

Wirksworth Town Council



Communications Policy

Policy – Adopted 19/12/16

Minute C120/16

Wirksworth Town Council - Communication Policy

Policy Statement

Wirksworth Town Council (“the Town Council”) is accountable to the electorate and has a duty to convey its decisions and actions through various media.

This policy aims to establish a protocol for effective communication of the Town Council’s activities and to facilitate efficient distribution of information to the media and members of the public. It does not at present seek to cover inbound communication.

Guiding Principles

The Town Council complies with the Open and Accountable Government Guidelines (2015). These principles are used as a baseline for the information available.

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.

The Town Council, its councillors and staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law. Some but not all of the relevant obligations that councillors are subject to are contained in the Town Council’s code of conduct, a copy of which is available via the Town Council’s publication scheme

The Town Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions.

Town Council communicates using its website as its primary channel/repository of information, with a Facebook page used for summaries and announcements.

Social media/web based communication activity should not stand alone, and care must be taken to use a full mix of communication including more traditional methods (e.g. noticeboards) to avoid a disproportionate skew towards either the digitally active or users of social media.

The aim of this policy is to ensure:

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

Where information is not available via the Town Council Publication Scheme, the Council will endeavour to assist the media/enquirer regarding the Town Council’s functions, decisions and actions.

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Guidance for Councillors

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-determination¹ on an issue, and can be avoided by making a statement to the effect that :

“I will approach the decision with an open mind and may choose to change my views based upon the information provided.””

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 (or deputy) for guidance.

Social media can help councillors to communicate, but care need to be taken that the guidelines above are followed. Councillors may wish to provide a more real time update(s) during Council meetings. Great care should be taken to ensure that posts, tweets or other similar updates provide an accurate reflection of the final decision taken, and not simply focus on the discussion. In addition, tweeting or similar blogging about unrelated subjects during a meeting may appear to the public that you not engaging in the meeting.

When communication on social media or online generally, it is good practice to provide links to either the Town Council’s Facebook Page or Website ; cutting and pasting comments to other sites/facebook etc creates the potential for incomplete or outdated information being promulgated as the Town Council position on an issue.

¹ Predetermination:

Case Law - R (Island Farm Development Ltd) v Bridgend CBC

“Councillors will inevitably be bound to have views on and may well have expressed them about issues of public interest locally. It would be quite impossible for decisions to be made by the elected members whom the law requires to make them if their observation could disqualify them because it might appear that they had formed a view in advance. Whatever their views, they must approach their decision making in an open mind in the sense that they must have regard to all material considerations and must be prepared to change their views if persuaded that they should.”

Localism Act 2011

“a decision maker is not to be taken to have had, or to have appeared to have had, a closed mind when making a decision JUST BECAUSE

- The decision maker had previously done anything that directly or indirectly indicated what view the decision maker took or would or might take in relation to a matter AND
- The matter was relevant to the decision”

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Procedure

The Town Clerk is the proper Officer of the Council and is responsible for all formal communication between the council, the press and members of the public.

Communications from the Council must be routed via the Clerk (or deputy) unless specifically resolved by the Council.

Where a statement of position/intent is issued, this may only be undertaken either where a Resolution of the Council already exists or after the Town Council has issued a resolution.

The Town Mayor (or deputy), as the leader of the Council, is regarded as the Town Council representative in public and may issue statements, speak with press or attend official functions. The Mayor cannot express the view of the Town Council in the absence of a clear resolution made by the Council.

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Activity	Method of Communication	Timescale	Responsibility
<i>Agendas</i>	Noticeboard (outside Town Hall) Website Link on Facebook	On date of issue	Town Clerk
<i>Minutes (Unadopted)</i>	Website Link on Facebook	On date of issue	Town Clerk
<i>Standing Orders & Financial Regulations</i>	Website	Within 7 days of approval after any amendment	Town Clerk
<i>Councillor Contact Details</i>	Noticeboards (inside/outside Town hall) Website	Within 7 days after any amendment	Town Clerk
<i>Representation on Outside Bodies</i>	Website	Within 14 days after any amendment	Town Clerk
<i>Press Release</i>	Website Link on Facebook Local Media	Immediate	Town Clerk (following approval of Full Council)
<i>Regular Messages</i>	Website Link on Facebook / full notice Facebook Local Media	Within 2 days of approval	Town Clerk (following approval of Full Council) Medium/Format(s) to be confirmed by Council each time
<i>Annual External Audit</i>	Noticeboard (inside Town hall) Website	Within 7 days of approval	Town Clerk
<i>Notice of Electors Rights</i>	Noticeboard (inside Town Hall)	(meet statutory guidelines)	Town Clerk
<i>Annual Accounts</i>	Website	Within 7 days of approval of Annual External Report	Town Clerk

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<i>Financial Information</i> e.g. Monthly Payments	Website	Within 28 days of period end	Town Clerk
<i>Annual Report</i>	Website	Within 7 days of approval	Town Clerk (following approval of Full Council)
<i>New/Revised Policies & Procedures</i>	Website	Within 7 days of approval	Town Clerk (following approval of Full Council)
<i>Code of Conduct</i>	Website	Within 7 days of approval after any amendment	Town Clerk
<i>Publication Scheme</i>	Website	Within 7 days of approval after any amendment	Town Clerk
<i>Asset List</i>	Website	Within 28 days of fiscal year end	Town Clerk
<i>Meeting Timetable</i> (to cover Jan 201x for 15 months)	Website Noticeboard (inside Town Hall) Noticeboard (outside Town Hall)	Within 1 month of year end	Town Clerk
<i>Staff Vacancies</i>	Website / Facebook Noticeboards (internal/external at Town Hall) Local Media	Immediate	Town Clerk (following approval of Full Council)
<i>Hall Hire Booking Form & Conditions of Hire</i>	Website Outside Town Clerks Office	Within 7 days of approval after any amendment	Town Clerk
<i>Events at Town Hall</i>	Noticeboards (internal community use) Noticeboard (outside Town Hall) Clipframes (Stairs in Town Hall)	Immediate / within 7 days of month end	Town Clerk
<i>Events at Memorial Hall</i>	Noticeboard (internal at MH) Noticeboard (Outside MH) Noticeboard (outside Town Hall)	Immediate / within 7 days of month end	Town Clerk

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Regular Messages

The Council may issue “messages”. These may consist of summarised key points from meetings during the month or issues which are felt to be “key”. Councillors may prepare summarised key points for agreement at Full Council Meeting.

The messages should be short and concise, referring the audience to other council documents such as the Council’s minutes for more complete information. Care must be taken to avoid misleading “sound bites” which do not reflect the full issue. Where messages refer to resolutions of the Town Council, readers must be clearly directed towards minutes to ensure that readers are aware of all decisions made the council – to avoid any possibility of perceived selectivity of messages.

Annual Report

The Clerk will prepare a brief written report detailing the activity of the Town Council in the past financial year. The Report will be prefaced with an introduction by the Mayor (of the year reported). The body of the text is intended to give a high level overview of the Town Council’s income sources and expenditure. The draft of the report to be agreed by full council prior to publication (on the TC Website).