



## **COMMUNICATION POLICY**

### **Introduction**

Each Town Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community.

They will always try and do their best and are available to help residents with regard to matters relating to Charlbury.

Town Councillors may be contacted via the Clerk or using their Town Council email addresses.

If it is felt by the resident that the matter is important, then a letter or email to the Town Clerk will ensure that it is dealt with in a timely and professional manner (also see the Correspondence section below). It is the Town Council's intention to meet the timescales detailed below but there could be occasions when this is not possible. When this happens the Town Council will review their procedures and where necessary make changes to the policy or procedures.

The Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions. Accordingly, great care needs to be taken when addressing communications within the Town Council and with outside bodies.

### **1. Aims of this Policy**

1.1 To establish clear, easy to use channels of communication between the Town Council and residents.

1.2 To ensure a consistent approach is adopted and maintained on behalf of Charlbury Town Council

1.3 That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social and online media.

1.4 That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.

1.5 That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.

### **2. Scope**

2.1 This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Council, including all elected and co-opted councillors, the Clerk to the Council and all volunteers. For ease, the word 'personnel' may be used as a collective term in this document.

2.2 This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council such as the Privacy Policy, Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Code of Conduct, Complaints Procedure, Information and Data Protection Policy, Retention and Disposal of Documents Policy, Freedom of Information Publication Scheme and Social Media Policy



2.3 The policy covers all of the Council's online media channels, which are currently:

- [www.charlbury-tc.gov.uk](http://www.charlbury-tc.gov.uk) – website.
- E-mail addresses linked to the charlbury-tc.gov.uk domain name.
- Facebook - @charlburytowncouncil
- Instagram - @charlburytowncouncil
- Twitter - @charlburytc
- Instagram – @charlburymarket

2.4 Over time the Town 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 may be updated to reflect the new arrangements that it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit Charlbury. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.

2.5 The use of new media channels will not replace existing forms of communication. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication.

### **3. Town Council Meetings**

3.1 The Town Council usually meets on the fourth Wednesday of every month. The Town Council will normally meet in the War Memorial Hall, Browns Lane, Charlbury, OX7 3PN from 7.30pm. Public participation will be held from 7.30pm, for ten minutes, to enable discussion on agenda items.

3.2 Members of the public wishing to address the Council during the formal meeting or wishing to record the meeting are asked to make the Chair or the Clerk aware of their intention before the meeting starts.

3.3 Planning applications are discussed at a separate planning committee meeting, usually held on the fourth Monday of the month.

### **4. Notice Boards**

The following items will be displayed on the Town Council noticeboards on Market Street, Sturt Road and Enstone Road:

- Town Council meeting agenda - which will be posted at least 3 working days in advance of each meeting
- Town Council meeting minutes – which will be posted in draft form as soon as is practicable after the meeting.
- Statutory requirements, for example Notice of Election
- Notice of current surveys and consultations

The information displayed on the notice boards will be kept up to date.

### **5. Correspondence**

5.1 All correspondence relating to the town should be addressed to the Town Clerk in the first instance either via email at [clerk@charlbury-tc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@charlbury-tc.gov.uk) or via post (c/o the Corner House, Market St, Charlbury). This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the relevant person or organisation as soon as practically possible.



5.2 All Town Councillors have their own Council email addresses which have the format [firstname.lastname@charlbury-tc.gov.uk](mailto:firstname.lastname@charlbury-tc.gov.uk). Access to e-mail accounts will be removed as soon as a relationship with the Council ceases.

5.3 Individuals are responsible for what they post or send. Personnel are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via e-mail addresses linked to the domain name charlbury-tc.gov.uk.

5.4 Personnel are restricted to ensuring use of these accounts is for the proper performance of their Council related duties only. These accounts should be the only ones used by personnel in relation to their Council related duties.

5.5 The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on anything relevant to Councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. All new email requiring data to be passed on may be followed up with a data consent request before action is taken with that correspondence.

5.6 Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with residents in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, with a copy to the Clerk.

5.7 It is important to note that any emails sent to Town Council email addresses will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act requirements. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

5.8 It is imperative that all correspondents never forward personal information on to other people or groups outside the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

5.9 All correspondence to the Town Clerk will be acknowledged within one week of receipt if at all possible. If email is used then an acknowledgment will be sent via email.

5.10 Councillors will be notified of correspondence, but the addressee will not be named on minutes of meetings unless requested. Anonymous correspondence in any form will be recorded as received but not responded to.

5.11 Email should be thought of in the same way as a letter. A subject line, the sender's name and the content should be in the main body of the email, not as an attachment. Attachments will not be opened unless the Clerk has prior knowledge of the subject. The Council regrets that, for reasons of computer security and virus protection, anonymous emails and those with no subject in the title will not be opened or actioned.

5.12 A parishioner may raise any issue directly with the Town Clerk or any Councillor. If a satisfactory answer cannot be given immediately, the issue may be placed on the agenda for the attention of the full Council. This may result in a delay in response.

5.13 The Clerk will acknowledge all Freedom of Information requests within seven working days and will reply fully within 20 working days of receipt of the request. If this is not possible, a further holding letter/email will be sent with an expected completion date.

5.14 Email to multiple addresses outside Charlbury Town Council should be sent as blind copy, (bcc). Messages sent to groups of people must be relevant to all concerned.



5.15 Junk mail is a hazard of internet life and efforts should be made to isolate it at source, if not it should be deleted immediately, and no attachments should be opened. It is important to keep virus protection up to date.

5.16 In order to protect from viruses, email attachments which might contain macros (word processor and spreadsheet files) or applications, should not be opened if they are from a sender whom you do not recognise, simply delete.

5.17 Be aware that agreements made by email have the same status as letters or formal contracts. The Clerk has the sole authority to purchase or acquire goods or services on behalf of the Council via email.

5.18 It is recommended that e-mails are retained for no more than twenty-four months before they are deleted. Those containing important material should be saved to a separate folder.

## **6. Website**

6.1 The Town Clerk will arrange for the agenda and associated papers to be posted on the Charlbury Town Council Website ([www.charlbury-tc.gov.uk](http://www.charlbury-tc.gov.uk)) at least three clear days before the meeting and for the draft minutes to be posted as soon as possible after the meeting. The final minutes will be published once approved.

6.2 Meeting dates and contact details for the Town Clerk are available on the website.

6.3 Whilst the Town Council income is above the £25,000 threshold, the Council still tries to comply with the DCLG's Transparency Code for Smaller Councils and will publish the following information after 31 March and no later than 1 July each year:

- a. all items of expenditure above £100
- b. end of year accounts
- c. annual governance statement
- d. internal audit report
- e. list of councillor or member responsibilities
- f. Minutes, agendas and meeting papers of formal meetings.

6.4 The Town Clerk is the web administrator for the Town Council website. The Town Clerk will ensure that the Town Council email address is publicised.

## **7. Social Media**

7.1 The Town Clerk is the designated 'Council' owner of social media channels agreed by the Council and will be an administrator / moderator on all accounts.

7.2 Other personnel officially appointed by the Council may assist the Town Clerk to disseminate information. However, all must ensure they follow this policy.

7.3 No account details may be changed without first informing the Town Clerk.

7.4 Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own social media accounts but they should ensure they comply with this policy and ensure that a 'personal view' disclaimer is used.

7.5 All social media sites used should be checked and updated on a regular basis to ensure that



the security settings are in place.

7.6 The nominated moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook / Twitter).

## **8. Annual Parish Meeting**

8.1 The Annual Parish Meeting is convened by the Chair of the Town Council and is held between March and May each year to provide parishioners with a summary of the activities of the Town Council over the previous year and the opportunity to debate local issues and celebrate local events and activities.

## **9. Guidance**

9.1 As a local council, Charlbury Town Council has a professional image to uphold and how personnel conduct themselves publicly and online impacts this image.

9.2 Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.

9.3 Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Town Council. Never make false or misleading statements.

9.4 You should not present yourself in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council.

9.5 Be mindful of the information you post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council, bring the Council into disrepute or are contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct and other Policies.

9.6 Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasis points.

9.7 Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.

9.8 Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents. Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Council policies or personnel.

This policy was adopted at a meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024

and will be reviewed in two years or sooner, should legislation dictate.