



Frodsham
TOWN COUNCIL

Communication & Community Engagement Policy

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Introduction

- 1.1 The council believes that involving citizens in decisions which affect their lives is a means to develop an empowered and strong community and recognises that effective communication is a key component in creating an engaged community.
- 1.2 Whilst the council cannot force anyone to engage with it or the wider community, it will make it easier and more attractive for them to do so.
- 1.3 The council is always open to receiving both positive and negative feedback and is committed to encouraging the community to engage with it.
- 1.4 The council considers that the Frodsham community comprises all residents of the town, all users of town council services, all those who work or own businesses within Frodsham, all young people who go to school in Knutsford and all voluntary organisations, clubs and societies operating within the town.
- 1.5 This policy sets out the council's approach to communications and engagement and provides guidance to councillors on member press engagement.
- 1.6 During election periods the council is required to ensure it does not do anything which could influence the outcome of the election. This is known as the purdah period. The council will follow the guidance issued by the Government, the National Association of Local Councils, the Society of Local Council Clerks and the Local Government Association and vary its communications accordingly during these periods.
- 1.7 All communications will avoid gobbledegook, jargon and misleading public information.

Communication

- 2.1 The council recognises that it has a role to play in facilitating communication across the community and where possible will support external organisations in disseminating information to the community.
- 2.2 The council's website is its primary source of council information for the community and it shall be kept up to date.
- 2.3 The council will:
 - a. utilise all noticeboards
 - b. develop the Annual Town Meeting as a forum for community discussion
 - c. publish its agendas, minutes and reports on the council website
 - d. publish an annual report of its activity

- 2.4 The council shall continue to set aside time at every Council and Committee meeting (excluding Staffing sub-Committee) for members of the public to address the Council.
- 2.5 The council recognises that communication is a two-way process and it will always strive to promptly answer questions from and listen to suggestions put forward by members of the community.

Social Media

- 2.6 The council recognises that social media is an effective means of communication and will operate social media channels as part of its communications.
- 2.7 Social media messages will be non-political, uncontroversial and used to promote and highlight the Town.
- 2.8 The council aims to use social media to support two-way communication with the community but recognises that it is not always appropriate to respond to every message/comment, publicly or otherwise. For complex issues users should be referred to traditional forms of communication e.g. email or telephone.

Consultations

- 3.1 When seeking the views on a specific project or idea, the council will consult with the community. The majority of consultations will be open to the whole community but on occasion consultations may be with specific stakeholders only.
- 3.2 In preparation for a consultation the council will:
 - a. Identify the stakeholders for the consultation
 - b. Determine the appropriate communications to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the consultation
 - c. Determine the appropriate form of consultation
 - d. Set a defined end date for submissions
- 3.3 Open consultations shall run for a minimum of six weeks. More focused consultations may run for a minimum of three weeks.
- 3.4 The council shall avoid running consultations over holiday periods e.g. school summer holidays, Easter and Christmas.
- 3.5 Consultations will use specific, non-leading questions. The council may ask open questions (e.g. where do you think swings should be sited?), but not open-ended questions (e.g. what do you think should be one?)

Press Releases and Official Statements

- 4.1 Press releases promoting council activity will be routinely issued under the direction of the Town Clerk. Press releases shall focus on promoting the council as a body and not promote the views of specific members/groups, publicise individual members or encourage the public to hold a particular view.
- 4.2 As a minimum, press releases will be published on the council website. Press releases may be disseminated further depending on the subject matter.
- 4.3 When a press release is prepared on an issue that the Town Clerk considers is contentious, it shall be prepared with relevant members e.g. the chairman of a committee and the Chair and Vice Chair.
- 4.4 All requests received by officers for statements on behalf of the council shall be referred to the Town Clerk who will provide a statement where there is a clear policy position/direction. All statements shall be matters of fact and demonstrate that the council is:
 - a. open and accountable
 - b. professional
 - c. willing to listen and engage on issues in the community

Member Press Engagement

- 5.1 It is to be expected that members will be approached by the media for comment and may wish to respond to local issues. In all engagement members must not purport to speak on behalf of the council unless expressly authorised to do so by resolution at a council/committee meeting.
- 5.2 Members speaking in their capacity as a councillor must uphold the council's Code of Conduct and are expected to follow relevant council policies.
- 5.3 Members must be aware of what constitutes pre-determination and should not present themselves as having made their mind up on an issue before voting at a meeting.
- 5.4 Members should avoid being seen to anticipate decisions of the council and must not criticise any council employees.
- 5.5 Members should be careful not to disclose any confidential information such as include information given in confidence or discussions following a resolution to exclude the public and press at a meeting. Members must not share the detail of any legal advice received by the council.

Statements to the Media

- 5.6 Members are entitled to make statements to the media on issues in the community but must ensure that they communicate the capacity in which they speak e.g. individually, on behalf of a group, as a committee chairman etc.
- 5.7 If a member is unsure about the facts of an issue, they may contact the Town Clerk for guidance or refer the media representative to contact the Town Clerk or another member to respond to the request.

Using the 'councillor' title

- 5.13 When a member is speaking in their capacity as a councillor, they may sign off as Councillor.
- 5.14 The title should not be used when the issue is not of relevance to the member's role as a councillor or when a member is not speaking as a councillor.

Approval/review

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