



Knaresborough
Town Council

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Introduction

1. Knaresborough Town Council ("the Council") is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. Where this information is not available via the Council's Publication Scheme, enquiries should be directed to the Town Clerk or, in their absence, the Deputy Clerk.
2. The Council shall, where possible, cooperate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form, including through digital and online platforms ("the media").
3. This policy explains how the Council will work with the media and communicate with the public in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply. It sets out the framework for councillors, officers and employees when communicating with the media and informing the public about the Council's activities, decisions and services.
4. Effective media relations and communications are important in maintaining a positive relationship between the Council and the local community. As members of the public often rely upon local media and digital platforms for information and news, it is important that information about the Council's activities and aspirations is communicated in a consistent, professional and accurate manner.
5. The community includes residents, elected representatives, businesses, schools, shops, places of worship, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, community groups and associations.

Legal Requirements and Restrictions

6. This policy is subject to the Council's obligations under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and any other applicable legislation. The policy shall also operate in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and adopted policies.
7. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information whose disclosure is prohibited by law. Information shall not be disclosed where prohibited by legislation, court order, contract, common law, the Council's Standing Orders or any other legal restriction. Councillors are subject to additional obligations regarding confidentiality under the Council's adopted Code of Conduct.

Media and Communications Channels

8. Media and communications channels include, but are not limited to:

- i. Broadcast media (radio and television);
- ii. Internet and digital communications, including the Council website and social media platforms;
- iii. Printed media including newspapers, magazines, newsletters, leaflets and the Council's Annual Report;
- iv. Council agendas, minutes and public notices;
- v. Council noticeboards and public information displays; and
- vi. Any future communication platform authorised by the Council.

Digital Communications and Social Media

9. The Council maintains a website at:

www.knaresboughtowncouncil.gov.uk

and currently operates the following social media accounts:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/KnaresboroughTC>
- Facebook (Town Walking Tours):
<https://www.facebook.com/Knaresboughtownwalkingtours>
- Tripadvisor: <https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk>

10. The Council may establish additional social media or digital communication platforms as required. This policy applies to all current and future official Council accounts.

11. The Council uses digital communications and social media to:

- Share information about Council services, activities and decisions.
- Promote Council and community events.
- Inform residents, businesses and visitors about opportunities and initiatives.
- Encourage appropriate community engagement.
- Promote Knaresborough as a place to live, work and visit.

12. Social media and digital communications are intended to supplement, not replace, traditional communication methods, statutory notices, consultation procedures or formal Council decision-making processes.

Management and Administration

13. Official social media accounts shall be created, managed and administered only by authorised Council employees.

14. Councillors shall not be granted administrative access to Council social media accounts unless specifically authorised by a resolution of the Council.

15. The Town Clerk shall be responsible for ensuring that appropriate governance arrangements are in place for all Council communication channels.

16. Access credentials shall be held securely by authorised officers. Passwords shall be reviewed and changed where necessary and multi-factor authentication shall be enabled where available.

17. Official Council communication channels shall be used only for authorised Council purposes.

Meetings

18. Meetings of the Council and its committees are open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude the public because their presence would be prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reasons stated in the resolution.

In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, a person may be required to leave a meeting if their behaviour obstructs the conduct of Council business.

19. Where a meeting includes a period for public participation, members of the media may attend, speak and ask questions in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders. The Chair shall manage public participation.

20. Photographing, recording, filming and reporting of Council and committee meetings, including the use of mobile devices, social media, blogs and other communication platforms, is permitted unless:

- i. the meeting has resolved to exclude the public from all or part of the meeting;
- ii. the activity disrupts the proceedings of the meeting; or
- iii. paragraphs 21 and 22 apply.

21. The photographing, recording, filming or publication of images of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council meeting is not permitted unless appropriate permission has been obtained from the responsible adult.

22. Nothing in this policy shall prevent lawful reporting, commentary or communication relating to a meeting where such activity is permitted by law and does not disrupt the conduct of the meeting.

23. The Council shall, as far as reasonably practicable, provide reasonable facilities for those reporting Council or committee meetings.

24. Attendance at meetings of sub-committees shall be governed by the Council's Standing Orders and Recording of Council Meetings Policy.

Content Standards and Publication

25. All communications issued by or on behalf of the Council shall:

- Be accurate, factual and relevant.
- Be professional, courteous and respectful.
- Reflect the Council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Comply with all applicable legislation and Council policies.

- Be politically neutral.

26. Council communications shall not:

- Contain unlawful, defamatory, abusive, threatening or discriminatory material.
- Contain obscene, offensive or inappropriate content.
- Breach copyright or intellectual property rights.
- Disclose confidential information.
- Include personal information without an appropriate lawful basis.
- Be used for party political campaigning or political advertising.

27. Council communications must represent the corporate position of the Council and shall not seek to promote or oppose any political party, candidate or political campaign.

28. The Council logo shall normally be used as the official profile image for Council-managed social media accounts unless alternative branding is approved by the Town Clerk.

Photographs, Video and Media Content

29. Photographs and videos published by the Council shall be obtained and used in accordance with data protection legislation and the Council's privacy arrangements.

30. Particular care shall be taken where images or recordings include children or vulnerable individuals. Appropriate consent shall be obtained where required.

31. Photographs and videos shall not be published where publication could reasonably be expected to compromise an individual's privacy, safety or wellbeing.

Communications with the Media

32. This policy does not seek to regulate councillors acting in their private capacity.

33. The Council's communications with the media shall seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council.

34. Where councillors express views that differ from the Council's corporate position, they must make clear that those views are their own.

35. The Town Clerk, or in their absence the Deputy Clerk, may contact the media where the Council wishes to issue information, statements or other communications. The Clerk is not authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council.

36. The Town Clerk, or any person specifically authorised by the Council, may act as an official spokesperson on behalf of the Council.

37. Where media enquiries are received, the Clerk should acknowledge receipt and provide a response, or an indication of when a response can be expected, as soon as reasonably practicable.

Moderation of Social Media Content

38. The Council welcomes constructive comments and engagement through its social media channels.

39. The Council reserves the right to hide, remove or report content that:

- Is abusive, threatening or harassing.
- Is discriminatory, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or otherwise hateful.
- Contains personal attacks.
- Is defamatory or potentially defamatory.
- Contains false or misleading information.
- Breaches privacy, confidentiality or data protection requirements.
- Contains spam, commercial advertising or repetitive postings.
- Promotes unlawful activity.
- Otherwise breaches this policy or any applicable law.

40. Users who repeatedly breach this policy may be blocked or reported to the relevant platform provider.

41. The Council may retain copies of removed content where necessary for governance, evidential or legal purposes.

Public Enquiries via Social Media

42. Council social media accounts are not monitored continuously and responses cannot be guaranteed within any specific timescale.

43. Communication through social media shall not constitute formal service of notices, complaints, Freedom of Information requests, emergency reports or other official Council correspondence.

44. Individuals wishing to contact the Council formally should do so through the Town Clerk using the Council's published contact details:

Email: clerk@knaresboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk

45. Where appropriate, matters raised through social media may be redirected to official Council communication channels.

Events and Promotion

46. The Council may use its communication channels to promote:

- Council meetings and events.
- Civic initiatives.
- Community activities.
- Charitable activities.
- Events that contribute positively to the wellbeing of Knaresborough.

47. The Council retains discretion over what information, events and initiatives it chooses to promote.

Data Protection, Records and Freedom of Information

48. The Council shall process personal data in accordance with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council's Privacy Notice.

49. Information published through Council communication channels may constitute Council records and shall be retained in accordance with the Council's records management and retention arrangements.

50. Information held by the Council, including social media content, may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Councillors' Use of Social Media and Public Communications

51. Councillors must ensure that public statements, including those made through social media, comply with the Council's Code of Conduct and do not misrepresent Council decisions or bring the Council into disrepute.

52. Subject to legal obligations regarding confidentiality, councillors are entitled to express their personal views but must make clear that such views are their own and do not necessarily represent those of the Council.

53. Councillors must not suggest that their personal views represent those of other councillors or the Council unless specifically authorised to do so.

54. Councillors should comply with:

- The Council's Code of Conduct.
- The Nolan Principles of Public Life.
- Relevant guidance issued by the Monitoring Officer, National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

55. Councillors should avoid personal attacks, offensive commentary or inappropriate exchanges involving councillors, officers, residents, partner organisations or other stakeholders.

Monitoring

56. It is important to monitor media coverage relating to the Council in order to determine:

- a) whether Council press releases and statements are being reported effectively; and
- b) what the community is saying about the Council.

57. Councillors, officers and employees are encouraged to bring relevant media coverage concerning the Council to the attention of the Town Clerk.

Review and Amendment

58. The Town Clerk may make minor administrative amendments to this policy, including updates to contact details, website addresses, platform details and references to legislation.

59. Any substantive amendment to this policy shall require approval by Knaresborough Town Council.

60. This policy shall be reviewed at least every two years or sooner if required by legislative, operational or technological change.

Adopted:

Review Due: