

# Electronic Communications and Social Media Policy

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## Document History

Adopted by Council – 27 January 2026

### Supersedes:

- Communications Policy (adopted 2019, reviewed 2022)
- Social Media Policy (adopted 2016, reviewed 2022)
- Communications Strategy (adopted 2023)

## 1. Introduction

Gainsborough Town Council (“the Council”) is committed to open, transparent, lawful and effective communication with councillors, staff, partners, the media and members of the public. This Policy consolidates all previous communications-related policies into a single framework, in line with National Association of Local Councils (NALC) guidance.

The Town Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Council and is the principal adviser on, and manager of, the Council’s communications.

## 2. Objectives and Purpose

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- Ensure communications are accurate, timely and consistent.
- Safeguard the Council’s reputation and legal position.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure compliance with statutory duties, Standing Orders and Codes of Conduct.

The Council is accountable to the public and will communicate its decisions and actions openly and straightforwardly using appropriate channels.

## 3. Roles and Responsibilities

### 3.1 Town Clerk (Proper Officer)

- Acts as the primary point of contact for all formal correspondence.
- Is the default authorised spokesperson for the Council unless Council resolves otherwise.
- Manages communications between the Council, the press and the public.
- Authorises official statements, press releases and social media content.
- May issue urgent or reactive statements in consultation with the Mayor/Chair where timescales do not permit prior Council approval.
- May delegate operational tasks to appropriate officers.

### 3.2 Mayor / Chair of Council

- Acts as the civic and ceremonial spokesperson for the Council.
- Works with the Town Clerk on strategic messaging and public statements.

### 3.3 Leader of the Council

- Provides direction on communications relating to Council policy and priorities.
- Works in partnership with the Town Clerk and Mayor/Chair to ensure messaging is consistent, accurate and timely.
- Must ensure that any use of electronic communications or social media clearly reflects the Council’s agreed position and complies with this Policy, the Members’ Code of Conduct and the Nolan Principles.
- Must not authorise or issue official Council communications independently of the Town Clerk, except where Council has expressly resolved otherwise.

### **3.4 Councillors**

- Must clearly distinguish between personal views and the corporate position of the Council.
- Must comply with the Members' Code of Conduct and the Nolan Principles.
- Must not disclose confidential or exempt information.
- Must not represent themselves as speaking on behalf of the Council without authority.

### **3.5 Officers**

- Act as ambassadors for the Council at all times.
- Must follow this Policy and associated procedures when communicating on behalf of the Council.

## **4. Town Council Correspondence**

- 4.1 All correspondence addressed to the Council shall be sent to and managed by the Town Clerk.
- 4.2 Correspondence arising from Council or committee meetings shall be actioned by the Town Clerk or an appropriate officer.
- 4.3 No individual councillor or officer shall be the sole custodian of Council correspondence or information. Access to confidential information is strictly on a 'need to know' basis.
- 4.4 Official correspondence shall be issued in the name of the Council by the Town Clerk using Council letterhead or official email accounts.
- 4.5 Where correspondence is copied to third parties, this must be made clear to the recipient.

## **5. Agendas, Minutes and Meeting Information**

- 5.1 Agendas shall be clear, concise and contain sufficient information to enable informed decision-making and public understanding.
- 5.2 Items for information only shall be kept to a minimum and circulated via the Town Clerk.
- 5.3 Supporting papers (excluding confidential items) shall be published with agendas in accordance with legislation.
- 5.4 Draft minutes shall be published as soon as practicable and no later than one month after the meeting.
- 5.5 Confidential papers must not be shared with members of the public or the press.

## **6. Communications with the Press and Media**

- 6.1 Official press releases and statements shall be issued by the Town Clerk, or a delegated officer, in consultation with the Mayor/Chair or relevant Committee Chair.
- 6.2 Reports of Council business may arise from official statements or media attendance at meetings.
- 6.3 Councillors who are not authorised to speak on behalf of the Council must make it clear when expressing personal views.
- 6.4 Councillors must not undermine the Council's corporate position or disclose confidential information.

- 6.5 The Council will cooperate with the media in accordance with legal requirements and best practice.

## **7. Social Media Policy**

### **7.1 Principles**

- To share factual information about the Council's work and decisions.
- To promote Gainsborough and community engagement.
- To avoid online arguments, political debate or reputational risk.
- To protect personal data and confidential information.

Social media shall not be used for recruitment other than advertising vacancies.

### **7.2 Approved Council Channels**

- Council website (primary information hub)
- Council Facebook
- Council Twitter/X
- Council LinkedIn

### **7.3 Management of Council Social Media**

- The Town Clerk is the nominated Social Media Officer.
- Only authorised officers may post on behalf of the Council.
- Public comments will be moderated by the Town Clerk or Assistant Clerk.
- Inappropriate comments will be removed and signposted to the Complaints Procedure where relevant.
- Responses will be issued during normal office hours only.

### **7.4 Councillors' and Officers' Use of Social Media**

- Councillors and officers must consider whether they are acting in a personal or official capacity.
- Information obtained through their role must not be shared unless already in the public domain.
- Content must not be defamatory, offensive, discriminatory or political.
- Breaches may constitute a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct and may be referred for investigation.

Council facilities must not be used for personal or political campaigning.

## **8. Community Engagement**

- 8.1 The Council will engage positively and transparently with the community and local media.
- 8.2 The Town Clerk will liaise with the Mayor/Chair and relevant Committee Chairs on key messaging where appropriate.
- 8.3 Agendas and supporting information shall be published to enable public understanding of Council business.

## **9. Communication with External Parties**

- 9.1 Communication with external organisations shall normally be undertaken by the Town Clerk unless Council resolves otherwise.
- 9.2 Where councillors are authorised to act on behalf of the Council, this authority shall be recorded in the minutes.
- 9.3 Councillors must not represent themselves as speaking on behalf of the Council without authority; doing so may constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 9.4 Copies of all official outgoing correspondence must be provided to the Town Clerk.

## **10. Communication with Town Council Staff**

- 10.1 Councillors must not give instructions to staff unless authorised through a committee or delegated powers.
- 10.2 No councillor may issue instructions that conflict with Council decisions or delegated authority.
- 10.3 All interactions must be professional, respectful and relevant to Council business.

### **10.4 Email and Telephone Etiquette**

- Business-like language must be used at all times.
- Confidential information must not be disclosed.
- Councillors' emails to external parties relating to Council business must be copied to the Town Clerk.
- Telephone calls must be answered politely and promptly.

## **11. Branding and Corporate Identity**

- 11.1 All communications shall use approved Council branding, logos and templates.
- 11.2 Official publications shall use a consistent font and style.
- 11.3 Council property shall display up-to-date signage with contact details.

## **12. Requests for Information**

- 12.1 Requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or Environmental Information Regulations must be made in writing and will be handled only by the Town Clerk as Proper Officer.
- 12.2 Information will be provided in accordance with the Council's Publication Scheme.
- 12.3 Confidential or exempt information will not be disclosed.
- 12.4 Correspondence from the Information Commissioner shall be referred to the Town Clerk and Council.

## **13. Legal Framework**

This Policy operates in accordance with:

- Local Government Acts
- Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Data Protection legislation
- The Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- The Members' Code of Conduct

## **Appendix A – Councillor Social Media Protocol**

### **Purpose**

This Appendix provides practical guidance for Councillors on the safe and appropriate use of social media and electronic communications. It supports the Members' Code of Conduct and the Council's Communications, Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy.

### **Key Principles**

- Consider whether a reasonable person would view you as acting as a Councillor
- Clearly distinguish personal views from Council decisions
- Do not undermine decisions lawfully made by the Council

### **Confidentiality**

Councillors must never publish:

- confidential or exempt information
- draft documents or internal discussions
- information obtained through their role before it is lawfully published

### **Behaviour and Tone**

Councillors must:

- remain respectful and civil
- avoid personal attacks, inflammatory language or online arguments
- treat residents, officers and fellow Councillors fairly

### **Political Content**

Council information, branding or resources must not be used for political campaigning. Extra care must be taken during election periods and when commenting on planning or quasi-judicial matters.

### **Complaints and Criticism**

Councillors should not attempt to resolve complaints via social media. Complaints should be referred to the Town Clerk or the Council's Complaints Procedure.

### **Sharing and Endorsement**

Sharing or liking content may be seen as endorsement. Councillors are responsible for the content they share.

### **Messaging Apps**

WhatsApp and similar platforms are subject to the same rules as other communications and may be disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act.

### **If in Doubt**

Pause before posting and seek advice from the Town Clerk if unsure.