

KIDWELLY TOWN COUNCIL

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define roles and responsibilities within the council for working with the media. It will also assist the media by clarifying the level of service they can expect regarding access to Officers and Councillors, provision of information and responses to enquiries.

1.2 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public area.

1.3 This media policy relates to any subject that has been considered by the Council and on which the Council has expressed an opinion.

2. Key aims of media relations

2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. Local accountability relies upon a genuine understanding of the council's policies and the services it provides. The media are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

2.2 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 officers 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.

2.3 To summarise, the key aims of this policy are to work with the media to -

- Build up a relationship of trust and mutual understanding that will benefit both parties
- Explain the Council's policies and services to the local community
- Communicate important public information messages
- Invigorate local democracy and enable people to participate in the work of the Council
- Enhance the reputation of the Council using the values as the cornerstone

3. Council values

3.1 The Council is committed to –

Honesty	we will never knowingly mislead the public, media or staff on an issue or news story.
Transparency	we promote openness and accessibility in our dealing with the media, whilst complying with The law and maintaining confidentiality when Appropriate.
Balance	information provided to the media will be objective, balanced, accurate, informative And timely.
Clarity	all communications with the media will be available in Welsh and English.

4. Contact with the Council

4.1 The first point of call for all media enquiries is the Town Clerk. It is the Town Clerk's responsibility to determine the most appropriate person to respond to any requests from the media and to ensure that there is a response that fully represents the council's policies, aims and service provision.

4.2 The criteria to be considered are:

- “Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards
- Local Authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.

4.3 Other guidelines are available to support this policy, in particular the Institute of Public Relation’s Code of Conduct, which outlines the principles of good practice in the field of public relations.

4.4 The Council has adopted the statutory Codes of Conduct for Members and all contacts with the media should be conducted on this basis. In particular, members should always have due regard for the long- term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

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

4.6 As requested by The Freedom of Information Act 2000 the Council has a Publication Scheme specifying the information that the authority publishes or intends to publish. The Publication Scheme is of direct relevance to the media providing a clear picture of what is available when they are seeking information on behalf of the public.

4.7 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 the Council’s own commercial interests and to the various parties involved in individual business transactions with the Council. So, for example, to protect the Council’s negotiating position, details of an offer made for the purchase of a property would not revealed to the media. This area and other matters are guided by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, The Data Protection Act 1998 and exemptions under the Freedom Of Information Act 2000.

4.8 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, the Town Clerk will obtain suitable advice before any response is made to such requests.

4.9 There are a number of personal privacy issues for Councillors. That must be handled carefully and sensitively

5. Attendance of the media at Council meetings.

5.1 The Council is required to publicise agendas three working days prior to the meeting. The media are encouraged to attend the Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available. Copies of any late table items will be made available and the text of any formal speeches. The relevant members and officers will be available following committee meeting for comment or interview.

5.2 In common with all Councils, certain agenda items, known as Part II items, are debated in closed meeting. The guidelines covering which items will be heard in Part II are covered by the Local Government Act 1972. Agenda papers must give reason to their inclusion in Part II and members must vote to exclude the press and the public from that part of the meeting.

6. Guidance for Councillors during election periods

6.1 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Councillors and for publicity around elections. The Code makes it clear that the Council resources should not be used on publicising individual members unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council. These extracts from the Code illustrate the main points –

- Publicity about individuals Councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the Council, and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual Councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and "personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided."
- " Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual Councillor which are relevant to his/her position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward his/her justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating

policies of those of a particular party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.”

- “The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election.”

6.2 In line with normal Local Authority Practice the Council will not quote any Councillor in a news release or involve them in proactive publicity events during the election period, regardless of whether or not they are standing for election. The only exception to this (as laid down in the government’s Code of Recommended Practise on Local Authority Publicity) is during an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the control of the Council. In this situation, members holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment.

6.3 The Council has adopted the Statutory Code of Conduct for Members, the objective of which is to enhance and maintain the integrity of local government, which demands very high standards of personal conduct. A vital function of individual members is to challenge and question policies and service provision. However, in dealing with the media all members should be conscious that they are representatives of Kidwelly Town Council. And should therefore avoid making comments or participating in photo opportunities that may damage the long-term reputation of the Council.

7. Proactive publicity

7.1 To properly involve the community in the work of the Council it is important that they are fully informed about the services provided and the reasons behind particular policy decisions. The Council also has a duty to inform the public how the Council spends its precept and how it is trying to benefit and support the town. Much research has been carried out over the years both nationally and locally which clearly demonstrates that most people are informed about the work of the Council through the media.

7.2 As well as responding punctually to requests for information from the media it is important work that goes on behind the scenes, and that the Council is proactive in its dealings with the media.

8. News releases.

8.1 The Council may issue a news release. The purpose of a news 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 officers and members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a news release may be beneficial and to notify the Town Clerk of the details.

9. Setting the record straight.

9.1 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 there may be serious editing of a quote or interview. Assume that anything said to a journalist will be reported. There is no such thing as 'off the record'.

9.2 There may be the rare occasion where 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. The Town Clerk is to determine the most appropriate action that is required to ensure that the correct position is reported. This would normally be dealt with through discussions with the editor. If this is unsuccessful an appropriate press release should be issued.

9.3 There are organisations that investigate complaints about the media. Newspapers must operate within the Press Complaints Commission Code of Conduct and TV and radio through the Broadcasting Standards Commission. However, making a complaint through these agencies would only be considered as a last resort.