

WHITLAND TOWN COUNCIL

Communication Policy



Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy is to outline the roles and responsibilities regarding communications within Whitland Town Council.

Scope

This policy aims to provide guidance on ensuring efficient and effective communications between Council Members and with third parties, without restricting freedom of speech or imposing unnecessary regulations. A separate policy on Social Media exists and should be considered alongside this one.

Emails received by the Council's Officers or Members may be subject to disclosure following a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998, or during legal proceedings.

Information held by someone on behalf of the Council (whether by a Member or Officer) qualifies as 'information held by a Town Council,' which is subject to public access under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Therefore, Emails related to official Council business, even when stored in personal Email accounts (e.g., Hotmail, Yahoo, Gmail), may be subject to disclosure.

If such Emails contain personal data, they could also fall within the scope of a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998. Information that is unrelated to Council business and held in personal Email accounts will not fall under these acts.

Inappropriate internal Emails, if disclosed externally, could lead to reputational damage or legal consequences for the Council, particularly if they contain defamatory, offensive, or improperly disclosed confidential information or personal data.

Key Principles

- Councillors Email addresses – the following format to be followed and once the account is opened it must only be used for official Council business:

Cllr.Jane.Smith@your_normal_service_provider.co.uk/com – the Clerk will advise you further.

- Always assume that any communication may need to be disclosed to a court, tribunal, or the Information Commissioner.
- Keep communications relevant, concise, and purposeful.



- Treat Emails as permanent records, even after deletion, as they may still be retrievable and disclosable.
- Internal Emails, even if marked as confidential, may be disclosed if required by law or legal proceedings.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of others.
- Avoid writing offensive, discriminatory, or negative comments about individuals or organisations.
- Ensure that the Clerk is copied into all Council Emails.
- Contact with the Clerk by Councillors should be within normal working hours via Email or the works phone.
- Out of working hours communication should only be in an emergency via the Clerks personal phone by the Chair or Chair of the relevant Committee.

Responsibilities and Accountabilities

Both Officers and Councillors are responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy and related communications guidelines.

Procedure

Town Council Correspondence

- The Clerk is the main point of contact for all Town Council correspondence, and all communication should be addressed to the Clerk.
- The Clerk handles all correspondence, and no individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of correspondence or information on behalf of the Council, its committees, or subcommittees. Councillors are only entitled to confidential information if they demonstrate a legitimate "need to know."
- All official correspondence must be sent by the Clerk on Council letterheaded paper or from the official Email account, indicating it is sent in the official capacity of the Council.
- If correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is also copied to another person, the recipient must be informed of the additional recipients.

Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees, and Working Groups

Agendas should be clear, concise, and provide sufficient information for Councillors to make informed decisions, and for the public to understand what issues will be discussed and what decisions will be made.



When discussing agenda items, Councillors must avoid pre-determination. It is acceptable to exchange thoughts and ideas, but Councillors should maintain an open mind and refrain from making comments that suggest a fixed conclusion.

Items for information should be minimised on agendas, and any non-urgent information should be circulated via the Clerk.

Confidential correspondence must be treated as such and not shared with anyone outside of the Council or its Committees without the Clerk's consent.

Correspondence with External Parties

Councillors may receive communication from the public in various formats (in-person, telephone, Email, etc.). these communications should be referred to the Town Clerk.

Refer the matter to the Town Clerk

- Request the matter be added to a Council agenda, provided the Clerk deems it appropriate
- All outgoing correspondence, related to Council matters, should be sent by the Clerk.
- Emails regarding Council business should be sent from an official Whitland Town Council Email address, as these communications are considered public records.
- Councillors should forward any received correspondence to the Clerk, who will handle it appropriately. Councillors should not communicate directly with businesses or individuals with whom the Council has a contractual relationship; all inquiries should go through the Clerk.
- If a member of the public requests copies of correspondence, the matter should be referred to the Clerk for consideration of whether it is public information.

Communications with Town Council Staff

- Councillors should not give instructions to staff nor contractors. No individual Councillor can be afforded delegated powers, regardless of their position.
- Telephone calls should be related to Council business, and Councillors should refrain from making external communications that imply they are representing the Council.

Contact with the Media

- The Clerk is the primary contact for all media inquiries. Individual Councillors may not issue press releases on behalf of the Council.



- The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair, is responsible for issuing formal press releases on behalf of the Council. These may be proactive to promote a decision or work of the Council, or reactive in response to media inquiries or published articles.
- If approached by the press, Councillors must clarify that their views are personal and not necessarily those of the Council.
- Confidential matters, including items discussed at meetings where the press and public have been excluded, must not be disclosed.
- Letters or articles representing the views of the Council should only be submitted by the Town Clerk unless they have been specifically approved by Council. If Members choose to express their own opinions on Council matters, they must make clear that the views put forward are those of the individual Member and not representative of Council policy.
- Members and the Clerk should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Minute Reference: _____

Review: _____

