



Northam Town Council

Policy and procedure for dealing with press/media

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish protocols for managing communication between the Council and media, to ensure coordinated, coherent, professional, accurate, and reliable presentation.

The key objective is to maximise a positive public image of Northam Town Council

1. Based on the principles of democracy, Northam Town Council encourages open, prompt, and accurate Communication with the media, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive and professional image of Council.

There are a number of different ways we communicate with our stakeholders, but the key ones are our residents' newsletter, corporate leaflets, the website, consultation and the media

The Council has a good working relationship with the media and values the role they play in disseminating information. The media is a significant source of information not only for the community, but also for staff.

2. It is vital that all media inquiries are treated by the Official Spokespersons, efficiently and courteously with due regard to the fact that all media work to stringent deadlines, which require prompt responses.

Publicity for Council and committee meetings

The local media are sent agendas for committees for Town Projects and Northam Burrows, at least three days before the meeting. Where appropriate, press releases will be issued before the meeting to highlight key items, or immediately afterwards.

3. The Mayor and/or Town Clerk are the Official Spokespersons on all matters of Council policy, interpretation of policy, or reaction to external matters. Where appropriate or expedient for a specific issue, the Mayor may authorise another Councillor to make a statement (on behalf of Council).

4. Media comment by the Official Spokespersons must accurately reflect the Council's position on the topic as determined by the Council in adopted documents, including the Council Plan, Strategies, Policies, and Minutes.

5. Spokesperson responsibilities can also be divided as follows – Mayor (political matters), Town Clerk (organisational matters).

6. In the case of matters with possible legal consequences, any statements made to the media must be authorised by the Town Clerk

The way the Council is portrayed in the media has a major influence on the public's perception of the Council. The impact of positive media coverage cannot be underestimated.

Every opportunity should be taken to promote the Council's services, decisions, policies and initiatives using the local media.

Written press statements are used to respond to enquiries about sensitive or controversial issues, when we want to make sure that the Council's position cannot be open to misinterpretation or misrepresentation.

All officers and Councillors should alert the Town Clerk/Mayor, if they are contacted directly by the press. Staff contacted directly by the press should take details of the enquiry – name, telephone number and details of deadline – then pass the enquiry on to the Town Clerk/Mayor

Monitoring the press

Sometimes articles or letters appear in the newspapers which are critical of the Council and which are published without a Council comment. While it is best not to overreact, this type of coverage cannot be ignored, as it will eventually damage the Council's reputation. It should be responded to where appropriate.

To monitor the press, press cuttings are collated from the local papers.

7. A Councillor who wishes to make a 'personal' statement on a topic, must clearly inform the media:

- their comment is being made as an individual, and
- their comments are not necessarily the view of the Council, and
- that the matter has (or has not) been determined by the Council, and
- that the majority of Council may hold a different opinion.

8. Councillors should consider the short- and long-term impact of such 'personal' comments, and the possible detrimental impact on Council teamwork and unity. Comments which are critical of majority Council decisions or fellow Councillors will damage teamwork, credibility and unity.

9. All 'open' decisions adopted by Council are public property and can readily be quoted, or made available, to the media. Matters of staff, personal privacy, contract and legal proceedings may be restricted, as their discussion may contravene Council's duty of care, contractual obligations, or could infringe laws. Councillors and Staff are required to comply with the statutory requirements contained in the Privacy Act and Local Government Act, which prohibit the disclosure of personal and

confidential information. Matters raised in closed sessions are confidential and cannot be discussed with the media.

10. Council staff will NOT engage in media activity which may be to the personal advantage of a Councillor (i.e during an election campaign). During local government election campaigns, Councillors must ensure that their media comments as a Candidate, are clearly distinguished from their role as a Councillor.

11. All items of advertising must be approved by the Town Clerk.