

# PADDOCK WOOD TOWN COUNCIL

## Press/media policy

Paddock Wood Town Council's Standing Orders (section 21) states:

Requests from the press or other media for an oral or written comment or statement from the Council, its councillors or staff shall be handled in accordance with the Council's policy in respect of dealing with the press and/or other media.

This policy outlines the procedures and arrangements for handling the press and what Councillors or the Clerk should do if approached by the media or if they are involved in a situation that will attract media attention. When responding to approaches from the media, the Chairman of the Council should be the authorised contact with the media in consultation with the Town Clerk. The Chairman may delegate the responsibility to another Councillor if appropriate.

The town council is keen to develop a good rapport and work proactively with the media, whilst ensuring that confidentiality and consent are maintained at all times.

1. On receipt of a request from the press or other media for a formal statement to the Clerk or any Councillor, the person receiving the request should advise the body making the request that a statement will be considered and issued shortly. The formal response to the press or other media should be the view of the town council as a whole.
2. On receipt of a request the journalist or other caller should be asked to make clear who they are working for or what is the exact nature of their enquiry. Further, they should be asked what and where any information they elicit will be put.
3. The Council is under no obligation to provide a statement – and may prefer to make 'no comment'.
4. Under no circumstances must anything of a confidential nature be disclosed to the press or other media, as per Standing Order 24 (a) & (b).
5. An individual Councillor may give a direct quote as long as they attribute that quote to their name and make it clear that is their view and not that of the town council.
6. No response should be made that is in any way damaging to the interests or reputation of the Town Council.

7. The Town Council acknowledges the right of the media to obtain information from the town council under the Freedom of Information Act. The Council will respond to such requests in accordance with the Act as laid out in Paddock Wood Town Council's Freedom of Information policy.

The Council will not release information that is exempted. Exemptions will be:

- (a) Personal data (see paragraph 8 below);
  - (b) Confidential matters
  - (c) Information likely to endanger the health or safety of a Councillor or member of staff or any other individual.
8. Data Protection Act – The council recognises that personal data (including photographs relating to a Councillor or Clerk are protected under the Data Protection Act and this personal data will not be disclosed to the media without the consent of the person concerned.
  9. If a request for information involves a conflict of interest for a Councillor or the Clerk. In that event, the Councillor or Clerk must declare his or her interest and avoid involvement with the matter.
  10. This Policy will be reviewed annually.
  11. The Clerk/Chairman should keep a record of all communications with the press or other media.
  12. **At Town Council meetings** – The press or representatives from any other media are welcomed at Town Council meetings. However under Paddock Wood Town Council's Standing Order 11 if any item or information is deemed personal or sensitive and not for the public domain, then the press / media along with members of the public should leave the meeting when requested to do so at this point.