



## **GILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

The Town Hall, School Road, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4QR

### **Communications and Media Policy**

#### **1. Introduction**

Gillingham Town Council is committed to providing accurate, timely and consistent information regarding its governance, decisions and activities. This policy sets out how the Council will manage communications and media engagement to achieve transparency, maintain confidentiality where required, and ensure public confidence in its operations.

#### **2. Purpose of the Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a clear and consistent approach to communications and media relations.
- Establish governance and oversight mechanisms for engagement with the media.
- Mitigate risks related to the disclosure of confidential or legally restricted information.

#### **3. Scope**

This policy applies to:

- All elected members of the Council.
- The Town Clerk and council officers.
- Any individual or party acting on behalf of the Council in any communication or media capacity.

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

#### **4. Legal Framework**

This council policy is designed to comply with relevant legislation, including:

- Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
- Local Government Act 1972
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000

## **5. Responsibilities**

The Mayor, Town Clerk, or in their absence, the Assistant Town Clerk, are the designated spokesperson for official Council statements to the media. Councillors must not speak on behalf of the Council unless authorised by resolution. All councillors and officers are responsible for ensuring they do not misrepresent the views or decisions of the Council, particularly in:

- Media appearances or interviews
- Written publications or newsletters.
- Social media posts, whether personal or council-affiliated.

Clear distinction must be made between personal views and the Council's official position.

## **6. Meetings**

Meetings of the Council and its standing committees are 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. 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.

The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees 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. 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 written permission.

Oral reporting or commentary about a council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted during the meeting without permission.

## **7. Communications with the Media**

The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. All press releases are to be factual, non-political, and not written to cause offence.

Officers and Councillors who have contact with the media in a personal capacity or as members of non-council related organisations must not refer to their council posts

It is illegal to use graphics or photographs without permission. Ensure that anyone giving permission to use an image is the original copyright owner and check the licensing agreement of photographs in any existing archives before use.

Do not take or use any photographs of children who appear to be under the age of 18 without written permission from a parent or guardian. Permission is non-transferable from a third party, such as a school unless they have authority to grant permission.

## **8. Social Media**

Social Media is a key communications tool for the Town Council and highlights a commitment to openness and transparency. The Town Clerk, with appropriate support, is designated as the administrator of the Town Council's social media channels. Posts on the Council's social media channels should reflect content suitable for public distribution and comply with Council policies.

The Town Council is under no obligation to moderate or respond to posts or comments made by the public but reserves the right to remove any that are deemed to be unacceptable.

Whilst private social media accounts are personal, their content can still affect an individual's professional standing and the Council's reputation. Councillors and officers should adhere to best practices regarding content related to their role, including:

- Ensuring that any reference to the Council on personal social media is made with clarity, specifying that views expressed are personal and do not represent the Council.
- Avoiding engagement in political debates or controversial discussions that could reflect poorly on the Council.
- Refraining from sharing confidential or sensitive information obtained in the course of Council duties.
- Maintaining professionalism and avoiding offensive, defamatory, or inflammatory language.
- Not using Council logos, branding, or images unless officially sanctioned.
- Regularly reviewing privacy settings to manage who can view their posts and personal details.
- Exercising caution when engaging with residents online to ensure transparency and accountability.

## **9. Avoiding Misrepresentation**

To avoid misrepresentation and to protect the integrity of the Town Council, it is not permissible for councillors to use photos of themselves in robes or chains of office as their social media profile pictures.

The robes and chains of office represent the Council, not the individual wearing them or their personal achievement. Such imagery might give the impression that the councillor is speaking or acting in an active and official capacity on social media, even when expressing personal views.

If Mayors or past Mayors wish to share moments from their ceremonial duties, they can do so in posts or updates with appropriate context, rather than as a profile image.

## **10. Elections**

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Councillors and for publicity around elections. The Code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual councillors unless it is relevant to the position they hold in the Council.

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity can be viewed via the link below:

[Recommended code of practice for local authority publicity - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-recommended-practice-on-local-authority-publicity)

In line with practice elsewhere in the country, the Council will not quote any Councillor in a news release or involve them in proactive publicity events during the election period, regardless of whether they are standing for election. The only exception to this (as laid down in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity) is during an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the control of the Council. In this situation, councillors holding key civic positions should be able to comment.

## **11. Risk Management**

Any risk management associated with the affected activities covered by this policy will be included in the council's risk management assessment. Risk notification is the responsibility of council members and staff.

## **12. Review**

This Communications and Media Policy was presented to the Finance and Policy Committee meeting held on 18 August 2025, for approval and adoption minute no. 180a and ratified at the Full Council meeting on 26 August 2025.

Policy reviews will be carried out annually or when there are changes to current legislation, whichever is the sooner. The next review is scheduled for August 2026

Signed by:

The Mayor of Gillingham: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_