

## **MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Downham Market Town Council’s relationship with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying attitudes and measuring satisfaction.
- 1.2 Effective media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between the Town Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Town Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.
- 1.3 The community in this sense includes all residents and elected representatives, businesses, schools, shops, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, groups and associations.
- 1.4 This document sets out the framework for Town Council Members and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Town Council’s activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.

### **2. Media Opportunities**

- 2.1 “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, including email and a wide range of printed media (e.g. newspapers, free sheets, community newspapers, magazines, leaflets posters, the Town Council Newsletter).
- 2.2 Many of the categories in 2.1 have different facets e.g. a newspaper has feature writers and specialist correspondents in addition to its “news” staff.
- 2.3 Different media respond more readily to certain factors. For example, newspapers are more likely to print a general interest story if supplied with a photograph, radio items tend to be quite brief with a short “sound bite”, and television producers will want moving pictures to illustrate a story.

### **3. Making Contact with the Media**

- 3.1 The general principle is that the Town Council office will act as the first point of contact. Any official contact with the media concerning the Town Council’s policies, the decisions it takes and the services it provides, are to be initiated through the Town Council’s office.
- 3.2 Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk to the Council and/or Mayor in association with other Members as required, and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Town Council. The Mayor, or the Mayor’s designated representative, should approve all press releases.
- 3.3 Other Members of the Town Council and employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Clerk to the Council so as to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.
- 3.4 If a Member or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Town Council, it should be referred to the Town Council office. A decision will then be made by the Clerk and/or Mayor, in consultation with other Members where necessary, about the format and content of any response.

- 3.5 Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a Member from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views. However, Members should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Town Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.
- 3.6 Employees (other than the Clerk) should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Town Council unless specifically authorised by the Clerk and/or Mayor.
- 3.7 All press releases and other materials are to be kept for reference.

#### **4. Talking to the Media**

- 4.1 In response to a Town Council press release:
- a) any enquiry from the media is to be referred to the Town Council office and the author of the press release;
  - b) no-one else should offer any comment without prior discussion, except to confirm basic matters of fact (dates of events, spelling of names, etc.)
- 4.2 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations)
- a) The view of the Town Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above;
  - b) The Clerk to the Council should be informed so that the facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.
  - c) When an unsolicited approach has been responded to with a personal opinion, as per 3.5, the Clerk to the Council should be notified.

#### **5. Monitoring**

- 5.1 It is important to monitor the media for items (reports, articles, letters) about the Town Council in order to know:
- a) whether press releases and statements issued by the Town Council are picked up and used effectively;
  - b) what members of the community are saying about the Town Council.
- 5.2 Members and employees are encouraged to look out for items referring to the Town Council in the media – original press cuttings, where obtainable, should be sent to the Clerk to the Council.
- 5.3 Anyone taking part in a radio or television broadcast should try to arrange for it to be recorded and a copy sent to the Clerk to the Council. In the absence of a recording, a note of the broadcaster's comments should be sent if available.
- 5.4 The Clerk to the Council will hold a file containing all media enquiries, releases and statements related to particular issues, where available. The Clerk will also record all direct media enquiries where a personal view has been expressed and duly notified as per paragraph 4.2c.