff member suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with investigations. Councillor and staff may be required to remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action or referral to the Monitoring Officer.

Date of policy: March 2023

Approved by: Full Council

Date of meeting: 14th March 2023

To be reviewed annually