

Communications Policy

RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE: P&F

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

Current Document Status

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Date	Version	Author/Editor	Notes
January 2021	1 DRAFT	AJT	New policy
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May 2022	1.1/2022	AJT	Readopted

Document Retention Period

Until superseded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 Council's services and achievements and improve the reputation of the Council.
- To promote high quality customer service and ensure that everyone in the 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 Council officers and staff
- All correspondence issued by Councillors

The Town Council will not consider any anonymous correspondence where the author cannot be identified or abusive or aggressive communications¹.

¹ 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. Council officers, staff and 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 – Council officers, staff and 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 council is the Town Clerk or the officer delegated to the relevant role or task.
2. No individual 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. 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 council.
3. All official communications should be sent in the name of the council using council letter headed paper and signed by the Town Clerk or, where another Council officer is signing, with the approval of a Line Manager or from an approved council email address.
4. All official communications issued by the office of the Mayor or other nominated member must be authorised by 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 Councillors where tasks are delegated by the 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 Council's code of conduct, respect confidentiality and any other relevant council policies in place at the time.

8. A copy of correspondence with Unitary Authority Councillors will be sent to Ward Councillors².

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

1. The agenda should be clear and concise. It should contain sufficient information to enable 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 Councillor wishes to circulate matters for “information only”, this information will be circulated via the Town Clerk’s office, and circulated to all Councillors.
4. Motions for an agenda will be submitted to the Proper Officer in writing following the procedure laid out in Standing Orders.³
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 Mayor⁴ or the Chair of the relevant committee as appropriate.
2. Press releases from the 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 office⁵.

² Standing Order 26b

³ Standing Order 10

⁴ Mayor’s Protocol Guide p9

⁵ Standing Order 24

5. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the media on an issue, 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 Council⁶.
6. When representing the Council at a “Meet your Councillors” event Councillors should follow GDPR and data protection guidance, the Code of Conduct and relevant sections of this policy.
7. Unless a Councillor is certain that they are reporting the view of the council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
8. If 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 Policy⁷.
9. Designated staff are authorised to promote the work of the Council on social media platforms, the website and noticeboards but operate strictly in accordance with the approved Social Media policy⁸ of the council.
10. In making public comments, Councillors must respect decisions made by a majority vote and abide at all times to the Code of Conduct⁹.
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. Councillor Correspondence to external parties

1. Individual Councillors are responsible for their own ward member correspondence. The Town Council does not provide administrative support for such purpose. 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, Councillors must always reflect the view of the Council.
3. Correspondence (including emails) sent in relation to council business where a councillor has been delegated to a task, should be openly copied to the Town Clerk or officer responsible for the task.
4. Councillors should be aware that all emails sent and received from their STC email account may be subject to release under FOI legislation.

⁶ Mayor's Protocol Guide p9

⁷ Customer Feedback Policy p3

⁸ Social Media Policy

⁹ Code of Conduct Part 2, General Obligations

E. Communications with Town Council Staff¹⁰

1. Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff¹¹, unless authorised to do so through the Council's decision-making process and with their line manager's agreement.
2. No individual 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 Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with 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 Clerk or other members of staff; reasons for urgency should be clearly stated.
5. Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
6. For meetings with the Clerk or other officers an appointment should be made wherever possible, meetings should be relevant to the work of that officer and Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

Summary

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

¹⁰ Staff Members Relations Policy; Standing Orders

¹¹ Standing Order 27a(ii)