



Shifnal Town Council

Communications Protocol

A. Council Correspondence

- (i) The point of contact for the Council is the **Town Clerk**, and it is to the Town Clerk that all correspondence for the Town Council should be addressed.
- (ii) The Town Clerk or an Officer delegated by the Town Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- (iii) 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'.
- (iv) All official correspondence should be sent by the Town Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper. It is understood that the Town Clerk may also utilise electronic means of communication (see Section F below).
- (v) Where correspondence from the Town 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).
- (vi) All requests made under the Freedom of Information Act will be processed by the Town Clerk with summary information provided to members in accordance with item B (iii) below.

B. Agenda items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties or Groups

- (i) The agenda should be clear and concise. It 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.
- (ii) Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda and the Town Clerk will use their discretion over whether to circulate hard copies of documents etc. which are for information only. Copies of documents referred to on agendas, when not circulated in advance or a meeting, will be available for viewing in the Council Office prior to a meeting.



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- (iii) A summary sheet containing information relating to complaints or compliments received and requests for information, together with responses written by the Town Clerk on behalf of the Council, will be circulated in advance (wherever possible) of any meeting where they are to be noted or discussed. Hard copy correspondence will be available for viewing in the Council Office prior to the meeting.

C. Public Noticeboards

- (i) All Council notices to be agreed by the Town Clerk or an Officer (in conjunction with the Town Clerk) prior to being posted in public noticeboards (either Council owned or otherwise).
- (ii) All public requests for notices to be posted in Council owned noticeboards to be agreed by the Town Clerk or an Officer prior to being posted.
- (iii) All public notices should be for charitable, social, or non-profit purposes and under no circumstances should business flyers be agreed.
- (iv) Any notices shall be removed by Officers without reference to the external body if they do not comply with the above, have passed their event period or if the noticeboards are otherwise required for Council business.
- (v) All keys for the Council owned noticeboards shall be retained and managed by the Council Office.

D. Communications with the Press and Public

- (i) The Town Clerk will be responsible for **all press reports** or comments to the media on behalf of the Council.
- (ii) The Town Clerk will, wherever possible, attempt to correct all inaccuracies and misinformation which appear in the press or any that are communicated to the public.
- (iii) Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the **Town Clerk** or an Officer (in conjunction with the Town Clerk) or via the reporters own attendance at a meeting.
- (iv) Unless a Councillor has been **authorised** by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a **personal view** and ask that it be **clearly reported** as their personal view.
- v) Unless a Councillor is **absolutely certain** that they are expressing the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a **personal view**.



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- vi) If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted Complaints Procedure.
- vii) All Councillors should make themselves aware of the Data Protection Act and GDPR and how it affects them in their role as Councillors. Councillors and Officers will be made aware of any other relevant information as and when it becomes available.
- viii) Standing Orders provides for the Mayor to ask a Councillor or the Town Clerk to respond to a member of the public during the public session. Where this happens the Councillor or the Town Clerk should ensure that the answer that they give reflects the view or policy of Shifnal Town Council on the matter raised. The Town Clerk, if appropriate, can give an update on progress of a matter of public importance.
- ix) Matters relating to employment issues and staff matters should **never** be discussed with **the Press or members of the public**.

E. Councillor Correspondence to External Parties

- (i) Most communications will be made through the Town Clerk. However, it is recognised that there are occasions when communications are made directly from Councillors to external parties. On these occasions, it needs to be made clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Town Council.

F. Communications with Council Staff

- (i) Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff. Relations with staff are covered in the Working Relationships Protocol which forms the policy of Shifnal Town Council on this.
- (ii) Telephone calls to and from the Town Clerk or Officers should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.

G. E-mails

- (i) Instant replies should not be expected from the Town Clerk. Any reasons for urgency should be stated.
- (ii) Information to Councillors should normally be copied to the Town Clerk.



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- (iii) Where e-mails are received by Councillors from external parties they should be acknowledged by return and copied to the Town Clerk for appropriate actions.
- (iv) E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Town Clerk.
- (v) Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

H. Meetings with the Town Clerk or other Officers

- (i) Wherever possible an appointment should be made.
- (ii) Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer.
- (ii) Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Council's Social Media Policy.

Any contravention of the Communication Protocol by the Town Clerk or any Officer will be initially dealt by the Mayor, and if deemed necessary by the Employment Committee.