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**Communications Policy**

This policy defines the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the media and addresses the day-to-day relationship between the Council and the media.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations for Councillors. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when Councillors deal with the media.

The Policy will be reviewed bi-annually from the month of approval by the Full Council and recommendations for proposed changes to it will be considered within two months for approval by Full Council.

**Southwell Town Council (STC) Correspondence**

* The point of contact for the Town Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Town Council should be addressed.
* The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
* 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.
* All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper.
* Where correspondence from the Clerk 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).

**Communications with the press and public**

* The Clerk/Communication Officer will liaise the Chair and the Communications Working Group (CWG) regarding the clearance of all press reports and comments to the media
* Official STC reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Clerk/ Communications Officer and the Communications Working Group or via the reporter’s own attendance at a meeting.
* If a Councillor has not been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a Town Council issue, Councillors should make it clear that it is a personal view.
* If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council’s adopted complaints procedure.

**Councillor correspondence to external parties**

* 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 Council.
* 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, eg. “copy to the Clerk” so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

**Communications with Town Council staff**

* Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so by the Clerk.
* No individual Councillor, regardless of whether they are the Chairman of the Council, the Chairman of a committee or other meeting, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
* Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.

Emails:

* Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk. The Clerk should respond to emails from Councillors within 2 working days (exceptions may apply).
* Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk.
* E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk.
* Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

Meetings with the Clerk 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 only Council business to be discussed at meetings.

**Councillor/officer emails**

Officers are provided with a post related email account e.g. clerk@southwell-tc.gov.uk

Councillor are provided with an email account, yourname@southwell-tc.gov.uk

specifically for your work as an officer or town Councillor.

The Council believes this is the most efficient and effective way of working together and keeping in touch with the community, when making use of this facility, there are some things you need to consider.

The Scheme of Delegation allows decisions to be made via email when appropriate.

* the law does not allow Councillors to act independently on behalf of Full Council.
* Council so you must remember to put the Disclaimer at the bottom whenever possible
* Council emails are not confidential; every email is stored in the archive and is available to the public through a freedom of information request. Although the emails will be cleared of any personal data before they are released, it is better to avoid disclosing anything personal or confidential in the first place; email is not a secure medium.
* no disclaimer will help if you send an email that contains illegal, offensive, obscene,

racist, abusive material or libellous, defamatory, or discriminative material which may bring the Council into disrepute.

* Account holders within the domain, southwell-tc.gov.uk, consent to receive Summons and Notices of Meetings by electronic means.
* The number of email accounts may be amended from time to time as the Council sees fit.
* All outgoing emails from the domain regardless of the author shall observe relevant data protection legislation and, where there are multiple private addressees who have no association, such emails shall be distributed by blind copy only.
* Members may use the Council’s email accounts for Council business only.
* Members may not delete emails from their Council email accounts except where allowed by Southwell Town Council’s Document Retention Policy.
* Users should not send or forward any chain emails (e.g. jokes and virus warnings) from their Council email account as both of these can contain malware. In addition, almost all virus warnings and police warnings circulating via email are hoaxes designed to clog up email systems by scaring people into forwarding them across the internet.
* Remember that the authenticity of any email received cannot be guaranteed, especially with the prevalence of email “spoofing” (emails pretending to come from a source gathered through dubious means). Users should always avoid opening any attachments to emails that are unexpected.
* Please only send emails to the relevant people.