

Title:	Communications Policy.
Purpose:	To detail the Council's policies and procedures in respect communications.
Owner:	Town Clerk.
Approved by:	Town Council.
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Next review date:	2019

## 1. Introduction.

The aim of this policy is to ensure:

- a) A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of all communication channels.
- b) Communications by the council remain open and transparent.
- c) Increased engagement with individuals and the community regarding the activities of the Town Council.
- d) The Town Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected by ill-considered use of, or focus on specific communication channels.
- e) Councillors and Officers understand their obligations in respect of council communications.

1.2 This policy is subject to the Council's statutory obligations 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 1988 and the Town Council's Standing Orders.

1.3 There are circumstances under which employers can be held legally responsible for content published by their employees. This may include action taken as part of their role for the organisation and material published on official organisation channels or somewhere that has been previously sanctioned by the Town Council. It is therefore important that everyone is aware of the potential legal issues with regards to communication.

1.4 It is important that employees and Councillors are aware that communicating information about the Council cannot be isolated from their working life. For example, any information published online can be accessed around the world within seconds and will be publicly available for all to see. Everyone should take the following into consideration when communicating in an official capacity with members of the public or the media when appropriate:

- a) Be familiar with the legal areas outlined below before writing or speaking about colleagues or sharing information about the Council.

- b) Ensure that verbal or written information does not disclose privileged or confidential information.
  - c) Be aware (where applicable) of any Council guidelines for using social media and the use of the internet/council IT, whether this is for personal use or as a part of their working role.
  - d) The importance of avoiding any actions which might prove misleading or bring the Council into disrepute.
- 1.5 The Town Council may be held responsible for something an employee or councillor has written or said if it is on behalf of the Council. Action can also be taken against anyone repeating libellous information from another source, so careful checks are needed before quoting statements from websites. This can also apply to linking to defamatory information. It should also be considered whether a statement can be proved before writing or using it, as in law, the onus is on the person making the statement to establish its truth.
- 1.6 This policy does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the press and media.
- 1.7 Above everything else, a Councillor must observe the Town Council's Code of Conduct whenever he/she conducts the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which he/she has been elected/appointed or acts as a representative of the authority.
- 2. Correspondence.**
- 2.1 Communications from the Council must be routed via the Clerk (or deputy) unless specifically resolved by the Council. The point of contact for the Town Council is the Clerk and all correspondence for the Council should be addressed to the Clerk. The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting both internally and externally. No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Council, a Committee, Sub-Committee or Working Group. Councillors do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- 2.2 All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper or email using Council email format. Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).
- 2.4 Agendas should be clear and concise and 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 may possibly be taken at the meeting. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on any agenda. Where the Town Clerk or a Councillor wishes Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information is to be circulated via the Clerk.

### **3.0 Communications with the Public.**

3.1 The Town Council encourages Councillors to keep residents and the wider community informed of issues. However, Councillors should be mindful of the need to ensure information is clearly relayed without bias. The “Council” speaks as a whole, and great care should be taken when expressing personal or “Councillor” views prior to any formal resolution by the Town Council. This is to avoid pre-determination on an issue. Once resolved, the resolution becomes the de jure stated position of the Council. Councillors may continue to make personal statements but should make it clear that are not speaking on behalf of the council. Where further information is required or where an issue is uncertain, the matter should be referred to the Town Clerk for guidance.

### **4.0 Communications with External Parties.**

4.1 As the Town Clerk should be sending most of the Council’s correspondence, any correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies needs to make clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Council. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor’s role within it should be sent to the Clerk, and be noted on the correspondence, e.g. “copy to the Clerk” so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

### **5.0 Communications with Denbighshire County Council.**

5.1 In addition to the considerations of the preceding paragraph, Llangollen Town Council and Denbighshire County Council have an agreed Charter that both Councils have signed up to. This Charter represents a mutual agreement between the two tiers of local government. It sets out how we aim to work together to develop and promote local needs and aspirations for the benefit of local communities, whilst recognising our respective responsibilities as autonomous, democratically elected statutory bodies.

5.2 This Charter builds on existing good practice and embrace the shared principles of openness, respect and our common priority of putting residents at the centre of service delivery. In delivering the charter the Councils aim to work together as a partnership of equals rather than tiers. Successful partnership working at the community level can only be achieved if the partners understand and respect each other’s roles, and work to complement those roles in serving the community. Securing good communication and liaison between the County and the Town Council is a cornerstone of this Charter and involves communication from the most strategic level right down to liaison on specific local projects.

### **6.0 Communications with Town Council Employees.**

6.1 A Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a Committee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council). No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Council, the Chairman of a Committee or are styled “Leader” of the Council, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee that are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

**7.0 Meetings with the Clerk or other staff.**

7.1 Wherever possible an appointment should be made, and meetings should be relevant to the work of that officer. Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate Council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

**8.0 Electronic communications.**

8.1 Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk and any reasons for urgency should be stated. Information to other Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk; and all emails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk. Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

**10.0 Breaches of this Policy.**

10.1 Failure to comply with this policy may result in a formal complaint being made to the Monitoring Officer to be dealt with under the Council's Standards Procedures.

10.2 Other violations of this policy, such as breaching the Local Government Act 1972, The Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Town Council's Standing Orders. could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved. The Council reserves the right to request the removal of any content published by Councillors deemed inappropriate or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council, or put it at risk of legal action