



## Southwold Town Council

### Press Release/Media Policy

Southwold Town Council welcomes enquiries from the Press & Media and recognizes that our relationship with the press helps us communicate with residents. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the Town Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members Code of Conduct. Under the 'Public Bodies and Admissions to Meetings Act 1960' the Press are invited to attend all meetings of Council and its committees. They are not however, invited to attend any working group meetings (which are informal fact finding sessions only and are not official council meetings).

The Council's approach to the media should be:

- Proactive
- Responsive and timely
- Informative
- Open, honest & with integrity

There are two types of press release;

#### 1. Official Council Releases

Councillors shall not in their official capacity provide oral or written statements or other written articles to the press or other media.

An official Council release is defined as being made on behalf of the Council as a whole.

This will be issued by the Town Clerk. It will be non-party political and can include a quote from the relevant Councillor(s), usually the Mayor of the Council, or Chair of a Committee.

#### 2. Councillor Press Releases

Councillors shall not in their official capacity provide oral or written statements or other written articles to the press or other media.

Councillors **are only able to issue personal press releases**, and these should be signed in a personal capacity **without** the word councillor attached to the name. Such releases may or may not be political and should bear no reference whatsoever to the Council or any Officer. Neither the Council address nor telephone number should be included as a point of contact.

Once the Council has, however, made a corporate decision, every Councillor should stand by this decision whether they voted for or against it and should not issue a press release expressing a contrary view. To do otherwise risks bringing themselves or the Town Council into disrepute, leads to confusion amongst the Public regarding Council policies and could lead to a Councillor being referred to the Standards Board. Councillors are well advised to consult with the Clerk before issuing any personal press release.

If the Press contact a Councillor directly, then the matter must be referred to the Town Mayor or Town Clerk with no comment being given by the individual councillor.



## **Press Release Protocol**

*The following forms the Protocol for Council Members:*

- Town Council/committees are able to draft a press release in line with procedures. The release will need to be provided to the Town Clerk to review and release to the media.
- Official press releases will not identify the political party or group affiliation of any Member(s) quoted in the release.
- The Town Mayor and/or Town Clerk is the first line of decision making in terms of what is newsworthy for official press releases, and shall made the final decision on whether a press release shall be issued unless otherwise directed by the Council.
- In the years when elections occur, during periods from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day of the Election, Officers will issue no releases quoting Council Members. During this time any quotes will be from Officers.
- Council Members are solely responsible for the writing and distribution of any personal press releases and any letters to the media. Council Member personal releases must not use the Town Councils logo, or use the Council or an Officer as a point of contact.
- Officers and Council Members must act reasonably and responsibly.
- Council Members are reminded that they must not mis-use Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes. Should the Council receive a Freedom of Information request on a topic on which there is correspondence (email or written) from or with Members, normally that correspondence would have to be disclosed, unless it was exempt. The fact that the disclosure of the correspondence may prove embarrassing would not, of itself, prevent disclosure. In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data. The Data Protection Act 1998 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents.
- The Town Clerk will be responsible for interpretation of the Protocol.

Adopted Date; 31<sup>st</sup> March. 2015

Reviewed Date; .....