



SANDOWN TOWN COUNCIL

Communications Policy

Contents

1. AIMS.....	2
2. INTRODUCTION.....	2
3. NOTICE BOARDS.....	2
4. WEBSITE	2
5. CORRESPONDENCE	3
<i>Council Correspondence.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Councillor Correspondence to external parties.....</i>	<i>3</i>
6. COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PRESS AND PUBLIC	3
7. COMMUNICATIONS WITH TOWN COUNCIL STAFF	3
<i>E-mails:.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Meetings with the Clerk or other officers:.....</i>	<i>4</i>
8. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL	4
9. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA	4
<i>Town Council email.....</i>	<i>5</i>
10. OTHER METHODS OF COMMUNICATION.....	5
<i>Volunteers and Authorised Community Representatives</i>	<i>5</i>
11. CONFIDENTIALITY, DATA PROTECTION AND CODE OF CONDUCT	5

1. AIMS

- 1.1. To establish clear, easy to use channels of communication between Sandown Town Council, the Clerk, Councillors and the residents of Sandown and vice versa.
- 1.2. To provide information on important matters in an appropriate manner so as to facilitate and encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Each Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interest of the whole community and is available to help parishioners with regard to matters relating to Sandown.
- 2.2. They may be contacted by telephone or email (if available) and a contact list is displayed on the council notice board and on the council website.
- 2.3. If the matter is important, then a letter to the clerk or their deputy will ensure that this will be brought before the council and dealt in a suitable manner.
- 2.4. It is the council's intention to comply with the schedule as below.

3. NOTICE BOARDS

- 3.1. The following items will be displayed permanently:
 - Councillors with contact email addresses
 - Council meetings dates for the year
 - Notice of the annual audited accounts will be displayed when appropriate.
- 3.2. The agendas pertaining to council meetings will be displayed 5 days in advance of the meeting.
- 3.3. Notices of public meetings will be displayed as and when appropriate.

4. WEBSITE

- 4.1. The following items will be permanently available:
 - Councillors with contact email addresses
 - Council meeting dates for the year once confirmed
 - The approved minutes from the next council meeting.
 - Financial information including bank reconciliations and annual budget
 - The Mayors Annual Report
 - All statutory documents including Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
 - All adopted policies
 - Details of the Publication Scheme
- 4.2. The Clerk will ensure that information published on the website is kept up to date.
- 4.3. Council information published on the website must be approved by the Clerk and/or Mayor before publication.

- 4.4. Where appropriate, residents may be directed to the website to obtain information or services

5. CORRESPONDENCE

Council Correspondence

- 5.1. The clerk is the main point of contact for the town council.
- 5.2. All correspondence relating to the Council should be addressed to the Clerk in the first instance.
- 5.3. All correspondence to the clerk will normally be acknowledged within one week of receipt.
- 5.4. Official correspondence shall be issued by the Clerk in the name of the Council using approved Council stationery or email
- 5.5. Where correspondence is copied to another person, the recipient should be made aware through the use of a copy notification (cc).
- 5.6. No individual Councillor or Officer shall be the sole custodian of Council correspondence or information
- 5.7. Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information unless they can demonstrate a legitimate need to know.

Councillor Correspondence to external parties

- 5.8. As the Clerk should be sending most of the council's correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies, it needs to be made clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Town council.
- 5.9. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

6. COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

- 6.1. The Clerk will clear official press statements and media comments with the Mayor or Chair of the relevant committee where appropriate.
- 6.2. Official press releases shall normally be issued by the Clerk or an authorised officer.
- 6.3. Unless specifically authorised by the Council, Councillors speaking to the media must make it clear when they are expressing a personal opinion.
- 6.4. Councillors must not represent personal views as the views of the Council.
- 6.5. Complaints received from members of the public shall be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Complaints Procedure.

7. COMMUNICATIONS WITH TOWN COUNCIL STAFF

- 7.1. Councillors must not give instructions directly to members of staff unless authorised through Council decisions or delegated powers
- 7.2. No individual Councillor, including the Mayor or Committee Chair, may issue instructions that conflict with Council decisions or delegated authority arrangements.

7.3. Telephone calls and communications should relate to legitimate Council business.

E-mails:

7.4. Immediate responses should not be expected from the Clerk unless urgency has been clearly identified.

7.5. Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;

7.6. E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk;

7.7. Councillors should acknowledge receipt of emails when requested.

Meetings with the Clerk or other officers:

7.8. Appointments should be arranged wherever possible.

7.9. Meetings should relate to the responsibilities of the relevant officer.

7.10. Matters discussed should be legitimate Council business and not personal or political matters.

8. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL

8.1. Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- a) Be civil, factual, and relevant.
- b) Be factual, civil and relevant
- c) Be lawful and respectful
- d) Not contain defamatory, abusive, threatening, obscene or discriminatory content
- e) Respect copyright
- f) Protect personal information☐ Comply with Council policies and legislation

9. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

9.1. The Council uses electronic communications, social media and digital platforms to communicate with residents, organisations and Councillors.

9.2. The Council currently uses:

- Website
- Email
- Facebook
- Other platforms approved by the Council from time to time

9.3. Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising

9.4. Official Council social media content shall be moderated by authorised Council representatives.

9.5. Employees and Councillors must comply with this policy whenever using social media in connection with Council business.

9.6. Breaches by employees may be dealt with through the disciplinary procedure.

9.7. Breaches by Councillors may be dealt with under the Code of Conduct and referred to the Monitoring Officer where appropriate.

Town Council email

- 9.8. The Clerk shall maintain an official Council email account.
- 9.9. The Council email account will normally be monitored during office hours.
- 9.10. The Clerk is responsible for managing incoming correspondence and distributing it as necessary.
- 9.11. Official Council communications will normally be issued by, or copied to, the Clerk.
- 9.12. Where personal data is provided by members of the public, appropriate consent procedures shall be followed where required.
- 9.13. Councillors may communicate directly with residents regarding personal views, provided they do not imply they are speaking on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so.
- 9.14. Councillors should use Council-provided email accounts for Council business whenever possible.
- 9.15. Emails relating to Council business may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act and other statutory disclosure requirements.
- 9.16. Personal information must not be disclosed without lawful authority.

10. OTHER METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

10.1. This policy applies equally to:

- SMS messaging
- Video conferencing
- Online meeting platforms
- Instant messaging services
- Any future communication technologies used for Council business

Volunteers and Authorised Community Representatives

- 10.2. The Council may, from time to time, authorise volunteers or community representatives to assist with the circulation of official Council communications.
- 10.3. Volunteers may share or recirculate Council-issued information only where they have been specifically authorised by the Clerk or Council to do so.
- 10.4. When sharing Council information, volunteers must not alter, interpret, or add commentary that could misrepresent the original message.
- 10.5. Volunteers must not issue statements, respond to public enquiries on behalf of the Council, or present themselves as official Council spokespeople unless formally authorised in writing.
- 10.6. All activity undertaken under this section must comply with this policy, the Council's Code of Conduct (where applicable), and all relevant data protection legislation.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY, DATA PROTECTION AND CODE OF CONDUCT

- 11.1. Councillors and employees must handle all information securely and appropriately.
- 11.2. Confidential information obtained through Council duties must not be disclosed without proper authority.
- 11.3. Care should be taken when using email distribution lists and the "Reply All" function.

11.4. Councillors and staff must comply with:

- The Council's Code of Conduct
- UK GDPR
- The Data Protection Act 2018
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Any other applicable legislation

11.5. Failure to maintain confidentiality or comply with data protection requirements may result in disciplinary action, Code of Conduct proceedings, or referral to appropriate authorities.

11.6. This policy also applies to other forms of communication used for council business including but not limited to SMS Messaging and video conferencing (skype, zoom, teams etc.)

11.7. Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council

11.8. As more and more information become available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely.

11.9. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone.

11.10. Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

11.11. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).