



NEWENT TOWN COUNCIL and BURIAL AUTHORITY

(SOCIAL) MEDIA POLICY

(Adopted on 8th February 2016; to be reviewed biennially)
Reviewed on 10th June 2019, 10th January 2022 & 22nd January 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Newent Town Council (“the Council”) is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities.
- 1.2 The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet (“the media”).
- 1.3 This includes the use of ‘social media’.
Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.
- 1.4 This policy sets out the framework for Town Council Members and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public to meet the above objectives, in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

2. Legal requirements and restrictions

- 2.1 This policy is subject to the Council’s obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, other legislation which may apply and the Council’s standing orders and financial regulations. The Council’s financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council’s publication scheme.
- 2.2 The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law.

The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council’s standing orders, under contract or by common law.

Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council’s publication scheme.

- 2.3 The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Individuals are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

3. Code of Practice

- 3.1 When using social media (including email) councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

- 3.2 Online content provided by the council should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

- 3.3 Councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given permission to do so
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- publish untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation which is libel, and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

- 3.4 Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

4. Meetings

- 4.1 As determined in the Council's Standing Orders.

5. Making contact with the Media

- 5.1 The Media is more than the local newspaper.

The phrase encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wide audience and includes broadcast media (radio and television), the internet and social media and a wide range of printed media (e.g. newspapers, leaflets, posters etc).

- 5.2 Any official contact with the media concerning the Town Council's policies, decisions it takes and the services it provides are to be initiated through the Town Clerk or in the Town Clerk's absence, the Mayor.
- 5.3 The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council.
- 5.4 Press releases and statements will be prepared by councillors, supported by the Town Clerk and forwarded to the media by the Clerk. Advice may be sought by the Clerk and/or councillor prior to publication.

Councillors will be sent the Press Release.

- 5.5 Members of the Town Council and employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Town Clerk.
- 5.6 If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Council, it should be referred to the Town Clerk.

A decision will then be made by the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor and/or Deputy Mayor and with other Members where possible, about the format and content of the response.

- 5.7 **This policy does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity and nothing is to be interpreted as preventing or attempting to prevent a Councillor from expressing a personal opinion through the media. Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views.** However, Councillors should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.

6. Talking to the Media

- 6.1 In response to a Town Council press release;
 - a. Any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Town Clerk.
 - b. No one else should offer any comment, except to confirm basic matters of fact e.g. dates of events, spelling of names etc.
- 6.2 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations) the journalist or reporter should be referred to the Town Clerk.