



PRESS AND MEDIA NEWS MANAGEMENT POLICY & PROTOCOL

POLICY

- 1 The Council is accountable to the electorate for its actions and shall therefore be proactive in making all reasonable efforts to make its decisions and policies known to the electorate.
- 2 The Council shall seek to issue information to news media on a regular basis.
- 3 The Council shall make every effort to respond without delay to requests for information from different news organisations.
- 4 The Council shall issue a news release as soon as practicable after meetings of the Council when appropriate and resources are available.
- 5 All news releases made on behalf of the Town Council will be authorised by the Council Manager after consultation with the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Council or Committee Chairman as appropriate
- 6 Press releases made on behalf of Committees, Sub-Committees, Working and Steering Groups will be authorised by the Council Manager after consultation with the relevant Chairman.

PROTOCOL

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This Protocol is to guide both Councillors and Officers of the Council in their relations with the Press in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.
- 1.2 This protocol does not seek to be comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some issues that may arise when dealing with the Press.
- 1.3 A Councillor must observe Town Council's Code of Conduct whenever he conducts the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which he has been elected or appointed and acts as a representative of the authority.
- 1.4 A Councillor must promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, treat others with respect and not do anything which compromises or is likely to compromise the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of, the authority.
- 1.5 A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press of any item which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committees' agenda.
- 1.6 A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of Neston Town Council.

2 Dealing with the Press

When dealing with news media Councillors should

- 2.1 be informed and certain of all their facts;
- 2.2 ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Town Council they are aware what Council policy is and their comments reflect that policy;
- 2.3 be calm;
- 2.4 ensure that their comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous or slanderous.

3 Issues to be aware of

- 3.1 Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the press, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made, while it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.
- 3.2 Councillors not used to dealing with the press may be surprised when they see that statements made in all innocence look very different in print than they did when they were spoken. It is advantageous to write out your statement or position beforehand.
- 3.3 Both Councillors and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one another. But their responsibilities are distinct. Councillors are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts. Officers are responsible to the Council. Their job is to give advice to Councillors and the Council, and to carry out the Council's work under the direction and control of the Council, its committees and sub-committees.
- 3.4 At the heart of this Protocol is the importance of mutual respect. Councillor/Officer relationships should be conducted in a positive and constructive way. Therefore, it is important that any dealings between Councillors and Officers should observe reasonable standards of courtesy and that neither party should seek to take unfair advantage of their position or seek to exert undue influence on the other party.
- 3.5 A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.
- 3.6 Where an Officer feels that they have not been properly treated with respect and courtesy by a Councillor, they should raise the matter with the Chairman of the Council. In these circumstances the Chairman of the Council will take appropriate action including approaching the individual Councillor concerned.