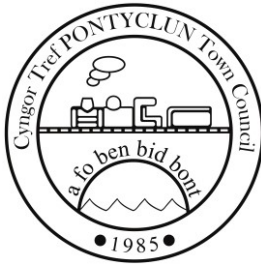


# Cyngor Tref Pontyclun Town Council

*Press, Media and promotions policy.*

*last review May 2024*



## Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within Pontyclun Town Council (known as “the Council”) for working with the press and media (known as “the media”) and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media. Communications via other means such as social media, Community Council website and Council noticeboards is also covered by this policy.
- 1.2 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena.

## 2 *Key aims*

- 2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, and 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 policies and priorities.
- 2.2 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 Members 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.

### **3**     *The legal framework*

- 3.1     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 (March 2011). Some aspects of the Code are relevant to this policy: -

“Where local authority publicity addresses matters of political controversy it should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner”.  
“Any publicity describing the council’s policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy”.

- 3.2, Officers and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.
- 3.3     Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and take appropriate action in accordance with the Standing Orders and Code of Conduct adopted by the Council.
- 3.4     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 Council’s solicitor before any response is made.
- 3.5     There are several personal privacy issues for Officers and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively in accordance with the Council’s policies on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. These issues include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member 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 Community Clerk before any response is made to the media.

### **4**     *Contact with the media*

- 4.1     When responding to approaches from the media, the Chair of the Council should be the authorised contact with the media in consultation with the Community Clerk.
- 4.2     Statements made must reflect the Council’s opinion. If practicable, to assist with accuracy it is preferred that such statements are in writing,
- 4.3     Other Councillors’ can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

- 4.4 Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. 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. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.
- 4.5 Letters representing the views of the Council should only be issued by the following agreement by the Council. If individual Members choose to send letters to express their own opinions on Council policies, they are strongly advised to check their facts first with the Clerk. It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward are those of the Council or of an individual Member.
- 4.6 At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.
- 4.7 All of the above shall apply equally to postings by Councillors on Social Media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook.

## 5 *Attendance of media at Council and Working group meetings*

- 5.1 Agendas and minutes of meetings will be supplied to media outlets together with dates of meetings being available on the Council's website.
- 5.2 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes be sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting.
- 5.3 The media are encouraged to attend Council and Working Group meetings.
- 5.4 Filming or taping of Council or Working Group proceedings is governed by Council Standing Orders which state "Photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of a meeting by any means is not permitted without the Council's prior written consent".

## 6 *Elections*

- 6.1 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (March 2011) contains guidance for providing publicity for Members and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual Members unless it is relevant to the position they hold in the Council. These extracts from the Code illustrate the main points: -
- "During the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, local authorities should not publish any publicity on controversial issues or report views or proposals in such a way that identifies them with any individual members or groups of members. Publicity relating to individuals involved directly in the election should not be published by local authorities during this period unless expressly authorised by or under statute. It is permissible for local authorities to publish factual information, which identifies the names, wards and parties of candidates at elections".

- “Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums”.

6.2 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 or not 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, Members holding key civic positions should be able to comment.

## **7** *Press releases*

7.1 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 all Officers and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

7.2 Any Officer or Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Clerk following agreement by the Council to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (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.

## **8** *Urgent situations*

8.1 In the case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a Council meeting, this may be issued by the Clerk with the agreement of the Chair of the Council or relevant following circulation of a draft version to other Members for comment.

8.2 In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the Members and Officers with specific roles and responsibilities under this policy, the following delegations shall apply:

- a) the Vice Chair of the Council may act in the absence of the Chair.
- b) The Clerk may act in the absence of the Vice Chair of the Council.

## 9 *Council noticeboards and Internet*

- The Council noticeboards are primarily for the display of agenda and other statutory notices relating to the Council's business and also notices from the Borough Council, Welsh Government and other statutory bodies. Subject to the availability of space, notices from local or national not-for-profit organisations considered as being of interest to the local community will be displayed on the community noticeboards. The Clerk is to be responsible for maintaining the information on the noticeboards and ensuring that the information therein is up to date.
- The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news, together with an agenda of forthcoming meetings and archive minutes from Council meetings. The Clerk is responsible for keeping the information on the site up to date.
- The Council's detailed policies on use of Noticeboards and social media are provided in the 2 appendices below.

## Appendix 1 Noticeboard management

### Notice Boards

The Council has several Notice boards placed strategically around the Council area. There are 2 types of board.

1. Large boards – 8 in various locations
  - a. Pontyclun- Heol yr Orsaf, Library and by Post Office
  - b. Ynysddu – at entrance to estate
  - c. Brynsadler – in Stone bus shelter on Llanharry Rd
  - d. Miskin – in St David's church yard and by YGGG school
  - e. Groesfaen – in Stone bus shelter at centre of village
2. Smaller board at Café 50 entrance.

The boards are used for Council notices, to advertise our services and also by Community Groups to advertise themselves and events.

Individual notices are typically A4 portrait in size or smaller.

The caretakers will check the notice boards and update notices weekly (Mondays)

### Café 50 external noticeboard

The contents of this noticeboard all relate to Café 50 and are managed by the Council's community liaison officer. This displays information about what is on at Café 50 and when plus who to contact. The notices here are checked and updated weekly where relevant.

### Large boards

These boards are used to provide information regarding Council activities and services. When space allows Community Group notices can be added. There is space for up to 18 notices on each board.

- There will be 3 permanent Council notices.
  - List of Councillor contact details
  - Reference to our Grant funding
  - Timetable of Council meeting dates
- 2 spaces are used for special Council, RCT CBC or National notices, e.g. Audit notice.
- 2 spaces are used to publicise the Council's various meeting agendas (Council meetings, Working group meetings etc)
- 2 Spaces are set aside for Cafe50 activities/events.
- This leaves up 9 spaces for notices relating to other local Community Groups/Event advertisements.
  - Community group notices are displayed for a maximum of 4 weeks or date of specific event if sooner.
  - If the Council has too many notices those that are most relevant to the locality will be displayed.
- If the board is full and the Council has additional Council/Community notices for that board then non-event specific notices will be replaced in date order – oldest first and only then event specific ones.
- If we have insufficient notices to fill the board the Council may choose to leave nondate specific notices up for longer, or to add extra notices for Cafe50/Council activities.
- Commercial notices will not be displayed.

## **Appendix 2 The Council's social media**

### ***Introduction to Social media***

A revolution is taking place in how we communicate. The world is experiencing the biggest ever change in how information is created and owned, as well as the speed at which it can be shared. This is changing the way we live, work and even how we speak and think.

Social media is a blanket term applied to a range of online multimedia tools that are used for creating content and two-way communication. They can be accessed via your smartphone, PC, laptop, tablet or smart TV.

### ***Policy statement***

- This policy is intended to help employees and elected members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as social networking websites, forums, message boards, blogs or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.
- This policy outlines the standards the Council requires employees and elected members to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which your use of social media will be monitored and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

### ***The scope of the policy***

- All employees and elected members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.
- Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- Breach of this policy by elected members will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

### ***Responsibility for implementation of the policy***

- The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.
- All employees and elected members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk or Chair of the Council.
- Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.



## *Using social media sites in the name of the council*

- The Clerk, Admin Assistant, Community liaison Officer and elected members are permitted to post material on a social media website in the name of the Council and on its behalf in accordance with the rules and scope of this policy.
- If you are not sure if your comments are appropriate do not post them until you have checked with the Clerk/Chair.

## *Using social media*

- The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and the support and services it provides to the community. It also recognises the importance of our employees and elected members joining in and helping shape community conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
  - a) Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council you must have read and understood this policy and
  - b) Employees must have gained prior written approval to do so from the Clerk.

## *Rules for use of social media*

Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules:

- Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- Any employee/elected member who feel that they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Clerk/Chair.
- Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk/Chair.
- Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- Before you include a link to a third-party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council.
- You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- Don't discuss colleagues without their prior approval.
- Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion. Remember that although it is acceptable to make political points or

canvass votes via your own social media accounts this will not be permissible if you are commenting on behalf of the Council.

- Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

### *Monitoring use of social media websites*

- Employees and elected members should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for Council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under our Disciplinary Procedure and councillors under the Code of Conduct.
- Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and the Council.
- A serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct/breach of the Code of Conduct (this list is not exhaustive):
  - a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature).
  - b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation.
  - c) material, which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council our councillors or our employees.
  - d) confidential information about the council or anyone else
  - e) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, whether for you or the organisation); or
  - f) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure/Code of Conduct.

- Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.
- If you notice any use of social media by other employees/elected members in breach of this policy, please report it to the Clerk/Chair.

## Appendix 3 The Council's online presence

The Council has the following “official” channels for communicating with the public.

1. We update manage the Pontyclun.net website.
  - This publishes information about the Council, events, activities etc.
  - This is also the public depository for the statutory information that the Council must publish.
2. We have 2 Facebook pages; one for the Town Council and one for Café 50
  - These have information about the Council/Café 50
  - We post articles about news and events on the pages.
  - We repost relevant information from other local bodies.
  - There is a Facebook page for Ivor Woods – we do not normally post on this but was a page set up by the public in the past.
3. The Council has an Instagram account to promote Events and activities in the Council area
4. We have 2 X (Twitter) pages; one for the Town Council and one for Café 50
  - These have information about the Council/Café 50
  - We post articles about news and events on the pages.
  - We repost relevant information from other local bodies.
5. The Council has “Google” pages for the Town Council and Café 50 which hold information about location and opening hours.
  - We also post information about Council/Cafe 50 events on these pages.
  - There are separate google pages for
    - The Council
    - Café 50
    - The Car Park
    - The Public Toilets
    - In some of the cases we took over existing Google pages set up for reviews
    - The Christmas fayre
    - Ivor Woods
    - Pontyclun Park
6. Council led events are also promoted via the following websites/Facebook pages.
  - Eventbrite – where tickets for some ticketed events can be sourced.
  - Wherecanwego.com
  - Familiesonline.co.uk
  - Thebestof.co.uk/Pontypridd-and-Rhondda
  - Visit RCT (FB page)
  - Love the valleys (FB page)
  - We also ask RCT CBC to publish on their web pages and Face book pages.
7. The Council officers write a monthly article for “The Buddy” outlining local events and news.
8. The monthly “buddy article” is also posted on the Council’s blog and via this loaded onto the website and Facebook page. The Officers are looking at options to extend the blog to include articles from other Councillors and the clerk to give residents a wider view of what contributors undertake in their roles.
9. We occasionally ask local press to publish articles about Café 50
10. The Council publishes an annual report which is placed on the website