

# **Olney Town Council**

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## **Communications Policy**

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## 1. Why have a Communications Policy?

- 1.1. Communication plays an important role in everything we do at Olney Town Council. This includes both internal and external communications. Our commitment is to use a multi-channel approach to communications including public announcements, email alerts, our website, printed material and social media.
- 1.2. Communications should be two-way and is essential in giving information, engaging, consulting, gaining feedback, developing insight, etc. from people (residents, employees and visitors), businesses and other stakeholders. A good standard of communications is the responsibility of everyone involved in the Council's work including councillors and staff. This Policy sets a framework for our communications..

## 2. Our Aims

- 2.1. This Council has adopted Five Principles which follow the requirements of the [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) and guide the Council in its communications. Our communications should deliver the aims of the Council and ensure residents and businesses are aware of services the Council offers.

- **Clear & Concise** - The Council's communications should be **clear**, **concise** and **trustworthy**. They should therefore be written in plain English and jargon-free.
- **Consistent** - We communicate through various channels to a wide range of people, including residents, businesses, visitors, our own employees and Councillors. It is therefore essential that communications are co-ordinated and give **consistent messages** which are promoted through the most cost-effective formats available to the Council.
- **Accessible** - A range of media will be used to communicate to ensure the messages are **accessible to everyone**.
- **Relevant and timely** - The messages should help **everyone to get the best** out of the services provided by the Council. This includes encouraging **dialogue** with the public as to how we can further improve services and **clarifying information** where necessary. We should ensure information is up-to-date and communicated regularly, including feedback of any changes made following consultation/dialogue with customers. Where specific enquiries are made to the council, a response will be given within 10 working days.
- **Accountable** – Our communications should be clear so that staff, councillors and public understand what we do. This will ensure that the Council is **accountable** to its customers and the wider community. All communications will remain compliant with **General Data Protection**

## **Regulation (GDPR)**

**2.2.** The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity requires that our publicity (communications) should be:

- lawful;
- cost-effective;
- objective;
- even-handed;
- appropriate;
- issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity; and
- have regard to equality and diversity

## **3. Vision**

**3.1.** The ultimate aim of our communications is that everyone who deals with the Council will have a clear understanding and a positive perception of our aims, as outlined on our website, our services and achievements, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and engagement.

**3.2.** Olney Town Council recognises that the maintenance of workplace wellbeing is key to ensuring high rates of productivity and engagement. Also, in nurturing a compassionate workplace environment, the council recognises that it can enjoy a lesser risk of human error. As such, our vision is to communicate to the public and each other in ways which nurture compassionate workplace cultures. In doing this, we will treat both our colleagues, staff and the public with equal respect, value and trust.

## **4. Delivering our Five Principles**

**4.1.** Where possible, we will use insights from the behavioural sciences to ensure that any communication is as successful as possible, and adopt the elements outlined in the mnemonic EAST (Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely) to guide this endeavour.

**4.2.** The range of print, social and electronic media used by the Council will vary depending upon the target audience to whom the communication applies and will be those which best reach them.

**4.3.** Any public communication from staff (in their official capacity) should reflect current council policy and not be a personal view.

## **5. Website**

**5.1.** A clearly-branded, up-to-date, simply organised website provides the most reliable way to ensure all the Council's messages, policies and information are held centrally and freely available to all.

## **6. Social Media**

- 6.1.** The Council will use social media (Facebook, and possibly other forms) in line with its current Social Media Protocol.

## **7. Supporting Members**

- 7.1.** The Clerks will support Members with communications in their role in the community. S/he will provide assistance and encourage the use of social media and other channels to listen and respond to the concerns of residents and help them explain the Council's policies and aims. Training for this will be made available where appropriate.

## **8. Supporting Staff**

- 8.1.** All employees of Olney Town Council are its ambassadors. The Council will seek to keep them informed about Council initiatives in line with five principles, and review these from time-to-time to ensure they remain effective.

## **9. Reputation**

- 9.1.** Criticism of the Council can adversely affect the Council's reputation. We will monitor the growing range of media channels so we can be alert to cases as they arise and act promptly to clarify and explain our position.

## **10. Face-to-Face**

- 10.1.** The principles outlined in this Strategy are relevant to all forms of communication carried out by this Council including face-to-face, email and telephone. These principles are what we would consider to be the behaviour expected of councillors and staff, and consider that non-compliance should be considered to be "bringing the council into disrepute" under the Council's Code of Conduct.

- 10.2.** In face-to-face communication, there is an additional need to remain aware of any negative body languages which may be viewed as undermining our compassionate workplace cultures. Such behaviours may include, but are not limited to;

- Eye rolling
- Tutting
- Sighing
- Glaring
- Finger tapping
- Finger pointing
- Aggressive gesturing
- Excessive sarcasm

**10.3.** It will also be important for both councillors and staff to remain aware of their tone of voice. Whilst it is difficult to describe how one's tone of voice may cause animosity, frustration or hostility, it is clear that every situation must be approached from the stance of compassion without a 'raised' or 'aggressive' tone of voice.

**10.4.** Where a member of staff or the council feels it is appropriate, records of face-to-face communications will be kept as best practice. Such records will include a summary of the communication along with any associated dates, times and actions taken.

## **11. Email**

**11.1.** Whilst email is a useful and convenient tool with which to communicate, there are some ways in which emails can be misinterpreted or cause frustration and/or animosity. Such instances threaten our vision for maintaining a compassionate workplace. As such, those staff and councillors engaging in emails must remain aware of actions to avoid. Such actions may include, but are not limited to;

- The use of capital letters, which may depict anger and/or inflame situations.
- 'Replying to all' when only targeting one person. Such actions may cause frustration and confusion.
- Using email strings to introduce new subjects, which may cause confusion. Instead, begin each new subject with a new string of emails with a new subject heading.
- Changing a heading of an unrelated email to start a new 'thread'.
- Sending superfluous emails (e.g. one word of thanks). Such emails can cause frustration for some.
- Avoid 'copying in' other councillors mid conversation without giving context. This may cause confusion and/or stimulate frustration and animosity in some cases.

## **12. Telephone**

**12.1.** The principles set out in relation to face-to-face and email communications will also be relevant in communications via telephone. Additionally, in cases of telephone communication, records will be kept as best practice. Such records will include a summary of each communication along with any associated dates, times and actions taken.

### **13. Accessibility**

**13.1.** We take our responsibilities towards equality and diversity seriously and will endeavour ensure information about our services is available to residents in a language and format they can understand and access. We recognise the need to provide both printed and digital material in order to remain accessible to all.

### **14. Final points**

**14.1.** In the interest of maintaining a workplace culture of compassion, both councillors and staff are advised to respectfully 'call out' communicative behaviours which they believe might put our compassionate workplace cultures at risk.

**14.2.** Olney Town Council and its staff are considered to be one 'team', essentially working towards the same shared and collective goals. As such, constructive criticism is welcome when it is delivered in a respectful manner embodying our shared vision of maintaining our compassionate workplace cultures.

**14.3.** Both councillors and staff are encouraged to role model communicative behaviours which strengthen our compassionate workplace environments in their everyday tasks and activities. Such behaviours should emulate those expected in return.

See also

Social Media Policy