



Princes Risborough Town Council	Date Agreed: 30/07/2024
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Media Policy

1. Introduction / Scope

This policy defines the roles and responsibilities within Princes Risborough Town Council ('the Council') for working with the media for the use of media applications by Council Employees, and Members on behalf of the Council.

The requirements of this policy apply to all uses of social networking applications, regardless of how the applications are hosted, for any approved Council-related purposes.

They must also be considered where Council Employees and Members are contributing in an official capacity to social networking applications provided by external organisations.

The media – printed, radio, TV, internet, email newsletters, social networking applications – are crucially important in conveying information to the community. The Council must maintain positive and constructive relations with the media, and work with them to increase public awareness of, and explain, its services, policies and priorities.

Social networking applications include, but are not limited to:

- Blogs
- Online discussion forums
- Collaborative spaces
- Media sharing services, e.g. Flickr, Vimeo and YouTube
- Social media applications, e.g. Twitter and Facebook

In addition to sharing information with the media through press releases, the Council also uses its own website, newsletter, local radio, posters, A-boards, banners, leaflets and other material to publicise its business and factual information.

All Council Employees and Members should bear in mind that information shared through social networking applications, even if they are private spaces, are still subject to copyright, data protection, defamation and Freedom of Information legislation.

Use of social networking applications in work time for personal use is not addressed by this policy.

2. Objectives / Aims

The objective of this policy is to protect the reputation of the Town Council by providing a framework to achieve a safe and effective use of social media and working relationship with the media.



The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communication. Local accountability relies upon a genuine understanding of the policies and services that the Council provides.

The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Council Employees and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. 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.

To summarise, the key aims of this policy are to utilise media to:

- Build a relationship of trust and mutual understanding between the Council and the local community;
- Promote and develop the Council's services and achievements through a variety of media as outlined in Section 1 of this policy;
- Invigorate local democracy by promoting alternative channels for communicating to, and engaging with, the public;
- Provide professional, informative and factually correct content which is relevant to the local community;

3. Enforcement / Legal Framework

3.0 Misconduct

Any breach of the guidelines could result in the application or offending content being removed in accordance with the Council's complaints procedure. Any communications or content published that causes damage to the Town Council, any of its employees, members reputation or third party's reputation may amount to misconduct or gross misconduct to which the Council's dismissal policy and code of conduct policy applies.

3.1 Code of Conduct

The Council has adopted the statutory Codes of Conduct for Council Employees and Members and all contacts via social media should be conducted on this basis. In particular, Council Employees and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings. What is unacceptable offline is unacceptable online. Members of the public, Council Employees and Members may make a complaint about an Council Employee or Member subject to the councils dismissal policy or the Code of Conduct.

3.2 Libel and Defamation Act

If a Council Employee or Member publishes an untrue statement about a person which causes "serious harm" to their reputation, they may take legal action against the Council Employee or Member for defamation. This also applies if a Council Employee or Member allows someone to publish something libellous on a website or social networking application (this includes sharing or 'retweeting') but does not take prompt action to remove it. A successful claim may result in an award of damages. The Defamation Act 2013 states that councils must not participate in the publication of defamatory material. A defamatory statement is one "which tends to lower a person in the estimation of right thinking members of society generally or to cause him/her to be shunned



or avoided or to expose him/her to hatred, contempt or ridicule, or to convey an imputation on him disparaging or injurious to him/her in his office, profession, calling, trade or business

3.3 Copyright

Using images or text from a copyrighted source without permission is likely to breach copyright. Always seek permission in advance and if there is any doubt, then avoid publishing.

3.4 Bias and pre-determination

If a Member is involved in determining planning applications, it is best to avoid publishing anything which suggests they have already made up their mind on the matter. This could be challenged as predetermination and bias, which runs the risk of the decision being challenged or invalidated.

3.5 Confidentiality

Confidential documents, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media, or published on social networking applications. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action will be taken.

3.6 Obscene Material

The publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and must be avoided.

3.7 Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires that local authorities produce a publication scheme specifying the information that the authority publishes or intends to publish. The publication scheme will be of direct relevance to the media by providing a clear picture of what is available when they are seeking information on behalf of the public. The Town Council's publication scheme can be viewed online at www.princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk.

3.8 Sensitive Information

The Council reserves the right to withhold certain sensitive information concerning commercial transactions, for example the purchase and sale of land and property. This applies to its own commercial interests and to the various parties involved in individual business transactions with the Council. So, for example, to protect a negotiating position, details of an offer made for the purchase of a property would not be revealed to the media. This area and other matters are guided by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Data Protection Act 2018 and exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then the Town Clerk should be consulted and if necessary legal advice will be taken before any response is made.

3.9 Personal Information

There are a number of personal privacy issues for Officers and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision.



3.10 Data Protection

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless their express written permission is given.

3.11 Safeguarding

Avoid publishing anything that could cause safeguarding or vulnerability issues.

4 Terms of Use / Management

The following forms of use apply to all uses of social networking applications by all Council Employees and Members.

4.1 New profiles, new groups or use of existing social media sites will only be created with the approval of the Public Relations Committee and access to all sites will be limited to Employees only .

4.2 Any use of the Town Council's social networking accounts on personal devices by Council Employees and Members must be authorised by the Town Clerk.

4.3 Use of existing social media sites or the creation of new profiles and groups will only be agreed if a clear business need and target audience can be proven, and sufficient resources are made available to maintain it and (where appropriate) respond to feedback generated by the service.

4.4 Social networking applications:

- a) must not be used to publish any content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes, but is not limited to, material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Town Council into disrepute.
- b) must not be used for party political purposes or specified campaigning purposes
- c) must not be used for the promotion of personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns
- d) must not be used in an abusive or hateful manner
- e) must not breach the Council's codes of conduct or other policies such as equal opportunities and bullying and harassment.

4.5 It is important to ensure that members of the public and other users of online services know when a social networking application is being used for official Council purposes. To assist with this, all Council Representatives must:

- a) only use @princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk email addresses for approved user accounts representing the Council;
- b) publish appropriate feedback and complaints information in a prominent place which is easily accessible to users, and formally log all messages received on social media using the Council's compliments and complaints procedure where managing social networking applications;
- d) identify themselves as such where appropriate on social networking applications, (for example, through additional information in user profiles);
- e) ensure that any contributions they make are professional and uphold the reputation of the Council;
- f) not promote or comment on political matters or issues that be regarded as such;
- g) use a disclaimer such as "the postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily



represent the Council's position, strategies or opinion", if publishing content online relevant to Council business in a personal capacity;

h) know and follow the Terms of Use of third-party social media sites (such as Facebook) when contributing to them;

i) comply with data protection, intellectual property and copyright laws;

k) not publish or report on confidential conversations or business;

l) monitor social media channels effectively to ensure that defamatory, abusive or derogatory comments are removed as soon as practically possible;

m) ensure a disclaimer is present on all sites which explain that comments made by the public are not those of the Council;

n) not download any software, shareware or freeware from any social media site, unless this has been approved and authorised by the Town Clerk.

o) Images of children should not be used without written permission from a parent/guardian over the age of 18, using an official photography consent form (Appendix 1) except where this is not practicable in situations including but not limited to images of crowds at public events. Should a complaint be received by either guardian/parent or child, the image of the child will be removed or pixilated

p) No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain – ie. available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised policies and procedures.

q) Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.

r) Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.

s) Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.

t) Link back to the original source wherever possible.

u) Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.

v) Staff must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council, and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.

5. Responding to approaches from the media

The media contact the Council for many different reasons, for example to follow up a story after receiving agendas or minutes; to ask for the Council position on a more general story affecting other authorities or organisations; to look for a local perspective on a national story. These approaches are usually made by phone or in person, perhaps following a committee meeting.

Approaches from all press, radio or TV stations or specialist press should be directed to the Town Clerk who will discuss the nature of the story and then contact the Chairman of the Town Council or designate representative asking them to respond.

To ensure that the balance of committee debate is not compromised, Members are encouraged not to speak to the media between the distribution of committee papers and the close of the meeting.

All Council Employees and Members should respond in a helpful manner to approaches from the media and with respect for their deadlines. Everyone in the media works to tight deadlines, but if necessary take five minutes to gather your thoughts and call back promptly. Always make it clear whether you are expressing your own opinions or those of the Council.



6. Press Releases

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. It is the responsibility of all Council Employees or Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a news release may be beneficial. Any Council Employee or Member may draft a press release but it may only be issued when it notified to the Public Relations Committee members.

Press releases for partnership projects require particular care and it is important that the draft text is agreed by all relevant parties. The lead partner would normally issue the release but the particular role of Princes Risborough Town Council should be clearly stated.

7. Setting the record straight

The media are at liberty to report stories using any angle they feel is appropriate and we can only hope to influence them through continuing our good working relationships. Limitations of time and space mean that you should expect serious editing of your quote or interview. Assume that anything you say to a journalist will be reported. There is no such thing as 'off the record.'

There may be occasions when you feel you have been misquoted or where important facts have not been accurately reported or where you feel the reporting has been particularly unfair. This can often be rectified using the 'corrections' column in a newspaper or, if the complaint is serious enough, by a short broadcast setting out the facts or apologising. This would normally be dealt with through discussions with the editor.

Where comments are made on social media, the policy is not to respond unless absolutely necessary.

In all cases where it is felt necessary to set the record straight advice should be taken from the Town Clerk before any action is taken.

8. Care during periods of heightened sensitivity

The period just before local elections, when there are restrictions on local authority publicity and rules concerning media reporting of the election campaign, is traditionally known as the 'purdah' period. However, it is now more often referred to as the 'pre-election' period and is defined as beginning with the last date for publication of notice of the election.

During the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, local authorities should not publish any publicity on controversial issues or report views or proposals in such a way that identifies them with any individual Members or groups of Members. Publicity relating to individuals involved directly in the election should not be published by local authorities during this period unless expressly authorised by or under statute. It is permissible for local authorities to publish factual information which identifies the names, wards and parties of candidates at elections.

There are also other periods when users of Council social media should ensure that use of social media is considerate to the occasion. Examples could include (but not limited to) periods of national mourning, periods of national remembrance and occasions where a national or regional plan is put in place which the Council is obliged to follow, such as following the death of a senior member of the royal family.



6. Advice and training

All users of Town Council social media accounts should be made aware of the policy and how the policy impacts them.

In the event that advice is needed in relation to aspects of the policy users should contact the Town Clerk.



**Appendix 1
Official Photography Consent Form**

Photography Consent Form

SECTION A: About you

Your name (and name of child / vulnerable adult if applicable)*	
Age of child (if under 16)	
Phone number	
Address	
Email	

SECTION B: About the project

Description	
Location	
Date	

SECTION C: Your Consent

Consent required	<p>I give consent for Princes Risborough Town Council to publish images of the named child / children / vulnerable adult for the purposes of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Publicity materials, including printed publications<input type="checkbox"/> Websites, social media channels and digital communications<input type="checkbox"/> News media and their associated websites and social media channels including print, television and radio <p>I understand that images will be stored electronically in accordance with Data Protection laws and may be used for up to three years from the date of signing. I have the right to withdraw this consent at any time by contacting Princes Risborough Town Council via towncouncil@princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk or calling 01844 275912.</p>
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SECTION D: Your signature

<p>Please delete as appropriate: [I am the person identified in Section A / I am the guardian/carer/parent of the child or vulnerable adult identified in Section A] and in the photograph(s). I understand the above request and give informed consent.</p>	
Signature:	Date: