

# Communications Policy

RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE: P&F

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

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01/2021	1 DRAFT	AJT			New policy.
03/2021	1.1	AJT	P&F 09.03.2021	173/20/21c	New policy – deferred to next FTC.
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08/2023	2023 v2	AJT	FTC 05.10.2023	195/23/24a	Approved.

<b>Document Retention Period</b>
Until superseded

# SALTASH TOWN COUNCIL 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
- 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<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Zero Tolerance Policy; Unreasonable Persistent Complaints Policy

## **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 Council Members 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 Council Members – should also remember that correspondence issued may be subject to release under a Freedom of Information request.

### **Members:**

Members 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.

### **A. Town Council Correspondence**

1. The point of contact for the Town Council is the Town Clerk or the Officer delegated to the relevant role or task.
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.
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.
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 Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk will be responsible for authorising all official communications prior to release.
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.
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.
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.

8. A copy of correspondence with Unitary Authority Town Councillors will be sent to Ward Town Councillors<sup>2</sup>.

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

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. Items for information will be circulated with the agenda and papers for the meeting and will be kept to a minimum.
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.
4. Motions for an agenda will be submitted to the Proper Officer in writing following the procedure laid out in Standing Orders.<sup>3</sup>
5. The Policy for Receiving Public Questions at Meetings will be followed where these are received.
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.

**C. Communications with the Press and Public**

1. The Town Clerk, or Assistant Town Clerk will clear all press releases, or comments to the media, with the Town Mayor<sup>4</sup> or the Chair of the relevant committee as appropriate.
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. All articles for the Town Messenger will be checked and approved by the Assistant Town Clerk or delegated Officer prior to publication.
4. Requests from the press/media for comments or statements should be sent to the Town Clerk’s office<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Standing Order 26b

<sup>3</sup> Standing Order 10

<sup>4</sup> Mayor’s Protocol Guide p9

<sup>5</sup> Standing Order 24

5. Unless a Town Councillor has been authorised by 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 Mayor is the normal authorised spokesperson for the Town Council<sup>6</sup>.
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.
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.
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<sup>7</sup>.
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<sup>8</sup> of the Town Council.
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<sup>9</sup>.
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.

#### **D. Town Councillor Correspondence to external parties**

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.
2. When using a Town Council email account, Town Councillors must always reflect the view of the Town Council.
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. Town Councillors should be aware that all emails sent and received from their STC email account may be subject to release under FOI legislation.

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<sup>6</sup> Mayor's Protocol Guide p9

<sup>7</sup> Customer Feedback Policy p3

<sup>8</sup> Social Media Policy

<sup>9</sup> Code of Conduct Part 2, General Obligations

## **E. Communications with Town Council Staff<sup>10</sup>**

1. It is unlawful for Members to instruct members of staff. Town Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff<sup>11</sup>, unless authorised to do so through the Town Council's decision-making process and with their line manager's agreement.
2. No individual Town Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Town Mayor 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.
3. Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.
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. Town Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
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.

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<sup>10</sup> Protocol for Officer Member Relations ; Standing Orders

<sup>11</sup> Standing Order 27a(ii)