

Communications Strategy

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Document History

Adopted by Council – 3 October 2023

Reviewed & Adopted -

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1. Objective

This Communications Strategy aims to establish a protocol for effective communication of the Town Council's activities and other relevant information to members of the public.

2. Purpose

The Town Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to convey its decisions and actions through various media. To this end, all communication will be conveyed in an open and straightforward manner.

The Town Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Town Council and manages **all** formal communication between the Council, the press and members of the public. However, this does not prevent individual councillors from communicating with the press and public but they must ensure that there is clarity in their communication so there is a clear distinction between individual opinions and those approved by the Town Council.

3. Method of Communication

The Council will use the following procedure to communicate with members of the public and the press.

Town Clerk: **TC**, Deputy Clerk: **DC/RFO**, Admin Support Officer: **ASO**, Mayor: **M**

Activity	Method of Communication	Responsibility
Newsletter	Website, Mail Chimp, Hard copies at library and other community spaces	TC/ASO
Approved and draft minutes	Website	ASO
Agendas	Website/notice board. These will be published in compliance with legislation.	TC/DC/ASO
Supporting information for meetings (non-confidential)	Website	TC/DC/ASO
Council policies/procedures	Website	TC/DC/ASO
Annual Town Meeting	Website/social media/notice boards	TC/ASO
Annual Report	Using themes approved by the Town Council, the Chairman will manage presenting the Annual Report at the Annual Town Meeting.	TC/M
Press releases	Local newspaper	TC
Annual external audit	Website/notice board	DC/RFO
Adopted Annual Accounts	Website/notice board	DC/RFO
Councillor vacancies	Website/notice board/social media	TC
Financial statements and other financial information	Website	DC/RFO

The Town Clerk may delegate responsibility for any of these publications as appropriate.

4. Social Media

The Council's website will be the main information hub and channel for communicating details about the Town Council. The website will also act as a channel for other information such as local news and events, consultation details, road closures and anything that is of general interest to the local community including links to other websites. The website will be regularly updated.

Posts and Events uploaded to the website will also be shared on the Council's social media accounts.

Facebook and Twitter will also be used; its main aim is to promote Gainsborough and to encourage visitors to support the local economy. This media will help to build social capital so that there is a two-way channel between the Town Council and members of the public. A member of staff's private Facebook account must not be used to administer, log in or send messages from the Town Council's social media sights. A specific Council work-use account must be used at all times. Whilst the Council supports open discussion inappropriate comments from members of the public will not be tolerated and will be removed and the reason given. If it is a genuine complaint the complainant will be directed to the Council's Complaints Procedure which can be viewed on the Council's website. Comments and enquiries will only be responded to during normal office hours. Personal information should not be conveyed through social media.

Whatever channel the Town Council chooses to communicate the message must be consistent across all channels.

5. Community Engagement

Through a positive and transparent approach Councillors and staff will actively engage with the community and the local media to promote the Council's decisions and plans. The Town Clerk will collaborate with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and appropriate chairs of Committees and sub-Committees to agree the content of pertinent information where necessary.

Councillors who wish to communicate directly with the press should make it clear whether they are speaking as a Councillor or as a private individual. If Councillors wish to express their own views directly with the media, they should not attempt to undermine the Town Council if their views are different to the Council's corporate position. If Councillors wish to take this course, it might be prudent to seek a briefing with the Town Clerk beforehand. No communication should be made that is in any way damaging to the interests or reputation of the Town Council or which reveals confidential matters, or information likely to endanger the health or safety of a Councillor, Town Clerk, or any other individual.

Agendas for Council meetings will be accompanied by sufficient supporting information to enable councillors to make informed decisions and for a member of the public to understand. Confidential information will not be included in the packs available to the public.

Confidential supporting papers must not be shared with members of the public and press. Agendas and supporting papers will be issued by email to the member's town council email address. Hard copies will either be posted, or hand delivered to members who requested to receive paper copies.

Supporting information will also be published on the Council's website at the same time as the agenda to which it relates.

Draft minutes for all Council meetings will be published on the Council's website as soon as they are available but at least within a month of the previous meeting.

The Town Clerk, and in their absence the Deputy Clerk/RFO, is responsible for the preparation of notices of Council meetings, agendas and minutes and for the development and maintenance of the Council's website so that it remains current. The Town Clerk may delegate any of these duties to a member of staff as appropriate.

All correspondence addressed to the Town Council will be actioned by the Town Clerk. Information that needs to be considered by the Town Council, or one of its committees, will be added to the agenda of the next appropriate meeting. Other relevant information will be emailed to Members in between meetings for information only.

6. Council Property

The Council's property (Sports Grounds, Cemeteries, Play areas, allotments etc) whether freehold or leasehold, will have up to date signage with contact information for the Council.

7. Ensure the council brand is consistently linked to services

The Council will look to brand its communications consistently, ensuring a single brand identity by:

- Making sure all staff have access to electronic logos and templates (press releases, letters, etc)
- Using a uniform font type – all printed communication should display the Council logo and should use Arial 12 font
- Developing a photographic library which supports the Council's brand and is available to staff, journalists, and partners online
- Ensuring the brand is reinforced through visual media such as advertising

8. Requests for Information

Council information will be made available to members of the public in accordance with the Council's adopted 'Publication Scheme'.

Correspondence from, and notices served by, the Information Commissioner shall be referred by the Proper Officer to the Council. The Council shall have the power to do anything to facilitate compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The Town Clerk, any member of staff nor councillors, will disclose confidential information that is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act. The agenda and its supporting papers, and the minutes from a meeting where confidential or sensitive information is discussed, shall not disclose or otherwise undermine such information which, for special reasons, is not in the public interest.

The Council will continuously implement improvements to its communications work through renewal and enhanced use of its website, social media and digital approaches to sharing information alongside making hard copies available. Transparency will be maintained at all times.

9. Communication by Email, Internet and Telephone Policy

Communications via email, and internet usage undertaken in the name of the Council or on Council systems carry inherent risks such as:

- potential defamation
- spreading of viruses, including Trojans which can steal data.
- breach of confidentiality

- accepting unsafe or infected files from sources in online chat rooms
- breach of contract
- breach of copyright
- breach of data protection legislation
- breach of privacy and unlawful discrimination
- damage to the reputation of the Council

The Council has procured IT support to help maintain internet security and reduce the risk from online threats.

Email etiquette

All employees and town councillors must follow the procedure outlined below when sending and receiving emails on behalf of the Town Council:

- only agreed email signatures may be used by employees which must include an appropriate waiver clause.
- all messages must use appropriate business language.
- the circulating of offensive, indecent, or obscene material, or anything which breaches the Equal Opportunities Policy is strictly prohibited.
- confidential material should not be disclosed.
- only attachments from a trusted source may be downloaded on Council IT equipment.
- the recipient's email address should be verified before sending.
- 'Reply to all' should only be used where appropriate.
- Essential files should be saved before deleting the message to which they were attached.

Telephone etiquette

All employees must follow the procedure outlined below when using the Council's telephone:

- answer all calls by stating the name of the Town Council
- be polite at all times do not be rude or abrupt to callers.
- do not use offensive language.
- do not swear.
- check the telephone frequently for messages from callers and respond in a timely manner.

10. General Communication Policy

Introduction

1. Gainsborough Town Council ("the Council") is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. Where this information is not available via the Council's Publication Scheme, members of the public should contact the Town Clerk.
2. The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet ("the media").
3. This policy explains how the Council may work with the media to meet the above aims in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

Legal requirements and restrictions

4. This policy is subject to the Council's obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of

Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, other legislation which may apply and the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. The Council's Financial Regulations and relevant Standing Orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council's Publication Scheme.

5. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council's Standing Orders, under contract or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council's Publication Scheme and available to download from the Council's website.

Meetings

1. Meetings of the Council and its committees are open to the public and press unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence would be prejudicial to the public interest. Per the Council's Standing Orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the council and its committees, if their disorderly conduct obstructs the business of the meeting.
2. Where a meeting of the Council and its committees include an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's Standing Orders.
3. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes e.g. using a mobile phone or table, recording for a TV radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted, unless (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings or (iii) paragraphs 4 and 5 below apply.
4. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.
5. Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is not permitted.
6. The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, supply reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.
7. The Council's Standing Orders will confirm if attendance by the public, their participation, photographing, recording, filming or other reporting is permitted at a meeting of a sub-committee.

Other communications with the media

This policy does not seek to regulate Councillors in their private capacity.

The Council's communications with the media aim to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. If the views of councillors are different to the Council's corporate position and views, they will make this clear.

The Town Clerk may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information, a statement or other material about the Council.

Subject to the obligations on Councillors not to disclose confidential information and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their position and views as their own.