

HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL **COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL**

A. Correspondence

- a. The point of contact for the Town Council is the Clerk and all correspondence for the Council should be addressed to the Clerk.
- b. The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- c. No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Council, a Committee, Sub-Committee or Working Group. In particular, Councillors do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- d. All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper or email using Council email format.
- e. 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).

B. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups

- a. Agendas should be clear and concise and 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 may be taken at the meeting.
- b. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on any agenda.
- c. Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information is to be circulated via the Clerk.

C. Communications with the Press and Public

- a. The Clerk will clear all press reports or comments to the media, with the Chairman of the Council.
- b. Press reports from the Council, its Committees or Working Groups, should be from the Clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- c. 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 must be clearly reported as their personal view.
- d. Unless a Councillor is certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
- e. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted Complaints Procedure.

D. Councillor Correspondence to External Parties

- a. As the Clerk should be sending most of the Council's correspondence, any correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies needs to make clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Council.
- b. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it should be sent to the Clerk, and be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

E. Communications with Town Council Employees

- a. Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (i.e. for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a committee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council).
- b. No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Council, the Chairman of a Committee or are styled "Leader" of the Council, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee that are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- c. E-mails:
 - i. Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk and any reasons for urgency should be stated;
 - ii. Information to other Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;
 - iii. E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk;
 - iv. Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
- d. Meetings with the Clerk or other staff:
 - i. Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
 - ii. Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;
 - iii. Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate Council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.