



CORFE MULLEN TOWN COUNCIL

Electronic Communications Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The use of electronic communications enables Corfe Mullen Town Council (the 'Council') to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and with the people, businesses and organisations it works with and represents.
- 1.2. The Council has a website, Facebook page and uses email to communicate, and will try to use the most effective channels of communication. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses, as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

2. Aim

- 2.1. The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance collectively to both councillors and employees of the Council, when using electronic communications.
- 2.2. The definition of electronic communications continues to evolve as platforms and technologies develop. Overall, it refers to any web-based practices which can be used to share content.
- 2.3. The 'Latest News' page on the Council's website and Facebook page intends to share information and updates relating to the Council's work, activities, opportunities within the parish and to promote and connect with the community it serves positively.

3. Training

- 3.1. All councillors and employees are expected to carry out any relevant training provided by Dorset Association of Local Parish & Town Councils (DAPTC) and/or National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in order to meet their obligation of this policy.

4. Standards for Conduct

- 4.1. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.
- 4.2. All councillors and employees should not:
 - present personal opinions as that of the Council
 - post any information the Council may deem to be confidential
 - present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council or bring the Council into disrepute
 - undermine the Council's democratic processes and/or finances
 - post politically controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
 - post any information that may be deemed libellous or constitutes bullying or harassment
 - post offensive language relating to any protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, including race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
 - conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or constitutes a criminal offence
- 4.3. Misuse of content contrary to this and other policies could result in disciplinary action being taken using the Council's prescribed policies.
- 4.4. Councillors and employees are reminded that anything posted online will more than likely be visible forever and generally should not post any comment or opinion online, that they would not say to someone face-to-face.
- 4.5. Councillors may publicly post from a personal account in their full name or an individual 'councillor page'. This policy applies to any post/comment made publicly where recognisable

as a Town Councillor.

4.6. Individual councillors are reminded that their Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way as it does to other written or verbal communications.

4.7. When using electronic communications, councillors and employees should be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and/or Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

4.8. Consideration should be given to the privacy settings on a personal account of both councillors and employees.

4.9. The Council is non-political, therefore, personal political views or those of any political party should not be shared on an individual councillor page or email.

4.10. Whilst the personal accounts of councillors and employees are their own business, it is still possible for the content posted on them to affect their professional standing and/or that of the Council. To mitigate this risk, councillors and employees should not include any reference to, or post comments about, the council, their roles, colleagues, or partner organisations of the Council. If however, references to employment or connection with the Council are made on a personal profile, please ensure you:

- declare on your page or biography that the views expressed are personal and not that of the Council
- do not bring the Council into disrepute
- do not reveal any potentially confidential or sensitive information about the Council that you may have come across in your work or role for the Council
- do not use any Council-owned images or logos
- do not include contact details or photographs of service users or employees

4.11. do not make unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments about the Council, its councillors or employees, or members of the public as disciplinary action may be taken using the Council's prescribed policies.

4.12. Communications from the Council will:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Council does not own the copyright
- not contain any personal information
- will not be used for the dissemination of any political views or advertising

4.13. To ensure all discussions with the Council are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the Council asks you to:

- be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated
- differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including councillors and employees, will not be permitted
- share freely official Council business, but be aware of copyright laws

- be accurate and give credit where credit is due
- stay on topic

4.14. Should members of the public wish to raise any questions or queries to the Council, they are encouraged to use the 'Contact Us' page on its website as the official way to contact the Council.

4.15. Should councillors receive communications from members of the public direct to their councillor email accounts relating to Council services and amenities, emails should be forwarded to the clerk to respond on behalf of the Council.

4.16. Any contact made with the Council should not contain:

- obscene or racist content
- personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- potentially libellous statements
- plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- commercial promotions or spam

4.17. The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of the policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the contact received.

5. Council Website

5.1. Where necessary, those contacting the Council may be directed to content on its website to view the required information, or your question may be forwarded to the clerk or a councillor for consideration and response. Any questions or queries will be dealt with in a timely manner where possible.

5.2. The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all local group's information from the website if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's expectations for its website.

6. Council Email

6.1. The Council has its own email address - office@corfemullen-tc.gov.uk, which is monitored during office hours. We aim to reply to all emails sent as soon as possible. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

6.2. The Administration Assistant monitors the email address and is responsible for passing on any relevant emails to councillors, employees or external agencies for information and/or action.

6.3. Individual councillors communicating directly with members of the public should use their Council email address only. Any emails sent will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act and GDPR. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all communications are kept.

6.4. Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses and email addresses.

7. Council Facebook Page

7.1. Facebook is a key communications tool for the Council and highlights a commitment to openness and transparency.

7.2. The clerk with appropriate support is designated as the administrator of the Council's Facebook

page and is responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with this policy.

7.3. The Facebook page intends to act a community notice board to share information and updates relating to the Council's work, activities, opportunities within the parish and to promote and connect with the community it serves positively.

7.4. The administrator will have authority to turn off commenting on all posts. Should members of the public wish to raise any questions or queries to the Council relating to any posts, they should use the 'Contact Us' page on its website as the official way to contact the Council.

7.5. As a general rule any posts on the Facebook page should reflect information or content available on the website and/or would be acceptable to publish to the public by other Council communication channels.

8. SMS and Messaging Apps

8.1. Councillors and employees may use SMS (texting) and messaging apps using the internet to send messages, images, audio or video as a convenient way to communicate at times. This policy also applies to such messages on Council or personal devices.

9. Video Conferencing

9.1. If this method is used to communicate e.g., Zoom/MS Teams, this policy also applies.

10. Internal communication and access to information within the Council

10.1. The Council continually looks at ways to improve its working and the use of electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.

11. Councillors are expected to abide by their Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council

11.1. As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors and employees are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures.

11.2. Councillors and employees should be careful when copying in recipients to an email using the cc. option and only include essential recipients on emails i.e., avoid use of the 'Reply All' option, where possible and only copy in those who need to know and ensure email trails have been removed, when appropriate.

12. Review

12.1. This Electronic Communications Policy was presented to the Full Council, for approval and adoption on 26 March 2024, minute no. TC 23/276.

12.2. Future reviews will be carried out bi-annually or when any changes are made to related legislation, whichever is sooner.

13. References

13.1. Council's Data Protection Policy, Data Protection Act 2018 –
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents/enacted/data.htm>

- 13.2. UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) -
<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>
- 13.3. Employee Handbook inc the Council's Disciplinary Procedure
- 13.4. Councillors Code of Conduct
- 13.5. Council's Equality & Diversity Policy
- 13.6. Council's Civility & Respect Pledge
- 13.7. National Association of Local Councils (NALC)