



Communications Policy

This document sets out Keswick Town Council’s protocol for communicating with its Councillors, staff and external parties such as the media.

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Town Clerk

Version control	
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Communications Protocol

Introduction

Keswick Town Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions.

Keswick Town Council may communicate with those whose work involves gathering material for editorial publication in print, broadcast and electric form.

The Council shall endeavour to assist the press and media with enquiries about the Council's functions, decisions and actions.

The purpose of this policy is:

- To establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media
- To ensure that the views and policies of the Council are presented accurately
- To clarify who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council
- To provide guidance for Councillors and Staff on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the press and media
- To ensure consistency in the Council's dealings with the press and media
- To ensure that all elements of the press and media will be treated equally

Legal Framework

This policy is subject to the Council's statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council's Standing Orders.

Media attendance at Meetings

Meetings of the Council, its committees and sub-committees are open to the public and press unless the Council resolves that their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons.

In accordance with Standing Orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting. Where meetings include time for public participation and subject to the Council's standing orders, media representatives may speak and ask questions.

Agenda items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups

Agenda items should be clear and concise. They 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.

Items for information should be kept to a minimum on the agenda.

Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for 'information only', this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

Town Council Correspondence

The point of contact for the Town Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Town Council should be addressed.

The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

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'.

Most official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper. For correspondence not sent by the Clerk, they must be provided with a copy.

Communications with the Press and Public

Unless a Councillor is reporting the view of the Council following discussion and a resolution, they must make it clear to members of the press and public that they are expressing a personal view.

Councillors should be aware that according to case law the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. Whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that they voted against a policy if this took place in open session, Councillors should not seek to undermine a decision through the use of the Press and media.

The Clerk will clear all official press reports, or official comments to the media, with the Mayor or the Chairman of the relevant Committee. Press releases may be released proactively to alert the media to a potential story, provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue.

Press releases made on behalf of the Council will normally be prepared by the Clerk following any meetings of the Council. If press releases are drafted by any other officer or Councillor, they must be issued by the Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman.

Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should originate from the Clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

Reporters should be directed to contact the Clerk if they want to carry out an interview or obtain a statement about the Council's businesses and actions. Except in the most straightforward cases, the caller should be informed that a statement will be made within 48 hours and they should be asked to set out clearly what they want to know. This will allow time for the Clerk to consult with the Chairman in producing a carefully worded response within a reasonable time.

If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure.

Councillor Correspondence to External Parties

As the Clerk should be sending most of the Council's correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies, it needs to be made clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Town Council.

A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it (except for constituency business) should be sent to the Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, for example "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

Communications with the Town Council Staff

Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised do to so (for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council).

No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Mayor, Chairman of a Committee or any other meeting, may give instruction to the Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.

Social Media

In their use of social media (Facebook, X, email etc) Councillors and Staff must at all times observe the principles stated in this policy.

Emails

- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; any reasons for urgency should be stated.
- Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk.
- Emails from Councillors to external parties (except for constituency business) should be copied to the Clerk.
- Councillors should acknowledge their emails when requested to do so.

Meetings with the Clerk or other officers

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

General principles for information for both Councillors and the Clerk

- Be calm when you are dealing with any communication
- Be informed and certain of your facts
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Council that you are aware of what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy

- Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor scandalous.
- Any publicity should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.
- Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views of policies of the Council should be handled with particular care.
- Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although facts, issues or arguments should not be oversimplified.
- Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.
- Public funds must not be used to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy
- Council resources must not be used on publicity that is, or could be misinterpreted as being, party political or on publicity which could be seen as promoting an individual member, particularly at election times.
- The Council, its Councillors and its staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law.
- A Councillor or Officer must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the Press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committee's agenda or at any other private briefing.
- Councillors must act with integrity and observe the Code of Conduct at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.
- Councillors and staff must not communicate their personal views about the Council's business, decisions and actions.
- Councillors and staff are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council or damage the reputation of others in the Council, or the Council itself.
- A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer at meetings held in public or before the Press.