



# **SAXMUNDHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

## **COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

Biennial Review: 14 March 2022  
Minute Item: 166/21TC



## **1. Statement of Policy**

**1.1** This policy is intended to set out guidelines for how the Town Council communicates internally and externally. It is intended to help Town Councillors, staff and affiliated volunteers make appropriate decisions about the way in which they communicate both in their official capacity and personally. It covers all means of written, verbal and visual communications including, but not limited to: websites, social media, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, videos, message boards, forums etc.

**1.2** This policy outlines the standards the Town Council itself intends to adopt, as well as that which is required by Town Councillors, staff and volunteers when communicating internally and externally; the circumstances in which the Town Council will monitor its operation and the action to be taken in respect of any possible breaches of this policy.

**1.3** This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Town Council.

## **2. Who is covered by this policy?**

This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Town Council. This includes paid staff members and Town Councillors and volunteers.

Within this policy “Members” refers to anyone affiliated with the Town Council, either as Town Councillors, staff or volunteers.

## **3. Scope of policy**

**3.1** The Town Council has overall responsibility for the effective implementation, operation and monitoring of this policy. All members are protected by and expected to comply with this policy at all times. Its aim is to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Town Council, its services, employees, and community.

**3.2** Behaviour required by the Members’ Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity, written and verbal communication. Members must be aware that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the Code does not apply and be mindful of their conduct when communicating both in their official capacity and personally. Content and communications published in any official capacity should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members should bear in mind that their profile as a Town Councillor means that it is more likely they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when networking or sharing content online.

It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a ‘private’ group it should be ensured that the Town Council would be content with the statement should it be made public. Town Councillors are expected to be honest and open, and to be mindful of the impact their contribution might make to people’s perceptions of the Town Council.



**3.3** All employees, members and volunteers should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. You are personally responsible for content you publish. Any breach should be reported to the Town Clerk.

**3.4** Questions regarding the content, scope or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

#### **4. Tone of communications and appropriate language and terminology**

**4.1** Communication with the public should be undertaken in a variety of different methods, acknowledging that members of the community will have differing access and preferences when it comes to consuming information. The Town Council should make efforts to reach a range of ages and demographics in the methods they employ to communicate.

**4.2** All external communications from the Town Council should be factual and transparent. Statements on Town Council decisions and policy should be written in a formal tone with precise and technically accurate language. Town Council communication should remain professional, clear and situation appropriate.

**4.3** The Town Council should make every effort to consider their audience at all times: The Flesch Reading Ease score may be considered in order to make documents for public consumption suitably accessible.

**4.4** More informal, friendlier language is accepted for promoting events or communication intended for under 18s.

#### **5. Visuals – branding**

**5.1** The adopted font of Saxmundham Town Council is: Raleway or Calibri (Body), where possible, efforts should be made that all written communications are written using this font.

**5.2** Where an appropriate logo, letterhead, or document format is available, it should be used for official Town Council communications.

**5.3** Emails from officers of the should be signed off with a standardised Town Council email signature.

**5.4** The Town Council's adopted colours are:

- Duck egg colour is 55c 9m 28y 0k
- soft red is 9c 76m 49y 1k
- Business blue is 92c 59m 29y 8k
- Community blue is 37c 5m 7y 0k

Where possible these pantones should be used in all visual media (ie posters, web pages etc)

#### **6. Channels of communication**



**6.1** The public's first point of contact for communication with the Town Council is normally the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk will either act on or distribute incoming correspondence to relevant Members in a timely manner.

**6.2** Members may share general information relating to the Town Council and their role, but statements on Town Council policy and committee business should be approved by Town Clerk in conjunction with the appropriate committee chair.

**6.3** Members should feel confident to share information and promote Town Council activities, without prohibitive red tape. As long as the interests of the Town Council are considered, and the guidance included in this policy is followed; Members do not have to seek approval for communications which occur as they carry out their duties.

**6.4** Proofreading and editorial control of communication is down to the individual sending or publishing it, unless otherwise stated below.

### **Means of Communication**

#### **Minutes:**

**What:** Required for formal Town Council Committees

**Who takes the Minutes:** Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, Community Officer or Assistant Town Clerk

#### **Notes:**

- The minutes must record the names of Members present at the meeting and the existence and nature of any interest declared by Members. The minutes are not a verbatim record of debate at a meeting but must accurately reflect the resolutions made and record voting if this is requested by a Member at that meeting.
- Minutes should be produced and circulated to members as quickly as possible after the meeting. It is good practice to circulate minutes within 10 working days of the meeting. A draft copy can be produced pending finalisation. It is acceptable for draft minutes to be published on the Town Council website or notice boards as long as it is recorded prominently to the effect "Minutes subject to approval at the next meeting" or by using a "DRAFT" watermark.
- If changes are made to minutes by the Town Council or committee before acceptance and signing, the wording changes should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting that agreed the changes and the original minutes must be amended to reflect the changes. The copy signed by the Chair will contain the alterations, recorded in longhand, with the changes signed and dated.
- Decisions taken at meetings are effective immediately, and not dependent on the minutes being approved at the following meeting.
- Signed minutes should be retained by the Town Clerk for Town Council archives.



## **Reports**

**What:** Normally required for Town Councillors in order that Town Councillors can take informed decisions.

**Who:** Reports may be prepared by the Town Clerk or other employee. Occasionally, reports may be made by a Member or Town Councillor, for example when reporting back to the Town Council or committee on an event attended or research done at the Town Council's request.

### **Notes:**

The Town Council's decisions can be set aside by a court if due regard has not been had to relevant information or irrelevant considerations have been applied.

Some matters may require Town Councillors to consider a variety of facts or documentation. It is important that such information is provided to Members in advance of the meeting in the form of a report.

Reports should be circulated at the same time as the agenda and made available to the public, unless they include confidential matters that would justify the exclusion of the press and public at the meeting. This enhances the transparency of the Town Council's decision making and improves local knowledge of its activities. It greatly improves the speed of handling business at a meeting if all the relevant information is made available to Members in a report that assists their grasp and deliberation of a matter before the meeting. The vast majority of county and district Town Council business is dealt with in this way.

Reports should be written as concisely and clearly as possible; ambiguous language particularly should be avoided when composing reports.

## **Annual Report**

The Town Council publishes its annual Report in May which is distributed at the Annual Town Meeting.

## **Notice board**

**What:** The notice board should display:

- The full title of the parish Town Council
- The name, address, telephone number and email address of the Town Clerk
- The Town Council's website address
- A list of Members of the Town Council with contact details (address, telephone number, email) and their political group, if this is relevant locally
- Venues, dates and times of meetings for the year
- Agenda for forthcoming meetings



- Details of where the minutes, the code of conduct and other public documents may be inspected

**Who:** The Town Clerk and a nominated representative of the Amenities Committee is responsible for keeping the Town Council noticeboard up to date

**Notes:**

It is essential that notice boards are kept up to date and notices replaced regularly. Town Councils can make arrangements with other bodies for joint use of notice boards. A community notice board that meets the needs of public bodies and local groups, as well as providing useful information for residents and visitors, is an economic means of achieving several objectives.

**Website**

**What:** The website may be used to:

- Post notices and minutes of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Post good news stories
- Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Town Council's expectations of conduct provided that their terms and conditions of that website permit it
- Advertise vacancies
- Share information from partners i. e. Police, Library, district Town Council, etc. if permitted to do so.
- Announce new information appropriate to the Town Council.
- Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
- Post other items as the Town Council see fit.
- Promote business and economic growth within the town.

**Who:** The Town Clerk will appoint a nominated officers, Town Councillors and occasionally volunteers to maintain and update the Town Council Website. These people do not need to seek pre-approval for publishing content to the website that is in line with their duties.

**Notes:**

The Town Council recognise that the Internet is a significant and powerful means of communication. The Town Council is dedicated to providing an informative and user friendly website which can provide a variety of information to the community.

The overall content and structure of the website is decided by the Communications Working Group.

It is essential that the website is kept up to date on a regular basis; displaying up-to-date and relevant information, and that older documents are archived. This is a joint



responsibility of all nominated Members, monitored by the Town Clerk and the Communications Working Group.

A good website can say a lot about the efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance of a parish Town Council. All content should follow the suggestions set out in this document for branding, tone, and good use of English.

Members who wish to have an item published to the website may submit it to the Town Clerk

Suggested edits or changes to the website should be sent to the Town Clerk

### **External communications (letters, emails, Press relations, Posters, publicity etc)**

**What:** This section sets out the policy in relation to Town Council Correspondence.

**Who:** Anyone with a Town Council email address is responsible for using it appropriately, and that their communication falls in line with the code of conduct.

#### **Notes:**

Town Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address. Town Councillors are advised to use the Town Council email address for Town Council business.

The official point of contact for the parish Town Council is the Town Clerk, and it is to the Town Clerk that all correspondence for the parish Town Council should normally be addressed. The Town Clerk should deal with all correspondence and refer it to the appropriate committee of the Town Council.

A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Town Council or a Town Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Town Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Town Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Town Clerk has been advised. Where correspondence from the Town Clerk to a Town 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). E-mails from Town Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Town Clerk

No individual Town Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the parish Town Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. Town Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.

All official correspondence should normally be sent by the Town Clerk in the name of the Town Council using Town Council letter headed paper or their official Town Council email address.



If Town Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Town Council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a Town Council agenda item.

You can expect a response from officers of the Town Council within seven working days. If you require an urgent response this should be clearly stated in the email.

The Town Clerk should clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the Town Council or the Chair of the relevant committee. Press reports from the Town Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Town Clerk or an officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

Unless a Town Councillor has been authorised by the Town Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Town Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view. Unless a Town Councillor is certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Town Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.

Any promotional posters, leaflets or booklets must be signed off by the Town Clerk before going to print.

### **Newsletters (email and physical)**

**What:** The Town Council commits to distributing three physical newsletters each year. There may also be additional email newsletters distributed among relevant groups. The frequency of these is to be determined by the Town Council member leading that department or initiative.

**Who:** Editorial control for printed newsletters is normally held by The Town Clerk in consultation with the Communications Working Group. All Town Council members are welcome and encouraged to submit pieces for newsletters.

Where e-newsletters are sent out; the sender is responsible for the content and presentation of the newsletter. Before setting up a mailing list, and introducing an e-newsletter for their department, they must first obtain approval from the Town Clerk. They are not required to have their work approved by the Chair or Town Clerk but are responsible for any outcomes from the communication. The Town Clerk may request to review past or current content or may call for the cessation of communications via e-newsletter at any time, but only where there is reasonable cause.

**Notes:** Please refer to section 4 & 5 for guidance on content, writing style and aesthetic.

Edits may be requested from authors of newsletter content if it does not meet the guidance in section 4, if it is factually incorrect, grammatically incorrect, or breaks any Town Council rules on Members' code of conduct, though autonomy should be allowed wherever possible.





## **Social media**

**What:** social media is an excellent method of communicating events, Town Council-related news, governance information and of gathering views and input from the community. Social media may be used to support the website and the information contained on it.

**Who:** The official Saxmundham Town Council social media accounts are administered by select representatives; namely Jeremy Smith (Chair), Roz Barnett (Town Clerk), and Jess Palmer (Town Centre Coordinator). Other members may submit content to the named representative to be posted on their behalf.

Each Member is responsible for the content they post on their personal social media profiles; ideally it should adhere to the code of conduct: This is especially important where they have identified their affiliation with the Town Council.

### **Notes:**

Members may post about and promote events and news relating to their role within the Town Council using their personal profiles. There is no requirement for pre-approval, though Members should take care, when identifying themselves on social media as a representative of the Town Council, that content posted is factually correct and suitable for public consumption (ie events and dates have been confirmed, and represents the views and remit of the Town Council and in no way damages the reputation of the Town Council.

The Town Clerk and nominated members of the Communications Working Group will act as moderators. The moderators will be responsible for monitoring of the content on Town Council pages, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The Town Clerk will have authority to instruct members to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Town Council's social media pages, or where they have stated an affiliation to the Town Council, if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such post will may also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Town Council for its records.

Members should not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others, or make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory, abusive, obscene, or offensive comments.

If Town Councillors share content on social media personally, and not in their role as a Town Councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Town Council. They should not include web links to official Town Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Town Council.



Where Members are posting with reference to, or on behalf of the Town Council, they should:

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Disclose their identity and affiliation to the Town Council.
- Avoid making false or misleading statements.
- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They should always aim to protect the good reputation of the Town Council.
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Town Council.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or “loud.” Use sentence case format, not capital letters.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion should be avoided.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face.
- Never name an individual third party unless you have permission to do so.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used.
- Respect the privacy of other Town Councillors, staff and residents.
- Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel and copyright.
- Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party’s consent.

Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. Never publish anyone else’s contact details. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Town Clerk or nominated Moderator.

Anyone who feels that they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded by elected and co-opted Town Councillors, volunteers or officers should inform the Town Clerk or the nominated Moderator.

Every effort should be made to check posts for grammar, spelling and good English.

**Monitoring use of social media websites.**



Members should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for Town Council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken

Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give risk to legal liability against you and the Town Council.

Residents and Town Councillors should be aware that communication through social media is not the formal way of raising an issue with the Town Council and not all comments will be responded to.

If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Town Council it may be raised at either the Public Question Time or as a full agenda item for consideration by a forum of Town Councillors. Any response agreed by the Town Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Points for further consideration may be brought to the attention of the Town Council by any Member, not just the Moderator. The Moderator, or any nominated social media Administrator may invite members of the public to re-raise points or comments made on social media through official channels with the Town Clerk. The Town Council are not obliged to make any definitive response to any comments left by members of the public on social media channels; it is preferred that the commentators are instead directed to the official channels (ie, emailing their points with the Town Clerk.)

Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the nominated Moderator or Town Clerk for referral to the Town Council as required.

All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place.

### **Public participation sessions**

All meetings of the Full Town Council are open to the Press and Public and these guidelines are for those attending and speaking at meetings.

#### Speaking at a Meeting

The Town Council meeting has a section called 'Public Participation – Have Your Say', where you can get involved and speak, tell the meeting something or ask questions. It is usually at the beginning of the meeting

### **Speaking Guidelines**



- Please let the Chair know before the meeting starts that you want to speak – you can phone or email in advance or tell the Chair at the meeting.
- Tell the Chair what topic(s) you want to cover.
- You are not restricted only to topics that are on the agenda.
- If you don't get a chance to do this, the Chair will ask if anyone else wants to speak.
- The Chair will invite you to stand or sit at the table.
- Please give your name which will not normally be recorded in the minutes
- There is normally time limit of 3 minutes per person to speak.
- You can speak on more than one topic during this time.
- If there are similar questions or statements about one topic then the Chair may ask one person to speak on behalf of the others.
- Town Councillors may ask you questions for clarification.
- The Town Council may respond to you at the meeting or may write to you.