

Cyngor Tref Aberystwyth Town Council

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PRESS AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Policy Statement

Aberystwyth Town Council welcomes enquiries from the press and media and recognises that the relationship with the press helps communicate with residents. The Council recognises the need for this and this should be reflected in how the Council deals with the press.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that the Council communicates in a professional and objective manner. This policy should be read and implemented in line with the Councillors Code of Conduct and Employee Handbook. The Council's approach to media should be open and honest; proactive; responsive and timely.

The Council will, as a rule, not comment on staffing or legal matters unless it is in the interest of the Council or Public.

The Council will review this policy annually for the purpose of ensuring that members have adhered to the policy, and to make improvements if there have been issues with regards to its implementation. The Clerk will also be able to suggest changes.

Scope of Policy

All employees and councillors are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.

Breach of this policy by employees (staff) may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedures and, in serious instances, may be treated as gross misconduct.

Breach of this policy by members will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

Responsibilities for implementation of the policy

The Council has overall collective responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy. The Council is collectively responsible for maintaining and upholding this policy.

All employees and elected members should ensure they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk and/or Chair of the Council. Complaints/reports will be considered in accordance with the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

Official Council Press Release:

An official Council press release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole. It is usually written by the staff of the Council on advice from councillors and will be issued by the Clerk. It is non-party political and may include a quote from the relevant Councillor(s). The relevant Councillor will be determined by the Clerk, however consideration will usually be given to the Mayor or relevant Committee Chairperson as first consideration.

Official Council Press Releases will be issued to BroAber360, Yr Angor and the Cambrian News in the first instance, and will be in line with our Bilingualism Policy. The Council aims to provide releases in a timely manner.

Councillor Statements:

Councillors' statements and/or press releases are personal and are written and issued by the Councillor responsible. Any such statement may or may not be political. It must not include the personal details of any Council employee(s). It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases to be provided to the Clerk prior to publication for information only, should any queries arise from the distribution. Any Councillors' statements or press releases should make clear that they are an individual's work and represent a personal view or opinion, which may not necessarily be the view of the Council as a whole. Councillors should request this be made clear in any publication.

Press Release Protocol:

The following forms the protocol for Councillors and employees:

Official Council press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation of any Member(s) quoted in the release.

The Clerk is the first line of decision making in terms of what is '*newsworthy*' for official press releases, and shall make the final decision on whether a press release shall be issued, unless otherwise directed by the Council.

In the years where elections occur, during the period from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day of the Election, employees will issue no releases quoting Council Members. During this time any quotes will be from the Clerk, and will be solely factual in nature.

Councillors are solely responsible for writing and distributing all Councillor press releases and any Editor Letters to the media.

Councillors must not use the Council's logo, or Council employees as a point of contact on personal releases.

Council Members are reminded that they must not misuse Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes.

Should the Council receive a Freedom of Information request on a topic on which there is correspondence (email or written) from or with Members, normally that correspondence would have to be disclosed, unless it was exempt. Correspondence that may be considered embarrassing will generally not be prevented from disclosure by the potential for embarrassment.

Care should be taken when processing personal data. The Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulations (UK) prevent the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents.

Speaking to the Media:

Unless a Councillor has been specifically authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who speak to the press should make it clear that any comment given represents a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view. When speaking to members of the public, unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that they are reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear that they are expressing a personal view.

The Clerk is authorised to speak to the media when asked for comment or background information. The information given will be factual and accurate and any comments will be non-party political and represent the agreed view of the Council. If Council has not taken an agreed view on the matter concerned, the press will be directed to a relevant Councillor (as above) for a personal comment.

Requests for information from journalists to the Council:

We ask that any journalist requesting information for journalistic purposes identifies themselves as such, in order to ensure compliance with our data protection and press policies. Requests for information should be, in the first instance, directed to the Clerk. We request that an expected timeline be provided by the requester.

Upon receipt of a request for information, the Clerk or designated member of staff will consider the burden of providing the information and legality in line with legislation and Council policy. A timeline for the provision of information will be given to the requester as soon as possible.

Information deemed to be legally or commercially sensitive **will not** be released unless specifically directed by a resolution of the Full Council.

Specific information deemed politically sensitive to individual members of the Council will be released upon request, with a notice (if possible beforehand) and copy provided to the member(s) in question. The politically sensitive nature will not, in and of itself, disqualify the information from publication.

Requests for information from journalists to Councillors:

Requests for non-political (i.e. factual or background) information will be, in the first instance, directed to the Clerk.

Requests for political information are handled at the discretion of the individual councillor. A copy of any information released should be provided to the Clerk for information purposes.

Councillors must not provide personal or sensitive information about members of staff.

Personal or sensitive information about other councillors may **only be provided with the express consent of the councillor(s) in question**. Failure to comply with this may result in a breach of data protection policies and the Code of Conduct.

Councillors providing information to journalists without prior authorisation must make clear that any information provided represents their own personal view or opinion. Councillors should request this be made clear in any publication.

Councillors must, at all times, comply with all relevant data protection and communications policies of the Council, and the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Policy adopted by Full Council: 10 February 2025

Next review: February 2026

This policy was originally written in English.