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## 1. Introduction

This Policy is designed to guide the Town Council's communications and marketing activities. Communications activity is a key driver in public perception of overall Council performance. Research suggests that keeping Stakeholders informed, listening to their concerns and involving them when making decisions has a significant impact on their satisfaction with the Council and its services.

Marketing techniques are an integral part of a forward-looking communications policy. If it is to be meaningful and have some longevity, the Communications and Marketing Policy must reflect the corporate aims and priorities of the Council. It will also be true to the principles set out in the Equalities Policy, Information and Data Protection Policy and Customer Care Policy and Complaints Code as well as being a vehicle for the delivery of other Council policies. Marketing in this case also includes insight and market research within the town and community, as well as place branding.

Delivering value for money and retaining satisfaction levels through effective communications is a priority, but this Policy must take into account and operate within a wider environment given the period of change.

## 2. Digital Revolution

The single biggest change to the way people live their lives is the digital revolution. Whilst this offers specific challenges for organisations such as the Council, it also offers enormous potential to change the way we deliver services. Over the last few years, the Council has seen a fundamental shift to the way customers want to interact with the Council and this has accelerated further with the imposition of restrictions to control the Covid-19 Pandemic.

More people now want to communicate, transact and engage through digital channels. Whilst the telephone used to be the main access channel for customers, this has now been overtaken by the website and email. Social media is now an essential tool which customers use to engage and interact with the Council.

The Council needs to embrace these channels and design online services that are simple to use with an easy and accessible user journey. This will mean that those people who have a preference for digital will be able to use our services, but this transformation will not be immediate and we must continue to cater for those who do not have the resources to access

technology or are not as confident with technology. In addition to encouraging the shift from traditional to online channels, another objective is to lower the transaction costs at the Council in order to create efficiencies.

The Council recognises the need to be able to develop greater personalisation of communications to enable it to deliver even better value for money. In order to achieve this, the Council will need to move away from a blanket approach whereby it uses all communication and marketing routes to engage with customers, which can be both costly and inefficient.

In the future, we will try to better understand the characteristics of our customers, which will allow us to effectively communicate with them by their preferred communication method and engage with them on services that may be of particular interest to them. Improved customer insight is critical as communications and marketing move beyond the traditional demographic groupings. It will allow a greater knowledge and understanding of the behaviours, motivations and preferences of individuals.

### **3. Corporate Priorities**

The Council's revised Corporate Strategy (2022-25) will set the direction and approach going forward. The Council will continue to articulate its clear direction, and will tell its growing number of good news stories. Robust policies and governance documents will set the rules about who can speak on behalf of the Council and what information can or can't be released. It is important to proactively build good relations with the local media and to issue press releases on important matters. By leading the PR approach proactively, media relations will continue to improve and it is likely that the positive stories that the Council wish to tell will filter through to the community. It must also be clear who will be allowed to answer press enquiries and for them to be well prepared to do so. Some basic media training will be given to these individuals (via the annual training plan) which will help ensure the right messages are provided but also give confidence to those speaking on behalf of the Council.

There are a number of actions in the Corporate Strategy which directly relate to communications and marketing:

- ❖ To communicate Neston's outward facing strategic priorities to ensure all Stakeholders, partners and staff are clear on these.
- ❖ A key objective to 'communicate effectively with all stakeholders'
- ❖ To gain clarity about people's needs and desires for service priorities through gaining insight and feedback and to use this to shape the future of services offered.
- ❖ Create a strong recognisable identity (**place brand**) for the town and local area to promote it as a safe and thriving environment and to attract visitors and businesses.
- ❖ Explore partnerships with Cheshire West and Chester Council as well as other community organisations to help promote the town and raise the profile of Neston.
- ❖ To have people and organisations working together for an integrated community.
- ❖ Promote the economy by supporting the messaging to internal and external audiences, in line with proposed Brand Strategy.

- ❖ Create and communicate a series of Council run events throughout the year to engage Stakeholders and visitors, support local business and to build on the heritage of the town.
- ❖ Encourage individuals and communities to get involved with the Town and the Council.
- ❖ Ensuring the Council has open and active communication and feedback mechanisms.
- ❖ Support activity which strengthens social connections and interaction.

#### **4. Key Areas**

Neston Town Council's main areas of promotion are:

The Town -

- Promotion of the Town to attract Stakeholders, day visitors and shoppers.
- Promotion to attract people looking to live or work in the Town.
- Promotion to businesses looking to invest in the Town.
- Promotion of the Town's businesses, community groups, clubs and organisations, and volunteering opportunities.
- Promotion of community events.
- Promotion of the town's assets including The Town Hall, markets, Ness Gardens and Wetlands and Parkgate coastal village.

The Council- Raising the image and understanding of the Council and its responsibilities  
 Communicating the Council's priorities 2022-25 and beyond Statutory and other information to help Stakeholders and businesses understand its decision making, policies and priorities. Open and active communication and feedback channels. Marketing of its services to ensure accessibility for all and to maximise income. Internal communications to aid the Council's efficiency and staff engagement.

The Council will promote the Town on its website; by improving signage, by organising and supporting local events, business initiatives and by helping publicise the range of local community groups and organisations in the Town. It is intended that images are updated regularly on the website to ensure best quality and engagement (a photography guide will be useful to maintain standards). It will also use social media to engage with Stakeholders and keep its communities informed. The existing Facebook page 'Neston Life' will be used for positive community stories and events and built upon as there are already interactions with this page (4.8k likes overall). In addition, the Council will create their own Facebook page to interact with Stakeholders on more factual matters as well as good news stories.

The Council will monitor the need for translation of information into other languages if required. It will work to ensure information is accessible for all, including the visually and hearing impaired, and promote Neston as "disability friendly".

#### **5. Elected Members**

Members will be supported by clear timely communications by making sure that they receive:

- Briefings, in relation to key national and local issues.
- Regular updates through the distribution of press and news articles.
- Support with briefings/statements for the media when required.
- Information and briefings on matters that are related to individual Councillors and their respective Ward.

This is the responsibility of the Council's Chief Officer.

## **6. Employees**

Employees are our most important communicators and if they are engaged, they will act as the voice of the council and all they stand for.

Better engagement with our Stakeholders starts with our employees. Our role is to build awareness, understanding and engagement among employees so that they can lead the delivery of positive outcomes. Effective communications enable and support employees in meeting the operational needs and the changes required to deliver our transformation vision. Leaders and managers at all levels have a role to play in listening and responding to employees, ensuring that communication is two-way.

Employee communications approach:

- Delivering clear, consistent, honest and timely information to relevant audiences.
- Ensuring feedback from employees is listened to, ensuring there is at least 2 engagement days per year to gain feedback and ideas.
- Ensuring communications are delivered in language that is free from jargon and easy to understand.
- Tailoring communications for specific audiences.
- Working in partnership to ensure messages are consistent and timely.

## **7. Marketing & Communications Objectives**

Strategic communications mean that any particular piece of communication is not an end in itself – it has to help deliver something that is important to the Council or Town as a whole. This could include improving the financial stability of the authority, delivering what matters for Stakeholders or making the locality a more attractive place in which people are happy to live, work or visit.

Marketing and promotional activity for the Council must achieve at least one of the following:

- Improve public and community relations.
- Drive income for NTC.
- Raise the Council's profile.
- Impart essential information.

- Improve two-way communication with stakeholders, to help understanding of what they want.
- Increase recognition received for the Council's achievements.
- Increase involvement and interest in Council activities.
- Engage people in the democratic process.

Marketing and promotional activity for the Town must achieve one of the following:

- Drive footfall into the town from the community.
- Drive visitors into the town.
- Support local businesses or achieve connectivity between them.
- Raise money for local charities.
- Raise the town's profile regionally.
- Raise the profile of local clubs, groups and organisations.
- Increase involvement of members of the community in volunteering.

These objectives will inform the Council's approach to public relations, advertising, design, marketing, customer care, consultation, website and social media. They should be used as a checklist before signing off any promotional material or communications.

## **8. Principles**

The following principles will be adopted in all communications:

- Integrity and honesty – the tone of voice will be sincere, genuine and inclusive.
- Openness and accessibility.
- Inclusiveness – ensure communications can be accessed by all of the community and that wider groups and harder to reach groups are referenced within these.
- Listening and responding – referencing feedback gained where possible.
- Accountability – demonstrate the Council doing what they can to hold themselves to account for best practice and right first-time delivery.
- Consistency – all communications should build on those previous telling the story of an aligned approach.
- Accuracy & clarity- data points or statistics to be used if relevant/ possible.
- Compliance with current legislation and guidance.

## **9. Stakeholders/Key Audiences**

The stakeholders/key audiences of Neston Town Council are:

- Stakeholders.
- Members.
- Employees.

- Partners within the public sector (Cheshire West & Chester County Councils, NHS, Police etc.).
- Special interest groups including those with language or disability needs.
- Business community.
- Voluntary/community organisations and groups.
- Schools.
- Press/media.
- Visitors.
- Customers and clients of the Town Council's services.

## **10. Corporate Style Guide**

To ensure consistency in the look and feel of all communication materials produced by the Council and a clear, recognisable identity, it is essential that a corporate style guide for Neston Town Council is used. This will include information on colourways, fonts and design parameters that will be applied across all communications which includes signage, advertisements, websites, business cards and letter headed paper, social media, leaflets and brochures, staff uniforms, badges, posters and banners. The recommended place branding work will use research to consider if the knot logo is to continue being used or if it should be replaced. A Photography Guide will be provided within the Style Guide document. This will ensure the quality and consistency of all images used, particularly on social media and the Council website. In the current climate, imagery is everything and portraying the town with vibrant and engaging imagery is now an essential requirement.

Also, as part of the Style Guide there will be an 'Image Bank' created where images can be stored and selected from to use for communications, in particular for social media. These images can include ones taken by local Stakeholders who are willing to share the images they have taken of their town.

The guide will also outline the 'tone of voice' and key messages to be used for each method of communication and different target audiences.

## **11. Websites**

The Council operates the following website:

**Neston Town Council.** [www.neston.org.uk](http://www.neston.org.uk)

This website has just been relaunched and updated with new images and functionality. It is crucial however to ensure the best imagery is used and this is still to be updated, for example, on the Town Hall page. An image audit is carried out on the website to ensure any dull, blurred or disengaging images are changed. This new website was designed to ensure compliance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018, the purpose of which is to improve the accessibility of public sector websites so that they can be used by as many people as possible – this builds on the existing obligations to disabled people under the Equality Act 2010.

The Community section is yet to be transferred over, however the Council consider it is important to keep the community involvement with the website.

The website is not only more accessible but more comprehensive, with a range of additional information, including that required by the Transparency Code. It will easily accommodate further information that will result from the Council's ongoing review of its priorities, governance, structure and procedures.

## **12. PR, Advertising & Communications**

This policy will be implemented through a SMART Communications & Marketing Plan and included in the Council's Delivery Plan.

The Plan will be both Proactive and Reactive:

A: Proactive:

- We will plan ahead for positive PR opportunities that we want to tell people about such as new developments, opportunities, events, positive changes and services.
- We will include a social media and events calendar to help inform workloads and ensure proactivity.

B: Reactive:

- We will respond to unforeseen events quickly but thoughtfully.
- Place advertising in the local press and specialist media, but not too often as it may breach the value and objectivity of parts of the Code.
- We will use the social media plan and events calendar to book space and where relevant send in press releases regularly.
- We will network within the community.
- We will produce information leaflets and flyers such as the 'Neston News' for distribution in reception, at community events and at local health and community centres.

## **13 Place Branding:**

The place branding/ marketing exercise will also form a central part of the Communications and Marketing Plan. This will ensure that the way Neston itself is promoted is in sync with the way Stakeholders feel about the town and its place in their hearts. It is recommended that the place branding work of 2011/12 is revisited and that an immersion day is run to look at what makes Neston unique focussing on the key attributes of the area.

A Place Branding Proposal has been developed alongside this document with a recommendation on how to conduct a place branding audit and immersion session. The findings of the immersion will give direction on logos, tone of voice and the overall style for marketing.

## **14. The Council Offer**

The most important thing in improving the Council's image or when marketing services and facilities is to ensure it provides a good 'product offering by':

- Continuing to improve the Town Hall, market, public realm, etc...
- Having great customer care.
- Appearing professional in the way we deal with people and taking pride in our interactions.
- Making a difference to the appearance of the Town.
- Having productive, authoritative and interesting Council meetings.

## **15 How We Will Deliver Our Principles**

- We will communicate as one organisation, so that the message is consistent.
- We will engage with all our audiences, through channels which work for them: listen and ensure we are easy to talk to.
- We will deliver clear, creative and value-for-money communication campaigns and activity based on the outcomes that matter to the Town's Stakeholders.
- We will ensure Neston's profile is maintained and enhanced so that all our audiences recognise the Council's role in improving the lives of Stakeholders. All published promotional, information material, advertising, vehicle livery, banners, building signage, etc, should conform to our corporate style (see point 10).
- We will enhance reputation and build trust by being consistent and transparent in everything we do and say.
- We will ensure our employees and Members are informed and engaged in all we do.

## **16. Social Media**

The Council will need to ensure that the social media plan is a priority for 2022. This will enable the right messages to reach Stakeholders, partners and businesses across Neston and the surrounding areas. The plan will be set out by date and will look forward across the next 12 months to identify key areas that the Council will wish to communicate.

- The Council currently only manage the Twitter account and it is considered beneficial to set up a Neston Town Council Facebook page once the place branding work and future logo have been decided upon.

Other social media platforms used include: About My Area, Neston Markets Facebook site, (these are a group of market traders) and Neston Life (the FB page of AMA). The social media plan should incorporate sharing positive content (i.e., events etc) created by Neston Town Council with Neston Life and other community run groups. The Town Council Facebook page will concentrate on a mix of positive stories and factual information for Stakeholders and businesses.

Social media allows us to obtain information and gain understanding on what is going on in the area, connect and listen to what people have to say, respond to comments and distribute news and information in a timely manner. It can also be used to advertise and



promote services and activities and allows us to segment and target particular groups based on their demographics, this could be based for example on their age or location and to their particular interests.

The power of the media (including online news websites and local newsletters) continues in its influence and authority, but social media is playing an increasing role in determining reputation. This shift will need to be reflected in the way that resources are deployed over the coming years.

Targeted marketing campaigns will be delivered to directly support business objectives, which may include awareness raising, service take-up, behaviour change or achieving income targets or savings through cost avoidance. This will be managed proactively using the social media planner.

## **17. Primary Publications & Communications Media**

**Neston News:** Many people still like to get information in hard printed copy however it is costly and should be balanced with the move to digital communications. We are committed to initiating this publication on a quarterly basis as long as it serves a purpose. Copies will also be available to view and download on our website. Printed copies will be available for pick-up at locations across the Town.

**Agendas, Minutes & Supporting Papers:** Are available for the public to view and download on our website. Councillors can access all documentation via our website. Copies can be requested if urgent.- Agendas are available for members of the public at Council meetings. There is a clear message on each agenda welcoming public participation at all of our Council meetings.

**Neston Town Guide:** This will be produced.

**Publications/Leaflets:** Annual Report, Strategy and Policy Documents in Constitution are available on our website with hard copies on request. Event leaflets, posters, banners and promotional flyers are produced when relevant to promote what is going on in the Town, and displayed in our reception area.

**Noticeboards:** The Town Council has five Notice Boards within its boundary area. Identifying other noticeboard sites around the town in places such as libraries, the Town Hall, in supermarkets and any others located in Neston and the villages are useful for displaying key information. It is key to remove any out-of-date information as this can reflect badly on the Council if noticeboards are not up to date. Electronic noticeboards will be investigated for the future.

## **Media Relations**

Press releases and feature material: Produced through the Council Manager's office.

Media statements: These are mostly reactive and cleared with the Council Manager.

Advertisements: Produced for information, promotional and recruitment purposes and to meet statutory requirements (e.g., Public Notices).

## **Face to Face**

**Councillor Surgeries:** Ongoing 'Chat to Councillor' sessions have been held at the library in in Neston and these have been held jointly with the Police. We will continue to organise Councillor Surgeries where possible to allow Stakeholders the opportunity to speak to their local councillors about issues and ideas for the Town. It is also intended that as part of the place branding audit some face-to-face questionnaires could be conducted in the town.

**Annual Town Meeting:** A chance for Stakeholders to hear an update on events for the town and to give comments. This is now reinstated post Covid 19.

**Daily Contact:** Day to day contact with staff and councillors either at the Council offices/ Town Hall or out and about in the community. All are ambassadors.

**Council Meetings:** Stakeholders are invited to attend all committee meetings and speak at the open public sessions at the beginning and end of each meeting. These are publicised on our website, social media and on the Town Noticeboards.

**Surveys and Market Research:** We will continue to engage the community with regular surveys either online via our website or Facebook. These are a great opportunity for use by the Town Council to understand the needs and wants and views of Stakeholders and local businesses.

## **Events**

The Council arranges some seasonal events throughout the year for Stakeholders to enjoy and to attract visitors to the town. The Councillors attend and have a stand at the annual Village Fair to encourage community engagement. Details of all of these are promoted on the website, through social media and promotional flyers.

## **Grants**

The Council awards grants to local groups and organisations through an annual grants and donations and through this a number of Town and Community events. It also supports Stakeholder Driven Projects. The benefits of this will be promoted highlighting the effect the grant award has had on the successful recipients and the community. This is detailed within the Council's Grants policy.

## **Accessibility**

The Council's contact details will always be kept up-to-date and freely available to make it as easy as possible for people to contact us via email, phone, or social media.

As covered in point 4, The Council will work to ensure information is accessible for all, including the visually and hearing impaired.

## **18. Customer Satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction - by protecting reputation or targeting one of four main drivers of this measure.

These are:

- How informed people feel – good communication is about getting the right message to the right person in the right medium at the right time.
- Value for money perceptions – these are based on a number of factors including price, quality, levels of customer service and brand image.
- Satisfaction with the service or response received.
- How able people feel they can influence decision making – there are three main areas of local activity that can impact on feelings of influence:
  - Provision of information.
  - Consultation – listening to views and taking them into consideration.
  - Attitudes towards local authority and partners.

## **19. Maintaining Standards**

The Council has adopted a **Protocol on Communications** (Appendix 1), in support of the Council's Communication and Marketing Policy. This outlines how Members and Officers should abide by the rules. A breach of these rules may also be a breach of their respective codes of conduct.

**The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011**, applies to local councils as well as principal councils. Neston Town Council recognises that local authorities are required by law to have regard to the contents of this Code in coming to any decision on publicity. Publicity means "any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public". The code therefore applies in relation to all decisions by local authorities relating to paid advertising and leaflet campaigns, publication of free newspapers and news sheets and maintenance of websites –including the hosting of material which is created by third parties. The Council supports the principles of the Code, which are summarised below.

Nothing in this code overrides the prohibition on the publication by local authorities of material which in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.

Publicity by local authorities should be:

- Lawful.
- Cost effective.
- Objective.
- Even-handed.
- Appropriate.
- In accordance with equality and diversity rules.
- Issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

Paid for advertising must comply with the Advertising Standards Authority's Advertising Codes. In relation to all publicity, local authorities should be able to confirm that consideration has been given to the value for money that is being achieved, including taking

into account any loss of potential revenue arising from the use of local authority-owned facilities to host authority publicity.

In some circumstances, it will be difficult to quantify value for money, for example where the publicity promotes a local amenity which is free to use. In such a case, authorities should be able to show that they have given thought to alternative means of promoting the amenity and satisfied themselves that the means of publicity chosen is the most appropriate.

If another public authority, such as central government, has issued publicity on a particular topic, local authorities should incur expenditure on issuing publicity on the same matter only if they consider that additional value is achieved by the duplication of that publicity.

The purchase of advertising space should not be used as a method of subsidising voluntary, public or commercial organisations.

Local authorities should consider whether it is appropriate to seek advice from economic analysts, public relations experts or other sources of expert advice before embarking on a publicity campaign involving very large expenditure.

Local authorities should ensure that publicity relating to policies and proposals from central government is balanced and factually accurate. Such publicity may set out the local authority's views and reasons for holding those views, but should avoid anything likely to be perceived by readers as constituting a political statement, or being a commentary on contentious areas of public policy.

Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy. It is acceptable for local authority publicity to correct erroneous material which has been published by other parties, despite the fact that the material being corrected may have been published with the intention of influencing the public's opinions about the policies of the authority.

Where paid-for advertising is used by local authorities, it should be clearly identified as being advertising.

Advertisements for the recruitment of staff should reflect the tradition of political impartiality of local authority employees.

Where local authority publicity addresses a matter of political controversy, it should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner.

In most circumstances\*, it is acceptable for local authorities to publicise the work done by individual members of the authority. This might be appropriate, for example, when one councillor has been the "face of" a particular campaign. If views expressed by or attributed to individual councillors do not reflect the views of the local authority itself, such publicity should make this fact clear. [\*In a pre-election period, previously known as 'purdah', there are specific restrictions on communications activity in place. These include: not making references to individual politicians or groups in press releases; not arranging proactive media or events involving candidates; and not issuing photographs which include

candidates. (see Local Government Association “A Short Guide to Publicity during the Pre-election Period”)].

Maintenance by a local authority of a website permitting the posting of material by third parties constitutes a continuing act of publication by that local authority which must accordingly have a system for moderating and removing any unacceptable material. Where local authorities provide assistance to third parties to issue publicity, they should ensure that the principles in this code are adhered to by the recipients of that assistance.

Local authorities should not incur any expenditure in retaining the services of lobbyists for the purpose of the publication of any material designed to influence public officials, Members of Parliament, political parties or the Government to take a particular view on any issue. Local authorities should not incur expenditure on providing stands or displays at conferences of political parties.

Local authorities should not publish or incur expenditure in commissioning in hard copy or on any website, newsletters, news sheets or similar communications which seek to emulate commercial newspapers in style or content. Where local councils do commission or publish newsletters, news sheets or similar communications, they should not issue them more frequently than monthly. Such communications should not include materials other than information for the public about the business, services and amenities of the council or other local service providers.

Publicity about local authorities and the services they provide should be freely available to anyone who wishes to receive such information in a format readily accessible and understandable by the person making the request or by any particular group for which services are provided. All local authority publicity should clearly and unambiguously identify itself as a product of the local authority.

Publicity by local authorities may seek to influence positively the attitudes of local people or public behaviour in relation to matters of health, safety, crime prevention, race relations, equality, diversity and community issues. Local authorities should consider how any publicity they issue can contribute to the promotion of any duties applicable to them in relation to the elimination of discrimination, the advancement of equality and the fostering of good relations.

Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums.

## **20. Data Transparency**

The Council has resolved to act in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015. This sets out the key principles for local authorities (including a town council which has gross annual income or expenditure (whichever is the higher) exceeding £200,000) in creating greater transparency through the publication of public data and is intended to help them meet obligations of the legislative framework concerning information. Transparency is seen as the foundation of local accountability and the key that gives people the tools and information, they need to enable them to play a bigger role in society.

“Public data” means the objective, factual data on which policy decisions are based and on which public services are assessed, or which is collected or generated in the course of public service delivery.

The Code will therefore underpin the Council’s decisions on the release of public data and ensure it is proactive in pursuing higher standards and responding to best practice as it develops.

The principles of the Code are:

Demand led: new technologies and publication of data should support transparency and accountability.

Open: the provision of public data will be integral to the Council’s engagement with Stakeholders so that it drives accountability to them.

Timely: data will be published as soon as possible following production.

The Code ensures local people can see and access data covering:

- How money is spent – for example, all spending transactions over £500, contracts valued over £5,000, etc...
- Use of assets – ensuring that local people are able to scrutinise how well their local authority manages its assets.
- Decision making – how decisions are taken and who is taking them, including how much senior staff are paid, etc...
- Issues important to local people – for example, parking.

Neston Town Council will ensure that it provides all required information on its website and will provide hard copies of information on request.

**Introduction**

This protocol is based on a model by the National Association of Local Councils, but tailored to the needs of Neston Town Council.

**A Town Council Correspondence**

1. The point of contact for the Town Council is the Council Manager, to whom correspondence should be addressed. Within the officer team, the Governance and Operations Manager takes the lead on implementing the Communications and Marketing Policy.
2. The Council Manager or other appointed officer should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
3. No individual Councillor or officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Town Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. In particular, Councillors and officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information / documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
4. All official correspondence should be sent by the Council Manager or another officer authorised by the Council Manager to do so, in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper. Emails are to be treated as other correspondence and may only be sent by authorised officers, on matters which are within their job descriptions and delegated authority.
5. The Mayor may sign letters directly initiated or prepared on his/her behalf by staff, but only on matters directly related to the role of Mayor, or other matters which another officer cannot sign such as the Council Manager's letter of appointment or contract.
6. Where correspondence from the Council Manager 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). No blind email copies should be used.

**B. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties**

1. Agendas should be clear and concise. Reports are to be attached where appropriate, which should 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 are to be taken at a meeting. Significant background documents should be circulated to Councillors.
2. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda, and will normally be contained in Members Briefings, which are to be circulated at least once each month.

3. Where the Council Manager or a councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Council Manager, or with the Council Manager's agreement.

### **C. Communications with the Press and Public**

1. The Council Manager will approve all press releases on behalf of the Council, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Mayor, or the Chairman of the relevant committee when appropriate.
2. Press releases from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Council Manager or a delegated officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
3. Unless a Councillor has been specifically authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should refer them to the Council Manager. Even if authorised, it is usually advised not to make an immediate comment and respond having obtained the facts and considered the matter. This gives time, if necessary, to seek advice from the Council Manager.
4. Councillors have a right to express personal views but must make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view. Unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
5. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public about an action of the Council or lack of action, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted Customer Care Policy and Complaints Code, or via a council agenda item. This does not limit a Councillor from carrying out his or her normal caseload on behalf of members of the public which they represent via a Council or committee agenda item.

### **D. Councillor Correspondence to External Parties**

1. As the Council Manager 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 Town Council. Councillors may write letters as individual members concerning Ward or Town matters as long as they make it clear they are acting as an individual and do not commit the Council.
2. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it, should, out of courtesy, be sent to the Council Manager, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g., 'copy to the Council Manager' so that the recipient is aware that the Officer has been advised.

### **E. Communications with Town Council Staff**

1. 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 or sub-committee



with appropriate delegated powers from the Council). The Council Manager however would encourage councillors to speak directly to relevant members of staff about issues, but to keep the Council Manager advised.

2. No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Mayor, or the Chairman of a committee, may give instructions to the Council Manager or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
3. Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council. Again, individual Councillors must not appear to represent the Council as a whole, unless authorised to do so.
4. Emails:
  - a. Instant replies should not be expected from staff; reasons for urgency should be stated;
  - b. Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Council Manager or other Authorised Officer;
  - c. Emails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Council Manager;
  - d. Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
5. Meetings with the Council Manager or other Officers:
  - Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
  - Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;
  - Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

#### **F. Councillors seeking information from outside bodies, organisations or individuals**

1. Councillors must not seek information from outside bodies, organisations or individuals on behalf of the Council unless authorised by the Council. They may of course do this as an individual Councillor.
2. Chairmen and other Councillors may be authorised to seek information on behalf of the Council to take some work load off the Council Manager or because of their individual experience or skills.
3. Any form of negotiation or meeting, must always be undertaken when accompanied by an Officer so that the Councillor is not compromised.
4. Councillors may only represent the Council on outside bodies if authorised to do so.

#### **G. Social Media**

1. The use of Social Media by Members or Officers should be in accordance with the Town Council's adopted policies and protocols.