

Bradford on Avon Town Council



Media and Communications Code of Practice

Version Control

Action:	Who:	Date:	Comments:
Re-drafted	Town Clerk	May 2025	
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Media and Communications Code of Practice

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Bradford on Avon 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 informing and developing services, identifying attitudes, and measuring satisfaction.
- 1.2 The Council is accountable to the community for its actions; good communications allow the Council to raise public awareness of the Council and its services.
- 1.3 Effective media relations and engagement between the Council and our community is an important factor in establishing a good relationship. It is important for the Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way, ensuring tone of voice, style, and brand protection across all media platforms.
- 1.4 The Council needs to build and maintain its profile across all forms of the media and promote its content relating to its services and aspirations for the Town. The Council will also provide information from other organisations i.e. Wiltshire Council, that are relevant to residents/businesses.
- 1.5 This document sets out the framework for Council's councillors and employees to follow in dealing the media and informing the public about the Council's activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to define roles and responsibilities within the Council and give guidelines on communication, contact with the media and use of social media.
- 2.2 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech. The policy is intended to provide guidance.
- 2.3 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 a website and/or social media. Members must make it clear that any views expressed are their own personal views. However, Town Councillors should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct.

3. Media Opportunities

- 3.1 "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, the internet, social media platforms and a wide range of printed media, including the Council's own newsletter.

- 3.2 The Council will engage with the various media outlets to provide timely and effective communication to the town and community area, whilst also being responsive to enquiries
- 3.3 The Council will operate its own social media platforms
- 3.4 The Council will operate its own website(s).
- 3.4 The Council will produce its own newsletter and email newsletter.
- 3.5 The Council logos, style guide and other branding tools cannot be used or changed without permission of the Chief Executive & Town Clerk, including any temporary or permanent sub-brands or communication campaigns.
- 3.6 All communications should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council.
- 3.7 All Council Policies and position statements will be expressed clearly, faithfully representing decisions taken and presented in a neutral tone.
- 3.8 Confidential documents **must not** be released or leaked to any media outlet.

4. Media Communications

- 4.1 The general principle is that the Council office will act as the press office for initial enquiries.
- 4.2 All media enquiries, or requests for statements by third parties, including where elected members are asked to speak on behalf of the Council, will be notified to the Chief Executive & Town Clerk either directly or via the Communications Officer or the office.
- 4.3 In the event that an enquiry is regarding an issue that is or may be subject to legal proceedings, the Chief Executive & Town Clerk should seek advice from the Council's solicitor prior to any response.
- 4.4 Any official contact with the media concerning the Council's policies, Council decisions and the services it provides, are to be initiated through the Chief Executive & Town Clerk via the Communications Officer.
- 4.5 Press releases and statements are an opportunity for the Council to raise awareness of important public information or story. The Communication Officer will prepare releases, to ensure consistency and corporate style. The release will then be agreed by the Chief Executive & Town Clerk then the Chairman, in association with committee chairs (or vice chair), if subject matter requires, and will normally be restricted to matters that have been debated and agreed by the Council.

- 4.6 Other Councillors and employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Chief Executive & Town Clerk and the Communication Officer to ensure accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.
- 4.7 If a councillor or employee receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Council, it should be referred to the Chief Executive & Town Clerk, or the Communication Officer, or the office.
- 4.9 Employees (other than the Chief Executive & Town Clerk) should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Town Council unless specifically authorised by the Chief Executive & Town Clerk.
- 4.10 All press releases and other materials will be kept for reference and featured on the Council's website.

5. Social Media

- 5.1 The Council acknowledges social media as a useful communication tool. However, clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media to ensure an effective communications mix and that its use does not expose the Council to security risks, reputational damage, or breach of the Data Protection Act 2018.
- 5.2 The day to day operation of the Councils social media platforms, including the Explore branding, shall be delegated to the Communication Officer. The management of the social media platforms is an officer function.
- 5.3 Access to, and posting on Council social media feeds, and other feeds on behalf of the Council will be subject to review with authorisation of the Chief Executive & Town Clerk.
- 5.4 Content, including pictures and graphics, for Council controlled platforms, including the website, should ensure a consistent style, tone of voice and brand protection.
- 5.5 The use of the social media platforms is to promote the work of the Council and Bradford on Avon. The Council will promote not for profit/local organisations holding events, who request the Council to support, with the prior agreement of the Chief Executive & Town Clerk.
- 5.6 The Council's social media platforms will not be used for party political purposes or campaigning, or any pecuniary interests.
- 5.7 Information posted automatically falls into the public domain and may elicit responses and negative comments. In the event that officers or members become aware of excessive responses this should be brought to the Chief Executive & Town Clerk attention so the situation can be managed effectively, and appropriate action taken.

6. Newsletter

- 6.1 The Council will produce four newsletters per year [Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter].
- 6.2 The Council will produce a fortnightly email newsletter.

7. Election Periods

- 7.1 During the period in which an Election has been called (defined as from the 25th working day before the poll), the Council will take specific care in publication of information.
- 7.2 The Council will continue to acknowledge their duty to inform the public of actions taken and provide information, including under Freedom of Information.
- 7.3 During this period:
 - i) Policy decisions and resolutions will continue to be announced on behalf of 'the Town Council.
 - ii) Individual Councillors will not be named or featured, outside of published minutes or unless in relation to adopted Resolutions or Policies – proposals (not adopted) and views will not be published outside of official minutes.
 - iii) In exceptional circumstances (for example in response to an emergency situation) statements from the Chair, Deputy Chair, in their official roles may be published, with the prior agreement of the Chief Executive & Town Clerk.
- 7.4 During this period the Councils officers will be mindful of the guidance/advice issued by Wiltshire Councils Monitoring Officer and the Local Government Associations (LGA) guide for the pre-election period.

8. Monitoring

- 8.1 It is important to monitor the media for items about the Council in order to know, identify impact, the need to respond and inform on future debate.

9. Delegations

- 9.1 In the absence of the Chief Executive & Town Clerk these responsibilities are delegated to the Deputy Town Clerk.

This Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011)ⁱ.

ⁱ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5670/18_78324.pdf