Communications Policy & Strategy

RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE: P&F

This is a policy/procedure document of Saltash Town Council to be followed by both Councillors and Employees.

Current Document Status			
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03.2021	1.1	AJT	P&F 09.03.2021	173/20/21c	New policy – deferred to next FTC.
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03.2025	2025	FM	FTC 03.04.2025	05/25/26a(3)	Approved

Document Retention Period
Until superseded

Communications Policy

Aims

- To set out how we will communicate with staff, Members, partners, local residents and the media.
- To ensure all communications are consistent and co-ordinated across all channels.
- To develop excellent, innovative and cost-effective communications to increase awareness of the Town Council's services and achievements and improve the reputation of the Town Council.
- To promote high quality customer service and ensure that everyone in the Town Council understands their role in delivering this.

Outcomes

All communications issued by the Saltash Town Council will be:

- **Open and honest** – direct, truthful and factual.
- **Timely** – up to date information communicated regularly, consistently and quickly.
- **Clear and concise** – Plain English and jargon free – easily understood by all sectors of the community.
- **Accessible** – easy to access through appropriate media / channels and in mixed format.
- **Relevant** – targeted at the needs of the intended audience, appropriate information, informative and useful.
- **Inclusive** – face to face communications wherever possible, designed to encourage and value discussion and feedback. Information available in suitable formats.

Scope

This policy covers all types of communications received by and issued by the Town Council, its Officers and elected Members and includes:

- Verbal
- Written
- Email
- Social media
- All correspondence issued by Town Council Officers and staff

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- All correspondence issued by Town Councillors

The Town Council will not consider any anonymous correspondence where the author cannot be identified or abusive or aggressive communications[1].

Data Protection and Freedom of Information

Saltash Town Council is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Data Controller. Town Council Officers, staff and Town Councillors are Data Processors and have a responsibility to maintain records and process data in accordance with the current General Data Protection Regulations. Breaches of the regulations may lead to the Town Council being subject to investigation by the ICO, a potential fine and loss of reputation. Anyone – Town Council Officers, staff and Town Councillors – should also remember that correspondence issued may be subject to release under a Freedom of Information request.

Councillors :

Councillors are reminded that the Code of Conduct applies to all forms of communications – verbal, written (including social media) and should be adhered to at all times.

1. **Town Council Correspondence**

    1.1. The point of contact for the Town Council is the Town Clerk or the Officer delegated to the relevant role or task.

    1.2. No individual Town Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Town Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. Town Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know' in order to carry out their role on behalf of the Town Council.

    1.3. All official communications should be sent in the name of the Town Council using Town Council letter headed paper and signed by the Town Clerk or, where another Town Council officer is signing, with the approval of a Line Manager or from an approved Town Council email address.

    1.4. All official communications issued by the office of the Mayor or other nominated member must be authorised by Town Council or relevant committee in advance. The

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[1] Zero Tolerance Policy; Unreasonable Persistent Complaints Policy

Development and Engagement Manager or Communications and Engagement Officer will be responsible for authorising all official communications prior to release.

1.5. All correspondence issued by Town Councillors where tasks are delegated by the Town Council must be copied to the Town Clerk or Officer delegated to the relevant role or task.

1.6. Where correspondence is copied to persons other than the addressee, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX) but data protection rules should be observed.

1.7. All communications should be compliant with the relevant data protection legislation, the Town Council's code of conduct, respect confidentiality and any other relevant Town Council policies in place at the time.

1.8. A copy of correspondence with Unitary Authority Town Councillors will be sent to Ward Town Councillors.

2. Agenda Items for Town Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

2.1. The agenda should be clear and concise. It should contain sufficient information to enable Town Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.

2.2. Items for information will be circulated with the agenda and papers for the meeting and will be kept to a minimum.

2.3. Where a Town Councillor wishes to circulate matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Town Clerk's office, and circulated to all Town Councillors.

2.4. Motions for an agenda will be submitted to the Proper Officer in writing following the procedure laid out in Standing Orders.

2.5. The Policy for Receiving Public Questions, Representations and Evidence at Meetings will be followed where these are received.

2.6. Discussion and decision making should only take place by email or Survey Poll where it is used in exceptional circumstances under a scheme of delegation and in accordance with standing orders.

3. Communications with the Press and Public

3.1. The Development and Engagement Manager or Communications and Engagement Officer will clear all press releases, or comments to the media, with the Chairman of the Town Council[2] or the Chair of the relevant committee as appropriate.

3.2. Press releases from the Town Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Town Clerk or an officer delegated to the task or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

3.3. All articles for the Town Messenger will be checked and approved by the Development and Engagement Manager or delegated Officer prior to publication.

3.4. Requests from the press/media for comments or statements should be sent to the Town Clerk's office.

3.5. Unless a Town Councillor has been authorised by the Chairman of the Town Council to speak to the media on an issue, Town Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view. The Chairman of the Town Council is the normal authorised spokesperson for the Town Council[3].

3.6. When representing the Town Council at a "Meet your Town Councillors" event Town Councillors should follow GDPR and data protection guidance, the Code of Conduct and relevant sections of this policy.

3.7. Unless a Town Councillor is certain that they are reporting the view of the Town Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.

3.8. If Town Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be passed immediately to the Town Clerk who will process it under the Customer Feedback Policy[4].

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[2] Mayor's Protocol Guide p9
[3] Mayor's Protocol Guide p9
[4] Customer Feedback Policy p3

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3.9. Designated staff are authorised to promote the work of the Town Council on social media platforms, the website and noticeboards but operate strictly in accordance with the approved Social Media policy[5] of the Town Council.

3.10. In making public comments, Town Councillors must respect decisions made by a majority vote and abide at all times to the Code of Conduct[6].

3.11. The Town Council may undertake consultations with residents from time to time. Where possible and practicable there will be multiple means of participation to ensure all consultees are contacted and able to respond, particularly taking account of difficult to reach groups.

4. Town Councillor Correspondence to external parties

4.1. Individual Town Councillors are responsible for their own ward member correspondence. The Town Council does not provide administrative support for such purpose. Town Councillors must ensure they make clear where they are informing on official policy and where they are stating their personal views.

4.2. When using a Town Council email account, Town Councillors must always reflect the view of the Town Council.

4.3. Correspondence (including emails) sent in relation to Town Council business where a Town Councillor has been delegated to a task, should be openly copied to the Town Clerk or officer responsible for the task.

4.4. Town Councillors should be aware that all emails sent and received from their STC email account may be subject to release under FOI legislation.

5. Communications with Town Council Staff[7]

5.1. It is unlawful for Members to instruct members of staff. Town Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff[8], unless authorised to do so through the Town Council's decision-making process and with their line manager's agreement.

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[5] Social Media Policy
[6] Code of Conduct Part 2, General Obligations
[7] Protocol for Officer Member Relations ; Standing Orders
[8] Standing Orders

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5.2. No individual Town Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Town Council or the Chair of a committee or other meeting, may give instructions to the Town Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with Town Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

5.3. Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.

5.4. Instant replies should not be expected to e-mails to the Town Clerk or other members of staff; reasons for urgency should be clearly stated.

5.5. Town Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

5.6. For meetings with the Town Clerk or other Officers an appointment should be made wherever possible, meetings should be relevant to the work of that Officer and Town Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate Town Council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

Summary

Saltash Town Council is committed to effective communications to ensure the Town Council's operations, priorities, objectives, values, ambitions and challenges are better understood by all our audiences - both internal and external.

Communications Strategy

Vision Statement

Saltash Town Council is committed to effective communications to ensure the Town Council's operations, priorities, objectives, values, ambitions and challenges are better understood by all our audiences - both internal and external – including our statutory obligations as a council.

Who do we want to reach?

Our Audience and stakeholders:

Key stakeholders include residents, local businesses, and community organisations, local government organisations and Cornwall Councillors, local media and Politicians.

What do we want to achieve?

Updates to the community:

Provide regular updates on council activities, decisions, and upcoming events to keep the community informed.

Community engagement:

Actively engage with the community through public forums, surveys and consultations, and feedback mechanisms to understand concerns and gather input. Make sure that the results of these are communicated positively to the community through communications channels.

Ensure the channels of communicating these elements cover electronic and paper versions.

Transparency:

Emphasise transparency by sharing meeting minutes, financial reports, and important documents to build trust and enable scrutiny of council functions and business.

Responsive platforms:

Monitor and respond promptly to inquiries and concerns raised by residents on various communication platforms and communicate any action taken.

Feedback mechanism:

Promote the methods for residents to provide feedback on services and decision making.

Promote ways in which the Town Council is making steps towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals. The Town Council has a responsibility to the community to ensure that our actions are in line with best sustainability practice.

How will we communicate?

Consistent Branding:

Maintain a consistent visual identity and tone of voice across all messaging on all communication channels, and assets for recognition and clarity[9].

Channels of Communication:

Identify a mix of channels such as official websites, social media, newsletters, and community meetings to disseminate information. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram will provide a fundamental and cost-effective home for Saltash Town Council communications.

- Town Council website

- Social media strategy to encompass various platforms utilising them to their full potential.

- Print media including local news outlets

- Broadcast TV and Radio channels

- Mailouts and leaflet drops

- Posters and banners

- Noticeboards

- In Person – Meet your Councillor sessions

- E-shot newsletter

Proactive PR:

Continue to positively promote the work that Saltash Town Council undertakes to the local media utilising all opportunities to enhance the role of the council in the town.

Statements to the Media:

Provide a mechanism to respond to any media enquiries in a timely manner as to safeguard the image of the town council and its members.

What will we communicate?

Regular Updates:

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[9] Appendix 1

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Establish a clear plan for communicating during urgent situations, ensuring residents receive timely and accurate information.

Education Campaigns:

Implement educational campaigns to inform residents about local policies, initiatives, and the decision-making process – dog poo campaign, green initiatives, speeding awareness etc. including circulating Cornwall Council education awareness.

Commence a campaign to educate people on the purpose of the Town Council. How they differ from County Councils, what their job is and why they exist.

Multilingual and Accessible Communication:

Incorporate Cornish language elements to communications out to community – including email signatures. Celebrate our Cornish heritage by using Cornish and English for communications and greetings in all genres – written, video and all graphics. We will endeavour to make all our communications as accessible as possible in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, and the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018.

Building good partnerships

Collaboration with Local Media:

Foster relationships with local media outlets to enhance coverage of council activities and community news through a positive working relationship.

Collaboration with Local Government:

Use our communications platforms to promote the division of responsibilities between Saltash Town Council and Cornwall Council and provide clarity regarding reporting issues to both councils.

How will we report on results?

The Communications and Engagement Officer will compile quarterly reports on growth and engagement, which will be communicated to the Development and Engagement Manager and the Town Clerk.

Appendix 1 – Branding and House Style

Saltash Town Council Style Guide:

Using a corporate style ensures consistency and accessibility across written communications.

Typography	
Abbreviations	The full word or phrase to be used the for the first use, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. Full stops not to be used abbreviations. In general, shortened versions of words (such as 'approx' for approximately or 'Jan' for January) should not be used. The exceptions are: • 'cllr' for councillor, which can be used in certain circumstances, When referring to a specific councillor, use 'Councillor' and their full name at first mention, and 'Cllr' and their surname subsequently • When writing for social media.
Branding	Town Seals and Modern Logo: refer to the Town Seals and Modern Logo Policy for guidance. When the Town Council is referred to in a publication it will be referred to as the Town Council not we.
Colour	The colour palette selected should be consistent with the type of publication and across the document. Avoid using colour alone to convey meaning in charts or graphs.
Date and Time	Write dates in full using the 'dd month yyyy' format. Do not name days unless it is absolutely necessary. For example: • 14 September 2020 (not 14th September 2020). For financial years and academic years write 2020/21 – not 2020-21, 2020-1, 2020/1 or 2020-2021. To refer to an expanse of time, use, for example, 2020 to 2025.

	Write the time using numbers, with a full stop (rather than a colon) to separate hours and minutes. Always use a 12-hour clock, for example 10.30am till 5.15pm.
Headings and titles:	Arial size 14, bold and placed. These should be in sentence case, with a capital letter used for only the first word of the heading.
Hyperlinks	When creating a hyperlink, use meaningful text as links. This makes content accessible to people using screen readers
Imagery	'Alt text' (alternative text) should be provided for all images to ensure accessibility. Following guidance for appropriate content in data protection documents.
Italics	Italics make text more difficult to read. Use single quotation marks to emphasise a word.
Main body text:	Corporate typeface is Arial size 12 black (do not use italic or underlined text).
Numbers	Use figures for numbers 10 and above. Write out numbers one to nine in letters.
Percentages	Use 'per cent', not percent or %. Only use the symbol in tables, graphs and images, or if a document uses the term so much that you could significantly reduce the word count by doing so. When not quoting a figure, use the word 'percentage'
Style	Be consistent with use of layout in keeping with the type of publication being produced.
Spacing	Use at least 1.5 line spacing (the minimum requirement for accessibility). Use a single space after full stops.

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Please refer to the Local Government Association writing style guide for full guidance on creating written content for webpages, printed publications or social media platforms. Found on the following https://www.local.gov.uk/about/creating-content-lga/local-government-association-lga-writing-style-guide

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