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ALFRETON TOWN COUNCIL

COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL

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| **Issue**  **Number** | **Date Agreed** | **Details of amendments** |
| 1 | May 2015 | Adopted by Council |
| 2 |  | Reviewed March 2019 |
| 3 |  | Reviewed July 2020 |
| 4 |  | Reviewed February 2022 |
| 4 |  | Reviewed February 2023 |
| 5 |  | Reviewed February 2024 |

This policy aims to establish a protocol for effective communication of the Town Council’s activities and pertinent information to the media and members of the public.

The Town Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to convey its decisions and actions through various media.

All communication will be conveyed in an open and straightforward manner.

The Town Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Town Council and is responsible for all formal communication between the Council, the press and members of the public. All Press Releases should be signed off by the Town Council Communication Committee. This process is managed by the Town Clerk.

The Town Council reserve the right to not post or share any information on any platform which may be deemed inappropriate, offensive or upsetting to others.

# Method of Communication

The Council will use the following media to communicate its activities:

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| **Activity** | **Method of Communication** | **Responsibility** |
| Approved Minutes | Website | Town Clerk |
| Agendas | Website/noticeboards | Town Clerk |
| Annual Report | Website | Town Clerk (following approval from Communications Committee) |
| Press Release | Website, Local Media, Twitter and Facebook | Town Clerk (following approval from Communications Committee or member nominated at the relevant Council Meeting) |
| Annual External Audit | Website/noticeboards | Town Clerk |
| Annual Accounts | Website | Town Clerk (following approval from Full Council) |
| Councillor Vacancies | Website/noticeboards | Town Clerk |
| Financial statements and other financial information | Website | Town Clerk |
| Weekly Blogs | Website, Twitter and Facebook | Town Clerk (following approval from Communications Committee) |
| Catch-up | Website, Twitter and Facebook  Distribute to: Library  Tearooms  Doctors/Dentist  Wetherspoons  Co-op | Town Clerk |

# Procedure

The Town Council’s requests that any press or other social media request for an oral or written comment or statement from the Council, its Councillors or staff, shall be handled in accordance with the Council’s policy in respect of dealing with the press and/or other media (this policy).

The following procedure sets out how the Council’s decisions and actions will be disseminated to interested parties.

1. Using themes approved by the Town Council, the Chairman will be responsible for presenting the Town Council’s Annual Report at the Annual General Meeting of the Council.
2. Once a formal written draft has been approved by Full Council, the Annual Report will be published.
3. The Town Clerk is solely responsible for the preparation of notices of Council meetings, agendas and minutes.
4. The Deputy Town Clerk is responsible for the overall development and maintenance of the Council’s website so that it remains current.
5. All correspondence addressed to the Town Council will be actioned by the Town Clerk.
6. Information that needs to be considered by the Town Council, or one of its committees, will be placed on the first agenda after its receipt.
7. Agendas for Council meetings will be accompanied with sufficient written reports and information to enable Members to make an informed decision. Agendas will be issued via email to those Councillors who wish to have the information forwarded this way or alternatively, as hard copies and will be posted to Members at least 3 clear days before all meetings of the Council.
8. Agendas and minutes for all meetings of the Council will be published on the Council’s website.
9. Other relevant information will be emailed or posted to Lead Members in-between meetings.
10. Council information will be made available to members of the public in accordance with the Council’s ‘Publication Scheme’.

# Requests for Information

Information held by the Council shall be handled in accordance with the Council’s policy in respect of handling requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Correspondence from, and notices served by, the Information Commissioner shall be referred by the Proper Officer to the Council. The Council shall have the power to do anything to facilitate compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

# Working for the Community

The Council will not disclose confidential information that is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act. The agenda and its supporting papers, and the minutes from a meeting where confidential or sensitive information is discussed, shall not be disclosed

***Councillors who wish to communicate directly with the press should make it clear that they are speaking as a private individual.***

# Pre-determination and Bias

Councillors must not predetermine their decision, particularly as it relates to regulatory or quasi-judicial issues (planning or licensing).

For example, Members must not say in a press release or through social media that they will “never allow this development to go ahead” or “this application can rely on my support’ and then go to the Planning Meeting and take part in the vote. **That member will have predetermined their decision.**

Predetermination or bias is where a councillor is closed to the merits of any arguments relating to a particular issue, such as an application for planning permission, and makes a decision on the issue without taking them into account.

Councillors must not even appear to have already decided how they will vote at the meeting, so that nothing will change their minds.

An impression of predetermination can be created in a number of different ways such as quotes given in the press, comments on social media, what has been said at meetings or written in correspondence including emails and texts. Rarely will membership of an organisation, such as a national charity, amount to predetermination or bias on its own unless it has a particular vested interest in the outcome of a specific decision that a councillor is involved in making.

Councillors who are not involved with making a decision are generally free to speak about how they want that decision to go.

Once again the test is if a fair-minded observer having considered the facts, decides there is a real possibility that the councillor had predetermined the issue or was biased?

If a member feels that they have, by actions such as those described above, demonstrated a predetermined or biased view they must declare a prejudicial interest and leave any meeting at which the item has been discussed and certainly not take part in any vote on the subject.

On all of these issues, if in doubt, Elected Members should take advice, as far in advance of a meeting as possible, from the Officers.