



# **Clun Town Council with Chapel Lawn**

## **PRESS & MEDIA POLICY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Regular and effective communication on the part of Clun Town Council with Chapel Lawn (hereinafter “the council”) with the local community is essential in ensuring that the council is held to account for its policies and actions; and for promoting the local community's awareness of the functions of the council and the facilities and services that it provides.
2. All communication by the council must be carefully managed to ensure that it is accurate, effective, consistent and timely. Failure to observe these principles risks miscommunication with the public, potentially leading to adverse publicity and damage to the council's reputation.
3. The Press and Media (i.e. television, radio and the internet) are key communication channels and it is particularly important that these channels are managed in a controlled and positive manner. The council must maintain a constructive and continuing dialogue with the Press and Media, encouraging appropriate contact with and access to Members and Officers, providing background information either pro-actively or when sought, and promoting attendance at and reporting of its meetings. At the same time, the council must also exercise effective governance in contact with the Press and Media. The purpose of this Policy is to set down that governance.
4. That governance covers how communication with the Press and Media is regulated and controlled by the council. The Policy defines the roles, responsibilities and authority of Members and Officers and the processes that they must follow. It does not seek to provide guidelines on how and when the council, or individual Members or Officers, engage with the Press and Media nor does it seek to provide guidance on the style or content of such communication.

### **LEGAL BACKGROUND**

5. The law governing communication and specifically publicity by local authorities, which includes Parish and Town Councils, is laid down in the Local Government Acts of 1986 and 1988 as amended by subsequent legislation and the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations. 2014. Local authorities must also have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. In general, all communication by Members and Officers must conform with their responsibilities under the various Acts governing their actions in public life.

### **FUNDAMENTAL RULES**

6. The following represent fundamental rules that must be observed by Members and Officers of Clun Town Council with Chapel Lawn with respect to contact with the Press and Media.

7. All statements, written or verbal, to the Press or Media which purport to represent the views of the council shall be approved in advance by the Clerk to the council, the Clerk having previously consulted the Chair of the council or, in his/her absence, the Vice Chair of the council. In urgent situations, where the Clerk to the council is unavailable, the Chair of the council or, in his/her absence, the Vice Chair of the council may approve such statements.

8. No Member or Officer of the council shall make statements, written or verbal, to the Press or Media which purport to represent the views of the council unless those views have been discussed and agreed in a meeting of the council or in a committee of the council with delegated authority to make decisions on the matters concerned.

9. Any Member of the council making a statement, written or verbal, to the Press or Media which represents a personal view and which does not purport to represent the views of the council must take reasonable steps to ensure that the personal nature of the statement is clear and that it could not be interpreted as a statement representing the views of the council. In particular, a Member of the council may not use the title "Councillor" when making statements representing a personal view.

10. In general, all Members and Officers of the council have a responsibility to have due regard to the content and to reasonable interpretations of any statements, personal or otherwise, made to the Press or Media; and to ensure that such statements do not risk the reputation of the council nor bring the council into disrepute.

11. No Member or Official of the council may disclose to the Press or Media any documents or matters that have been issued in confidence to or discussed in confidence by the council unless authorised to do so by a vote of the council and by the Clerk to the council.

## GUIDELINES

12. The following represent guidelines that should be followed by Officers and Members of the council with respect to contact with the Press and Media.

13. Members and Officers of the council should refer all requests by the Press or Media for interviews or statements to the Clerk of the council in the first instance. The Clerk will agree with the Chair of the Council, or in his/her absence, the Vice Chair of the council who will respond on behalf of the council to the request. In general, either the Clerk, the Chair, the Vice Chair or the chairman of the relevant committee of the council will respond.

14. Subject to the fundamental rules above, any Member may seek to publish in the Press or Media material of interest to the local community relating to the work of the council or to issues coming before the council. Indeed, all Members are encouraged to look for such opportunities. Members are advised to discuss such publications with the Clerk at the earliest opportunity in order to ensure that the council's communication with the Press and Media remains coordinated.

15. Debate in the Press and Media is an essential part of the democratic process. Where a matter has not yet come before the council for decision, Members are free to enter into such debate in a personal capacity. In so doing, however, they must avoid criticism of the council and of other Members.

16. Once the council has made a decision on a matter, a Member must not seek to use the Press or Media to undermine the decision of the council. Should they wish to dissent from a decision of the council, they may do so; but they must make clear that this is done solely in a personal capacity; and they must at all times

ensure that their conduct, manner and language in expressing dissent does not risk the reputation of the council.

17. Members and Officers of the council should exercise care when submitting letters to the Press or Media, even when such letters are written in a personal capacity, that they do not express opinions or otherwise act in a manner that could risk the reputation of the council. In particular, Members and Officers should avoid adversarial correspondence in the Press or Media.

18. Members and Officers must alert the Clerk and the Chair of the council as soon as they become aware of a potentially negative issue or matter which may attract adverse Press or Media attention or comment. In such circumstances, and at the discretion of the Chair or, in his/her absence, the Vice Chair, the Clerk will coordinate the production of a statement ready for issue to the Press and Media stating the council's position on the matter