

RAYLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL - MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

1. Rayleigh 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, please contact the Council’s office.
2. The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet (“the media”).
3. This policy explains how the Council may work with the media to meet the above objectives in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

Legal requirements and restrictions

4. This policy is subject to the Council’s obligations which are set out in 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 1998, other legislation which may apply and the Council’s standing orders and financial regulations. The Council’s financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council’s publication scheme.
5. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council’s standing orders, under contract or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council’s publication scheme.

Meetings

6. A meeting of the Council and its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution. In accordance with the Council’s standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council and its committees, if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.
7. Where a meeting of the Council and its committees include an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council’s standing orders.
8. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes e.g. using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings or (iii) paragraphs 9 and 10 below apply.
9. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.
10. Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted.
11. The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, provide reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.
12. The Council’s standing orders will confirm if attendance by the public, their participation, photographing, recording, filming or other reporting is permitted at a meeting of a sub-committee.

Other communications with the media

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

14. The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. If the views of councillors are different to the Council's corporate position and views, they will make this clear.

15. The Council's Clerk (in liaison with the Council or Committee Chairman) may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information, a statement or other material about the Council.

Press Releases

The Town Council should generate positive publicity in the form of press releases to be issued to all local newspapers and journals such as the Echo, Rayleigh Times, Standard Recorder, Essex Life the Essex Chronicle, Rayleigh Review. etc. All press releases will be **non party political**. The issuing of press releases should be considered by members at Committee meetings on any matter under discussion, without the need for a resolution by the Full Council. Press releases will be written by the Town Clerk and will contain a designated Town Council member's contact details including name, telephone number and status of member. The wording should be approved by the Committee Chairman and the Chairman of the Council.

Contact Initiated by the Media

From time to time, the press will contact the Town Council office or members for a comment on a breaking news story. It is not satisfactory to state 'no comment'. In these circumstances the Town Clerk would liaise with the Council and Committee Chairmen as appropriate and will prepare a response. If a member is approached directly they should refer the caller to the Town Council office.

This does not prevent official opposition Councillors from giving their official group/independent views if their stated policy is in conflict with the adopted policy of the Town Council. All matters discussed at meetings, which have been deemed by the Council as being 'Private and Confidential' should not under any circumstances be commented on by members to the press or in any other form of media communication such as websites. Any members who ignore the rules concerning private and confidential matters risk being reported to the Standards Board.

16. Subject to the obligations on councillors not to disclose information referred to in paragraph 5 above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their position and views. Ward members may comment to the press on any issues that are local to their Ward. If in doubt members should seek advice from the Town Clerk. The Media Relations policy is intended to deal solely with the Town Council's official business. The policy will not affect in any way an individual member or groups freedom to make political comment through their own resources.'