



Communications and Engagement Policy

Welshpool Town Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders. It is vital that a communications and engagement policy is developed to enable this duty.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb any freedoms guaranteed by law but to establish a framework for achieving effective aims of communication and engagement with the public.

Legal Framework

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council is also required to have regard to the Welsh Government's Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authority Publicity¹.

Officers and councillors should have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers, and private correspondence should not be leaked to media channels. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action will be taken.

There are several personal privacy issues for officers and councillors that must be managed carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address, private e-mail address and telephone numbers (although Member contact details are in the public domain), annual leave, disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Town Clerk before any response is made to the media.

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 permission from a parent or guardian. Permission is non-transferable from a third party, such as a school.

When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Town Clerk before any response is made.

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/code-recommended-practice-local-authority-publicity>

Community Engagement

The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following manner:

- Public participation slot on meeting agendas (in line with statutory requirements). This allows an opportunity for interested persons to talk to the Council or to ask questions.
- The publishing of agendas, minutes and supporting documentation for all meetings on our website and noticeboards.
- Annual external audit process provides an opportunity for electors to seek further information about financial matters.
- Providing councillor contact information on our website.
- News and events are publicised and promoted via our website and social media.
- Tourist Information Centre is open between 9:30am and 4:30pm.
- Contact form on our website to allow for enquiries by the public.
- Regular press releases featured in local media keep the general public informed of community events, projects and other Town Council items of interest.

Contact with the Media

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media (press, radio, TV, internet) are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to officers and councillors and to background information to assist them in this role. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

When responding to approaches from the media, the Town Clerk is the main contact with permission to speak to the media. Any statements made by any member of officer under this policy should reflect the Council's resolved opinion and set policies.

If Councillors are contacted directly by the media for comment on behalf of the council, they should consult with the Town Clerk before responding to the request. If requested to comment in a personal capacity Councillors must ensure that it is clear that opinions given are their own.

The media are encouraged to attend Council and Committee meetings; seating and workspace will be made available. Meeting dates, agendas, reports, and minutes are available via our website.

All press releases are to be factual, non-political, not written to cause offence and must be in accordance with Council policy.

Social Media

See Social Media Policy.

Elections

The Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authority Publicity² 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 particular position they hold in the Council.

In line with relevant guidance, 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.

Website

The Council maintains a website in accordance with its duties under Section 55 of the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru etc. Act 2013 to publicise certain information electronically.

In order to enhance local democracy and transparency, the Council will also publish:

- A short personal statement by councillors
- Councillor training records
- Councillor declaration of interest records (in line with Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000)
- Councillor attendance records
- Councillor appointments to outside bodies
- All decisions and resolutions made by the Council

Other ways of communicating and engagement with the public

The Council could expand communications to include:

- Quarterly community newsletters to explain and highlight the work of the Council and local events.

² <https://www.gov.wales/code-recommended-practice-local-authority-publicity>

- Encourage further attendance by the Police to meetings to enable a partnership working in meeting statutory duties to consider crime and disorder (Crime and Disorder Act 1998).
- Planned communications and tourism campaigns.
- Media training for key members e.g. Mayor, Town Clerk.
- Briefings for councillors on key issues.
- Member development sessions on important strategic issues.

Filming and Recordings of Meetings

While the Openness of Local Government Regulations 2014 do not apply in Wales, the Council has previously acted within the spirit of these regulations by allowing filming of Council meetings.

Therefore the Council will continue to allow recording and filming in Council meetings, unless the public or press are excluded under a resolution made under the Public Bodies (Access to Meetings) Act 1960 or subsequent legislation.

Whilst permission is granted to record and film in meetings, this must not disrupt the meeting or inhibit community involvement in proceedings and recordings should not record members of the public without their consent.

Whilst the adopted minutes of council meetings remain the official record of the meeting, the Council may record and/or livestream meetings to encourage broader access to meetings for improving access to local democracy and for information purposes. Subject to operational requirements as determined by the Town Clerk, meetings may be recorded/live streamed onto an appropriate platform as far as reasonably practicable, allowing for technical difficulties etc.

Any live streams and recordings of Council meetings made are the property of the Council and cannot be reused or reproduced without the approval of the Council.

Opinions and statements expressed and made during a Council meeting are those of the individuals making them and the Council does not accept any responsibility for any verbal statements made by the public during meetings which may be inaccurate, incorrect, or defamatory.

A notice indicating that this is the policy on filming and recording in meetings will be read out at the start of meetings.

Implementation

The Town Clerk shall have overall responsibility for implementation of this policy.

Written April 2025

Adopted XXX

Review date April 2026