



COUNCILLOR AND STAFF COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

Adopted 20 JULY 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of these procedures is to define roles and responsibilities within Camelford Town Council (CTC) and give guidelines on internal and external communications, contact with the media and effective use of social media.
- 1.2 It is not the intention of these Guidelines to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise and indicates how any risks or pitfalls can be minimised or mitigated.
- 1.3 This should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct.

2. KEY AIMS

- 2.1 CTC is accountable to the local community for its actions; this accountability can be managed, in part, through effective two-way communications. The media (including social media) is crucially important in conveying information to the community and, as such, CTC must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with the media to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by CTC, and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
- 2.2 It is important that the media has access to the Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk and to background information to assist them in giving accurate accounts to the public. To balance this, CTC reserves the right to defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public is properly informed of all the relevant facts.
- 2.3 CTC acknowledges social media as a useful communication tool. However, clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that its use does not expose CTC to security risks, reputational damage or breach of the Data Protection Act.

3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts. CTC must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The Town Council's Standing Orders (approved and adopted on 6 April 2017) and The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 should be adhered to.

TOWN COUNCIL STANDING ORDERS - Admission of the public and press to meetings

The Public and Press shall be admitted to all meetings of CTC and its Committees, which may however temporarily exclude the public or the press or both, by means of the following resolution:-

"That in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press be excluded, and they are instructed to withdraw."

If a member of the press or public interrupts the proceedings at any meeting, the Chair may, after warning, order that he/she be removed from the meeting room and/or that part of the room open to the public be cleared. The Chair may adjourn the meeting for such a period as is necessary to restore order.

There shall be no audio or video recording or photographs taken of the meeting without the express permission of CTC. *Please refer to the "Audio recording, filming, photographing and reporting of Council and Committee Meetings Policy.*

4. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1 The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of CTC in all their dealings with the media.
- 4.2 Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible, with appropriate action taken.
- 4.3 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from CTC's solicitor before any response is made. This also applies to issues raised by the general public.
- 4.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Town Clerk and Councillors that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain), and disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these, and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Town Clerk before any response is made to the media.
- 4.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Town Clerk and Town Mayor are authorised to make contact with the media.
- 4.6 Statements made by the Town Clerk and Town Mayor should reflect CTC's opinion.

4.7 Other Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of CTC.

4.8 There are occasions when it is appropriate for CTC to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents; such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Town Clerk.

5. ATTENDANCE OF MEDIA AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

5.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media upon request.

5.2 The media are encouraged to attend CTC meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

5.3 Permission to film or tape CTC proceedings by the media must be obtained in writing, and in advance, from the Chair of the meeting. *Please refer to the "Audio recording, filming, photographing and reporting of Council and Committee Meetings Policy".*

6. PRESS RELEASES

6.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain CTC's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

6.2 The Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk or a Councillor may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Town Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across CTC and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

7. NOTICES OF MEETINGS

7.1 CTC website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Deputy Town Clerk, under the direction of the Town Clerk.

7.2 Council noticeboards will be used for advertising meeting notices.

7.3 Social media will be used for advertising meeting notices, events and delivering general public information notices.

8. SOCIAL MEDIA

8.1 For the purposes of this policy, the term 'social media' covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram,

blogs, discussion forums, wikis and any sites which may emerge after the creation of this policy where CTC could be represented.

8.2 The following risks have been identified with social media use (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Virus or other malware infection from an infected site.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Damage to CTC's reputation.
- Social engineering attacks (also known as phishing).
- Bullying or witch-hunting.
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

8.2 Social media sites will be monitored to mitigate these risks to ensure:

- Consistent and corporate approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
- CTC information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.
- Users operate within existing policies, guidelines and existing legislation.
- CTC's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

8.3 Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, in line with this guidance. Social media sites are in the public domain and officers must ensure the reliability and be confident of the nature of the information published. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without consent, used in different contexts or further distributed.

8.4 From time to time, CTC may have to respond to negative issues and may become involved in drawn out conversations on social media. Councillors and all members of staff must alert the Town Clerk as soon as practicable, so that the situation can be managed effectively and efficiently to minimise negative publicity.

8.5 CTC social media must not be used for party political purposes or specific party political campaigning. Officers must not seek to promote councillors' social media accounts during the pre-election period.

9. URGENT SITUATIONS

9.1 In the case of an urgent letter or press release being required in advance of a Council or Committee meeting, this may be issued by the Town Clerk, with the agreement of the Town Mayor, or relevant Committee Chair following circulation of a draft version to other Members for comment.

9.2 In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the Members and Officers with specific roles and responsibilities under this policy, the following delegations shall apply:

- a) the Deputy Town Mayor of CTC may act in the absence of the Town Mayor;
- b) the Town Clerk may act in the absence of the Town Mayor or Deputy Town Mayor of CTC.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

Item	Who responsible	Timescale	Method	All Cllrs	Website	Social Media (FB, Twitter)
Clerk sickness	Mayor	Same day	Email	Yes		
Staff sickness	TC, AA	Same day	Email	Yes		
Staff holiday	TC, DTC	At least 2 weeks. Will be signed off at Staffing Committee	Email	Yes		Only absence of Town Clerk.
Clerk's holiday	Mayor	2 weeks before	Email	Yes		
Staff training	TC, DTC	1 week before	Email	Yes		
Committee Minutes	Chair of Cttee	Within 1 week to the Clerk. Will be attached at next Council meeting.	Email	Yes		
Agenda	TC	3 working days before meeting	Email/by hand	Yes	Yes	Yes
Draft Minutes	TC	3 working days before meeting	Email/by hand			
Death of Cllr*	TC	Within week	Email	Yes	Yes	Yes
New policy & procedure	TC	Within week of adoption			Yes	
Complaint from public	TC	Same day.	Phone Cllrs by Email	Mayor then all		

*Also remove details from website after consultation with next of kin.

TC – Town Clerk

DTC – Deputy Town Clerk

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

Item	Who responsible	Timescale	Website	Social Media (FB, Twitter)	Noticeboards	Press
Agenda	DTC	3 working days before	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (by email)
Minutes	DTC	Day after approval	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Events	DTC	At least 1 month not less than 2 weeks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Planning consultations	TC/DTC	Day of notice	Yes	Yes		
Death of Cllr	TC	Within week	Yes	Yes		Yes
New policy & procedure	TC	Within week of adoption	Yes	If appropriate		
Complaint from public via social media	TC	Same day depending on severity. Follow complaints procedure at 8.4.				
Planning decision	TC	Next day to Cornwall Council	Yes			
Transparency code	TC	Monthly	Yes			
Other organisations?						

TC – Town Clerk

DTC – Deputy Town Clerk