

Dalton with Newton Town Council – Media and Communications Policy

Adopted on.....

Purpose

Dalton with Newton Town Council (“the Council”) is committed to providing accurate and timely information regarding its functions, decisions, and activities. This policy establishes a framework for effective engagement with the media and ensures consistent and professional communication.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Establish a framework for effective working relationships with the media.
- Ensure the views and policies of the Council are presented accurately.
- Clarify who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council.
- Provide guidance to Councillors and staff on practical issues when engaging with the press and media.
- Ensure consistency in the Council’s dealings with the media.
- Ensure that all elements of the press and media are treated fairly and equally.

Legal Framework

This policy is subject to the Council’s statutory obligations, including:

- Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Government Act 1986
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Council’s Standing Orders

The Council must also have regard to the Government’s **Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity**.

Media Attendance at Meetings

- Meetings of the Council, its committees, and sub-committees are generally open to the public and the press unless the Council resolves that their

presence would be prejudicial due to the confidential nature of business or other special reasons.

- Persons, including media representatives, may be asked to leave if their behaviour obstructs the meeting.
 - Media representatives may speak or ask questions during public participation, subject to standing orders.
 - On payment of necessary charges, the press is entitled to copies of agendas and supporting papers and shall be provided reasonable facilities for reporting.
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Role of the Clerk

- All communications with the media should, wherever possible, be made through the Clerk.
 - The Clerk, as Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive media enquiries and issue press statements in consultation with the Chairman, or the Vice-Chairman in the Chairman's absence.
 - The Clerk's communications shall relate only to Council business and adopted policy and must not speculate on matters not considered by the Council.
 - Where immediate responses are not possible, the Clerk should inform the enquirer that a response will be provided within 48 hours and consult with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman to formulate an appropriate reply.
 - In urgent cases, the Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman, may issue press statements without a Council meeting.
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Role of Councillors

- Councillors must be mindful that their role as elected representatives takes precedence over personal views when communicating publicly.
 - Councillors may clarify that they voted against a policy in open session but must not attempt to undermine Council decisions via the press.
 - Councillors must act with integrity and in accordance with the **Members' Code of Conduct**.
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Press Releases and Council Communication

- Press releases may be issued proactively to highlight potential stories, provide public information, or explain the Council's position.
 - Press releases are normally prepared by the Clerk after Council meetings. Drafts by other officers or Councillors must be issued by the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman.
 - Direct approaches to the media (interviews, statements, articles) require Council authorisation unless urgent, in which case the Clerk may act in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman.
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Approaches from the Media

- Unexpected media enquiries should be referred to the Clerk.
 - Enquiries should be clarified in writing or via a statement of key questions to allow a measured response within 48 hours.
 - Any statement made by the Clerk must reflect the corporate position of the Council, not personal views of Councillors or staff.
 - Where matters have not been discussed by the Council, an immediate response is not permitted; the enquirer should be informed accordingly.
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General Principles for Councillors and Staff

All communications must:

- Be calm, factual, and accurate.
- Reflect Council policy and avoid speculation.
- Avoid statements that are libellous, slanderous, or bring the Council, its staff, or Councillors into disrepute.
- Ensure publicity is objective, focusing on facts or explanations.
- Handle controversial matters carefully, presenting issues clearly, fairly, and simply.
- Avoid using public funds for publicity campaigns intended to persuade public opinion.
- Avoid communications that are political or promote individual Councillors.
- Respect confidentiality and legal restrictions on information disclosure.
- Councillors and staff must not misrepresent the corporate position or damage reputations.

- Personal views must be clearly distinguished from Council policy; titles should not be used to imply official endorsement.
 - Written communications representing the Council by Councillors must be copied to the Clerk.
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Social Media

- Councillors and staff must observe this policy when using social media.
- Councillors using social media in their official capacity must have a dedicated Councillor page, which should not post personal information without consent.
- Councillors' personal accounts must be separate and clearly non-Council related.