



Ammanford Town Council Press & Media Policy

Adopted: 19th May 2025

Review: Annual Meeting May 2026

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to guide both Councillors and Officers of the Council in their relations with the Press and Media, in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council and to define the roles and responsibilities within the Town Council for working with the media.

This policy applies to all elected and co-opted members of Ammanford Town Council, the Clerk, and other council staff.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media.

Aims

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communication. The media, including press, radio, television and the 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 policies and priorities.

It is important that the press has access to the Town Clerk, Officers, Councillors and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. 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.

This policy sets out the principles for Ammanford Town Council's interaction with the press and media, ensuring all communications are consistent, professional, and in the public interest. It aims to:

- Promote the Council's activities and decisions transparently.
- Ensure accurate representation of the Council's views.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of councillors and staff.

Contact with the Media

The Clerk and Councillors should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

The Council will operate an open and transparent approach to press and media relations, subject to legal and confidentiality constraints.

All communication will be factual, timely, and non-political in nature.

The Council recognises the role of the media in fostering public interest and will work constructively with local and regional outlets.

The Legal Framework

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

Ammanford Town Council's adopted Standing Orders should also be adhered to.

Confidentiality and Legal Considerations

A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on Council or Committee agendas or at any other private briefing.

Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be provided to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place, and appropriate action will be taken.

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

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

All communications must comply with:

- GDPR and data protection laws
- Defamation laws
- Local Government Acts and Standing Orders

Attendance of Media at Council Meetings

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.

The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating, and workspace will be made available.

Any filming or taping of Council proceedings by the media must be with prior notice to the Clerk and Chair of the meeting. Refer to Standing Order number 3.

Clerk and Officers of the Council

The Clerk is the main point of contact for all press and media enquiries and is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council.

In the absence of the Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Deputy Clerk. In the absence of both officers enquirers will be referred to the Mayor/Mayoress who will act as the spokesperson for the purposes of this element of the policy.

All communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day-to-day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk is not expected or authorized to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council.

The Mayor (or Chair) may speak on behalf of the Council in consultation with the Clerk or deputy Clerk.

Members of the Council

Councillors should always act with integrity when representing or acting on behalf of Ammanford Town Council.

Councillors may speak to the press in a personal or political capacity but must not present personal views as those of the Council.

When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media, Members should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information.

For example: -

- as Mayor
- as Chairman of a Committee
- as an individual (i.e. letter to press for publication)

Never use the prefix “Councillor” when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy. A copy of any written material sent to the Press and Media by a Member, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Town Clerk.

Take particular care if the press or media approach you for comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure about any policy, simply state “no comment” and ask the press to contact the Council Offices.

Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that they disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.

A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.

There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example, to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over long periods. All correspondence must come from the Clerk.

Above everything else, a Councillor must observe Ammanford Town Council’s Code of Conduct whenever they conduct the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which they have been elected/appointed or acts as a representative of the authority.

Dealing with the Press

When dealing with the Press verbally, members and officers should be aware of the following:

- Be calm
- Be informed and certain of all your facts
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Town Council that you are aware what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy.
- Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libelous nor slanderous.

Issues to be Aware of

Councillors and officers not used to dealing with the press may be surprised when they see that statements made in all innocence look very different in print than they did when they were spoken.

It is advantageous to write out a statement or position beforehand.

Press Releases

The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Councillors to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

The Clerk or any Councillor may draft a press release, however, they must all be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in the legal framework are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

The Town Clerk, in consultation with the Town Mayor/Mayoress, is also authorised to publish press releases on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a council meeting.

All official press releases must be:

- Approved by the Clerk or Mayor
- Issued on behalf of the Council or its committees
- Politically neutral and representative of agreed Council decisions

Press releases must not:

- Disclose confidential or exempt information
- Misrepresent the Council's position
- Criticise other councillors, staff, or external organisations

Social Media

The use of official Council social media accounts will:

- Be managed by the Clerk or a designated officer only
- Reflect official Council news, updates, and event promotion
- Not include personal opinions or political bias

Councillors are free to use personal social media accounts but must:

- Respect the Members' Code of Conduct
- Avoid publishing confidential or defamatory information
- Clarify that their views are personal if commenting on Council matters

Breach of Policy

Any breach of this policy by a councillor may be referred to the Public Service Ombudsman as a potential breach of the Code of Conduct.

Breaches by staff will be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedures.

Review

This document has been prepared as a guidance note for officers and elected members. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with the Press and Media. The policy has been prepared to ensure consistency in the Council's dealing with the Press and Media and details who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council. It has been drafted to ensure that the views and policy of the Council are presented accurately.

This policy will be reviewed annually or as required by changes in legislation or council practice.