

Communications Policy

1. Introduction

Brandon Town Council is committed to maintaining open, transparent, and effective communication with the public. This Communications Policy provides guidance to councillors, staff, and volunteers on their roles in upholding professionalism and consistency across Council communications channels, both online and offline.

2. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to:

- 2.1 Facilitate consistent, proactive, and professional communication between Brandon Town Council and the public.
- 2.2 Promote openness and transparency to build community trust and engagement.
- 2.3 Uphold Brandon Town Council's reputation by ensuring all communications reflect the Council's values and goals.
- 2.4 Ensure compliance with relevant legal obligations and privacy standards.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all Town Council representatives, including councillors, staff, and volunteers, as well as all forms of communication issued by the Council, including websites, social media, emails, press releases, newsletters, and printed materials. This policy aligns with the Councillors' Code of Conduct, Staff Handbook, and Protocol for Councillor/Staff Relations.

4. Media and Public Relations Guidelines

4.1 Press Releases

- Press releases are to be managed and approved by the Town Clerk or designated officer in their absence to ensure accuracy and appropriateness. Each release should maintain an objective tone, focusing on Council initiatives, events, and information relevant to the community, avoiding any political bias.
- All press releases must follow a standard format: headline, Council contact details, and quotes from relevant Council representatives.
- Press releases will be circulated to a pre-approved Distribution List and will be shared on the Council's website and social media accounts to ensure accessibility.

5. Media Enquiries

- The Town Clerk or an authorised officer in their absence is responsible for handling all media inquiries. Staff and councillors should redirect inquiries to this designated officer to ensure a consistent response.
- When approached for interviews or statements, Council representatives should provide factual, non-political information that reflects the Council's views, avoiding personal opinion or speculation.
- The Council does not comment on leaks, anonymous allegations, or issues concerning individual councillors or staff. If a correction is necessary, the Town Clerk will determine an appropriate response, which may include issuing a statement, letter, or updated post.

6. Social Media Policy

6.1 Use of Social Media

- Brandon Town Council values social media as a tool for community engagement and information sharing. The Council's official accounts are overseen by the Town Clerk and managed by authorised officers.
- Content posted should be relevant, respectful, and non-political. Councillors and staff should avoid sharing personal opinions on Council accounts.
- Social media posts should be consistent and timely, aiming for at least weekly updates to keep the community informed about the Council's work, events, and relevant news.

7. Monitoring and Moderation

- 7.1 To maintain a safe and respectful online environment, all comments on Council social media will be regularly monitored. Content violating the following guidelines will be removed:
- 7.2 Comments with abusive language, discriminatory views, or political motivations.
- 7.3 Comments that are off-topic, promotion of illegal activities, or those that threaten the safety and security of individuals or systems.

Repeat offenders may be blocked, and any threats or harassment will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

8. Communication Channels

8.1 Website

- The Council's website is a primary information source for the community, providing access to Council minutes, policies, event details, and staff and councillor contact information.
- The communications officer is responsible for ensuring that all information on the website is accurate, accessible, and up to date. Press releases will be posted in chronological order for easy public access.

8.2 Email

- Official Council email addresses must be used by staff and councillors for all Council-related communication. The use of personal email accounts for Council business is discouraged to maintain data security and comply with GDPR and FOI requirements.
- Junk mail and attachments from unverified sources should not be opened, and emails should be checked regularly to ensure timely responses.
- Email content should be respectful, and professional, and use clear language. Avoid debating Council matters over email, as these should be addressed in public meetings.

8.3 Posters

- The Communications Officer and other designated staff will ensure that posters for relevant Council events and activities are displayed on community notice boards and are replaced as needed.

9. Legal and Compliance

9.1 Data Protection

- All personnel handling personal data must do so in line with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Any breaches should be reported promptly to the Town Clerk and handled according to Council procedures.

9.2 Freedom of Information (FOI)

- In compliance with FOI Act requirements, all correspondence and information regarding Council activities are accessible to the public unless exempt, promoting a culture of openness and transparency.

9.3 Election Periods (Purdah)

- During election periods, proactive Council publicity regarding councillors, candidates, or political parties will be paused. Routine Council business will continue to be publicised neutrally, and staff will not upload any content that could imply political bias.



10. Evaluation and Review

The Council will review this Communications Policy annually to ensure its relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with evolving technology and community needs. Engagement metrics and community feedback will help inform any necessary updates which will be conducted by the Communications Officer and communicated to Council via Full Council meetings.