

# **GODMANCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL**

## **Communication Policy**

**This policy was formally adopted by the Town Council at the Town Council meeting held on 21 February 2019**

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**Cllr Sarah Conboy**

**TOWN MAYOR**

## **Aims of Communication Policy**

To offer good practice guidelines for the management of communications by Godmanchester Town Council Staff and Councillors. This embraces all internal and external communication by any route. It defines roles and responsibilities within the Council. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech but, rather, to provide guidance on how to deal with issues with consistency and clarity.

### **1. Use of Email**

1.1 All Councillors should communicate using their Town Council email addresses for all Town Council matters.

1.2 E-mail content, both internal and external, should abide by the adopted Town Council Code of Conduct. Councillors should:

- treat others with respect
- comply with equality and discrimination laws
- not bully or intimidate staff, members of the Town Council, or members of the public
- not compromise the impartiality of others
- not prevent access to information
- not use their council position improperly
- use council resources for proper purposes only
- consider advice provided and give reasons
- act openly and fairly

1.3 All e-mails should have a clear subject heading and should include any relevant e-mail chain. A new subject should start a new email chain

1.4 Internal e-mails can be used for discussion, and forwarded to all TC members, but should not be used for decision making except in exceptional circumstances for non-controversial and minor matters only. In interests of transparency blind copying is not supported, and Councillors should copy the Town Clerk (or Deputy Town Clerk) into emails to ensure transparency and to enable the Town Clerk to provide advice promptly where needed. Very occasionally in exceptional circumstances decisions may be made via email that require urgent decisions. These are required to be overseen by mayor or deputy and town clerk e.g. traveler encampment arriving or fire.

1.5 Care should be taking in the use of underlining and capitals as this can be interpreted as aggression.

1.6 The Town Clerk's role includes responsibility for directing all communication received at the Town Hall, including phone calls, letters, e-mails etc. to the appropriate recipient/s. The Town Clerk will err on the side of caution if unsure

of appropriate recipient, by seeking advice or e-mailing widely. All members of the relevant Portfolio group will be included in forwarded emails

- 1.7 Key communications received by the Town Clerk, not covered in specific agenda items, will be shared at Town Council meetings as an agenda item “correspondence”. These should include any correspondence that requires discussion or a response.
- 1.8 All email communication on formal matters with external agencies/bodies should be sent by and via the Town Clerk. However, if this is practically impossible, any e-mail communications sent by a Councillor on formal matters with external agencies must be copied to “Town Clerk” with a request that replies be copied to the Town Clerk. This enables the Town Clerk to maintain an overview and record of business.
- 1.9 Any emails from external agencies or individuals relating to Town Council business received by Councillors directly, either to their personal or town council email addresses, should be forwarded to the Town Clerk. No decisions should be made based on any communication that has not been discussed by Town Council, i.e. requests to attend meetings or requests for financial support.
- 1.10 Acceptances and apologies for working parties and meetings should to be sent to chair of meeting/working party and Town Clerk only.
- 1.11 Notes from working party meetings will be copied to working party members and attendees only for comment. The notes will form the basis of a full report together with recommendations to be put to the Town Council at the following Town Council meeting.
- 1.12 Councillors should note that any emails relating to Town Council business can be requested through Freedom of Information/GDPR/Data Protection, and such a request will legally include information held or sent on any device or account held by the Councillor.

## **2 Oral Interactions**

- 2.1 As with emails, all oral interactions should abide by the adopted Code of Conduct.
- 2.2 When interacting with the public or external agencies Councillors should be clear about what is their personal view and what is the view of the Town Council. The public or external agencies should be invited to contact the Town Clerk as required. No decisions should be made based on any communication that has not been discussed by Town Council
- 2.3 Once the Town Council has reached and recorded a decision on a matter, all Councillors are expected to publicly uphold those decisions

### **3 Working with the Media**

- 3.1 The Town Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Town Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Town Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
- 3.2 It is important that the press have access to the Town Council, and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Town Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.
- 3.3 The Legal Framework: The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 3.4 The Town Council Standing Orders (revised 2019) should be adhered to in all contact with the media
- 3.5 The Town Clerk and Councillors should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Town Council in all their dealings with the media.
- 3.6 Confidential documents, including draft minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media or other members of the public. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who is responsible and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.
- 3.7 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Town Clerk and Councillors that must be handled carefully and sensitively. Although Councillors contact details are in the public domain, Councillors and staff are not permitted to share any further personal information without that individual's express permission to do so. Councillors should seek advice from the Town Clerk before any response is made to the media involving requests for personal information.
- 3.8 When responding to approaches from the media, only the Town Clerk and Town Mayor are authorised to make contact with the media in the first instance. In specific cases the Town Clerk and/or Mayor may authorise other Councillors to respond to media requests on the Council's behalf.
- 3.9 Any request for a media interview should be scrutinized for intent of purpose before agreement to participate is agreed. If it is felt to be inappropriate and not in the interests of the Town Council, it is acceptable to decline. Interaction can be terminated at any stage if that is felt to be in the best interests of the Town Council, or of the person being interviewed.

- 3.10 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Town Council's legal advisor before any response is made.
- 3.11 Statements to the media made by the Town Mayor and the Town Clerk should represent the Council's agreed stance.
- 3.12 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone, and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Town Clerk or Town Mayor.
- 3.13 Should a Town Councillor submit a letter to the press on any subject they should not use the term 'Town Councillor' or give the impression, directly or implied, that they are writing on behalf of the Town Council.
- 3.14 Press releases can be a valuable way to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information, or to explain the Town Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Town Clerk and Councillors to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- 3.15 All press releases must be issued by the Town Clerk in order to ensure the above principles are adhered to.

#### **4 Attendance of Media at Town Council Meetings**

- 4.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request.
- 4.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and should be provided with reasonable facilities for the taking of their report of all or part of a meeting at which they are entitled to be present.
- 4.3 As in standing orders 2019, any person, including the media, is permitted to report on a Town Council meeting whilst the meeting is open to the public. To "report" means to film, photograph, make an audio recording of meeting proceedings, use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear the meeting as it takes place or later, or to report or to provide oral or written commentary about the meeting so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later, to persons not present. They may not provide an oral report or oral commentary about a meeting as it takes place without permission.

## **5 Use of Social Media including Facebook e.g. Godmanchester Living.**

- 5.1 Councillors should not post anything directly on Facebook e.g. Godmanchester Living, relating to Town Council policy, procedures, future projects, thoughts and wishes etc. The Town Clerk and Town Mayor are authorised to do this, following agreement with Councillors as required. This ensures consistency and accuracy of the message delivered.
- 5.2 Councillors may post personal comments as an individual on Facebook as they wish but should be cognizant of above.
- 5.3 Statements made on social media by the Town Mayor and the Town Clerk should reflect the Council's agreed position.

## **6 Newsletters**

- 6.1 Electronic newsletters should be issued monthly and published on Town Council website with a link provided on the Godmanchester Living Facebook page.
- 6.2 Paper newsletters will be distributed in the town 3 times annually.
- 6.3 These should convey information to the community to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Town Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
- 6.4 The content of these will be agreed beforehand to ensure that they are factually correct and appropriate.

**Amendment History:**

<b>Paragraph</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>
Original	Initial Version	January 2019
Review Due		January 2022