



Andover Town Council

Item
No.

To **consider** Officers concerns in relation to the Media Policy and to **agree** the inclusion of the specific clause relating to statements made as individuals.

Produced for: P&R Committee

By: Town Clerk & Deputy Clerk

Date of Report: 25 Jan 2024

Current situation:

Andover Town Council have a [draft Media Policy](#) which has been taken to the Policy Review Working Group on two separate occasions for review as required, but the phrase below remains a point of contention.

- 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: -
*Using the prefix Councillor when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy, make sure you include a statement that you are making a statement as an individual and **NOT** on behalf of the Town Council itself.*

It is common ground that:

- a. some members of the public currently interpret anyone using the prefix "Councillor" or "Cllr" as automatically representing the Council
- b. some members of the public will be unclear as to whether the Councillor was representing the council or not.

Officers would advise:

- that Councillors can of course use their title of 'Councillor' when addressing the press, however, it is considered best practice to ensure, when making statements under the title of 'Councillor' the addressee is clear that the opinion/information given is being given as an individual.
- that by complying with the above clause, Councillors are acting in complete transparency and by doing so working within the bounds of the Nolan Principles, by which all public bodies are required to abide by.
- any Councillor giving a press release which does not include the clarifying statement, is at risk of being accused of knowingly making a misleading or unclear statement because they deliberately have not declared who the press release is being made on behalf of. (Themselves or the Council.)
- If members of the public believe that a Councillor has knowingly made a misleading or unclear statement, this may be construed as a Breach of the Code of Conduct in relation to Openness and Honesty. Steps should always be taken to prevent this kind of misunderstanding to protect the reputation of Councillors and the Council.
- The Test Valley Borough Council Monitoring Officer has been asked to give advice on this issue.

Councillor Robin Hughes has provided, by way of support of the concern he has expressed, a copy of a decision reached by West Devon Borough Council. This is supplied to Councillors on email.

Recommendation:

- To **note** Officers concerns
- To **agree** the clause should be maintained in the Media Policy before reviewing the policy any further.