



# North Walsham Town Council

## Communication Protocol

### 1 Introduction

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- 1.1 This document covers communications relating to Members of the Town Council, Council staff, members of the public, other bodies, and the press.

### 2 Correspondence and information sent to the Council

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- 2.1 The official point of contact for the Council is the Town Clerk. All correspondence to the Council should be addressed to the Town Clerk.
- 2.2 The Town Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting of the Council.
- 2.3 No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Council, a committee, a sub-committee, or a working group.
- 2.4 Items of correspondence which require a council response, decision or action should be officially received at Council for a decision unless of an urgent Health and Safety concern.

### 3 Agenda items of Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups

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- 3.1 Agenda items should be clear and concise. They should contain sufficient information for members to make an informed decision. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on Council agendas. Where Councillors wish colleagues to receive matters “for information only”, this information should be circulated via the Town Clerk.

### 4 Communications with the Press and Public

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- 4.1 Press reports and correspondence from the Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups are deemed to be authorised by the Proper Officer.
- 4.2 If Councillors are asked for a comment by the press or members of the public, unless it is absolutely clear that they are reporting the official view of the Council, it should be stated clearly that such comments or views are the personal views of the Member.
- 4.3 When posting information on behalf of the Council via any form of Social media, it must be done under a Group heading such as North Walsham Town Council and remain under the control or delegation of the Proper Officer.
- 4.4 Administrative rights to social media areas created for Town Council use will be performed by members of the Committee or delegated employees, to ensure the following behavior is enshrined:
  - No business advertisements permitted
  - No insults, bullying/threatening behavior or foul language
  - Political neutrality

Any breach of these basic rules will follow this process of these basic rules will follow this process.

- Private contact and request for immediate revocation of post
- Notification that this is their one and only warning

Any further transgression will result in immediate barring from the group

- 4.5 Safeguards will be in place so that no single person is required to monitor content or to take decisions about rule breaches in isolation
- 4.6 Social Media account operates should limit their responses to answering questions and providing information. They should not express an opinion and, if in any doubt, refer the issue to the Proper Officer:
- 4.7 When using social media, Councillors must make it absolutely clear from the outset that any comments they are making are that Member's personal views. This applies particularly to the North Walsham Town Council Facebook group, where the default understanding of members of the public is that any comments by Councillors represent the views of the Council. Councillors must not allow themselves to be drawn into lengthy discussion or argument about matters over which the Town Council has no control.
- 4.8 If Councillors wish to make a complaint, or receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be passed in writing to the Town Clerk so that it can be dealt with under the Council's complaints procedure or by a Council agenda item. The name and address of the complainant should be on record.

## 5 Correspondence between Councillors and other bodies

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- 5.1 All personal correspondence as a Councillor to other agencies should make clear that the views expressed are those of the individual and not necessarily those of the Council.
- 5.2 A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or the Councillors role within it should be sent to the Town Clerk, and the correspondence should make clear to the addressee that this is the case.

## 6 Communications with Town Council staff

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- 6.1 Council staff are answerable to the Council as a whole, through the Town Clerk, and not to individual Councillors. Councillors **must not** give instructions to any member of staff unless specifically authorized to do so by the Council or the urgency of the request justifies direct contact (for example health and safety matters on Council-owned property). In any event, the Town Clerk **must** be notified of any instructions given to staff. If the Town Clerk states that work cannot be undertaken by a member of staff that decision is final and the decision cannot be raised with another Councillor.
- 6.2 Telephone calls should be kept to a minimum, and relate to the Council.
- 6.3 Emails should be kept to a minimum to the Town Clerk or staff. Instant replies from the Town Clerk or other staff should not be expected and will only be dealt with instantly if considered urgent. Matters for information should be directed to other Councillors via the Town Clerk.
- 6.4 If an acknowledgement is requested in an email from the Town Clerk, Councillors should provide this.
- 6.5 If Councillors wish to meet with the Town Clerk to discuss matters of Council business, an appointment should be made. When requesting an appointment, the matters for discussion should be made clear.