



Andover Town Council

To consider

- (a) if the Council's reputation has been impacted by publishing a mockumentary; and
(b) next steps

Item
No.
15

Produced for: Full Council

By: Councillors:

K Bird, M Farren,
T Gregory, S Hardstaff,
H Neate & E Reynolds.

Date of Report: 12 Jan 2024

Background:

On 20 September 2023, Andover Town Council (ATC) resolved to:

- (a) develop a series of mockumentaries, in collaboration with various organisations within Andover, which can be uploaded to various media platforms; and
(b) approve purchase of two microphones.

No Councillors registered an interest in the item at the meeting.

We express our concerns regarding decisions and processes undertaken by ATC regarding publication of a subsequent mockumentary video on 19 December 2023 and propose next steps.

Advice:

Two microphones were purchased on 13 Oct 2023 and are entered in the ATC asset register at reference 80.

At lunchtime on 16 December 2023, a councillor advised fellow councillors for the first time that a Christmas mockumentary was complete and sought councillors' opinions by 7pm the following day, when it was planned to publish the video. Councillors feedback applauded the creativity and enthusiasm in making the mockumentary, but raised concerns that the style of the mockumentary may be perceived as negative to ATC and also sought reassurance that:

- legal advice had been taken;
- the video complied with the ATC social media policy; and
- if Council approval was needed prior to publishing.

From the feedback given, it became clear that the original resolution of 20 September 2023 did not consider the next steps for process or procedure around publishing the mockumentaries. The Town Clerk had considered that this would be a future agenda item where the draft mockumentaries would require Council approval before method of publication was discussed.

On 18 December 2023, councillors received:

- a summary of potential options for going forward which lead to ATC seeking legal advice, consulting with stakeholder partners and a request for press lines.

On 19 December 2023, councillors received:

- feedback from one stakeholder partner to the effect that publishing the video would likely create adverse publicity for ATC; and
- legal advice that there was a real risk that residents would not understand the video, the timing was inappropriate and suggested it would be different if the video was published independently.

Councillors further commented that independent publication would not be appropriate after asking and receiving ATC funding and filming from locations accessed as a councillor.

Later that day, the councillor published the video on YouTube, in the name of the councillor with the following written credits.



On 29 December 2023, an article was printed in the Andover Advertiser under the heading 'Councillor's mockumentary video 'made out of love for the town'.' The article included a line to the effect that the councillor had released the video independently of the Town Council.

As at 11 January 2024, the video had received 474 views, with 22 'thumbs up' but no comments. Comments on a small number of Facebook pages to date have been largely negative and questioned use of ATC equipment when making the video.

We are concerned the video gives the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that the councillor was acting as a councillor when publishing the video.

The LGA encourages the use of support, training and mediation prior to action being taken using the Code of Conduct.

Proposal:

<p>1. The Council should consider if the Council's reputation has been impacted and to review if lessons can be learned:</p>	<p>What, if any, are the next steps?</p>
<p>(a) publishing the video using the councillor pre-fix;</p>	
<p>(b) inappropriate use of council equipment for a personal video;</p>	
<p>(c) coverage in the Andover Advertiser using the councillor pre-fix; and</p>	
<p>(d) clarify ownership of version2 of the video.</p>	
<p>Depending on the outcome of Council's consideration, we further propose that the Council:</p>	
<p>2. To reviews the Media Policy as a priority to include specific guidance on making future mockumentaries and/or videos for publication; and</p>	<p>To review the Media Policy in the 31st January P+R Committee after previous review by the policies working group.</p>
<p>3. To agree that any further mockumentaries are formally approved by Full Council in advance of publication, supported by legal advice, a risk assessment, stakeholder engagement and press lines.</p>	<p>To publish the schedule agreed between the Town Clerk and Cllr J Hughes and Andover College for the Mockumentaries project, and to schedule a date for Full Council review of the final episodes.</p>