

**Swaffham Town Council**

**COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

**1 Introduction**

1.1 Swaffham Town Council is committed to active engagement with the community through a wide range of channels, including online and social media.

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

1.3 The aim of this Communications Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to both staff and Councillors about the use of media such as Emails, video conferencing, podcasts, blogs, messages boards or comments on web articles and social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn.

**2 Aim**

2.1 The aim of this Policy is to ensure:

2.2 Engagement with individuals and communities and the successful promotion of Town Council based services by all media and communication channels, has a consistent approach.

2.3 That Town Council information remains secure and is not compromised by using social and online media. That the Town Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.

2.4 That users operate within existing policies and relevant legislation:

- Data Protection GDPR Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Code of Conduct Policy
- Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures
- Computer Misuse Act 1990
- Member and Employee Protocol

**3 Scope**

3.1 This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Town Council, including all elected councillors, the Clerk to the Council and all other employees and volunteers.

3.2 It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Town Council.

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

- [www.swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk)

- Twitter @SwaffhamClerk
- Twitter@SwaffhamMarket
- Twitter@SwaffhamCouncil
- Twitter@SwaffhamEvents
- Twitter@Superint1
- Twitter@Swaffham NPlan
- Facebook – Whats Going On In Swaffham (page and account)
- Facebook – Swaffham Town Council (page and account)
- Facebook – Swaffham Market (page)
- Facebook – Neighbourhood Plan (page)
- Instagram – What’s Going On In Swaffham
- Instagram – Swaffham Town Council (to be added)

3.4 Swaffham Town Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications and may over time, add to the channels of communication that it uses. When these changes occur, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements and as part of the Town Council’s Community Engagement Strategy, all sections of the community and its partners will be notified.

#### **4 Data Protection**

4.1 Swaffham Town Council is the Data Controller as defined by GDPR of personal data processed by the Town Council and Councillors, the Data Protection process is managed by the Town Clerk on behalf of the Council.

4.2 Personnel must not send, receive, or disseminate proprietary data or any confidential information belonging to Swaffham Town Council to or from a third party unless authorised.

4.3 Permission to publish videos or photographs on Social Media, should be sought from the person/s, parent/carer, or organisations in the material to be published, prior to uploading. A Photo and Video Release form is required for permission that Swaffham Town Council can use photographs, videos and names in print publications, Town Council website, Social Media and presentations.

*See Appendix 1 for Release Form*

#### **5 Emails**

5.1 Town Council staff will be provided with an email address linked to the swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk domain name upon their appointment to a position within the council. Access to this email account will be removed upon ceasing to be employed by Town Council.

5.2 Staff are restricted to ensuring use of these accounts is for the proper performance of Town Council related duties only.

5.2 Town Councillors when elected, will be provided with an email address linked to the swaffhamtc@gmail.com domain name. Access to this email account will be removed upon ceasing to be a town councillor.

5.3 No email account details may be changed without first informing the Town Clerk

5.4 All staff and town councillors are responsible for what they send by email, including any online activity conducted via email addresses linked to the swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk domain name.

5.5 The use of emails requires the same professional standards as any other form of communication.

5.6 Emails sent to external addresses should include the Town Council's standard disclaimer and signature format.

5.7 Efforts should be made to isolate Junk mail at its source, if not it should be deleted immediately and no attachments opened.

5.8 To protect from viruses, emails from a sender that is not recognised should not be opened.

5.9 During holiday periods, absence or sickness, staff email inboxes should be checked by appropriate line manager or nominated member of staff.

5.10 Agreements made by email have the same status as letters or formal contracts. Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk has the authority to purchase or acquire goods or services on behalf of the Town Council.

5.11 It is recommended that emails are retained for 24 months before they are deleted.

5.12 Councillors and staff are not permitted to debate matters of council businesses by email, but to follow Standing Orders for debate to take place in a legally constituted public or virtual meeting.

## **6 Social Media**

6.1 **Twitter.** Swaffham Town Council currently has 6 twitter accounts, which are operated by the Town Clerk and other members of staff as delegated:

- @swaffhamclerk
- @SwaffhamCouncil
- @SwaffhamNPlan
- @SwaffhamMarket operated by the Deputy Town Clerk
- @swaffhamevents operated by the Project Support Officer
- @marketsuperint1 operated by the Market Superintendent

6.2 **Facebook.** Swaffham Town Council currently has three Facebook accounts, which are operated by the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and Project Support Officer, with resulting pages as follows:

- Swaffham Council
- Swaffham Market
- Swaffham Neighbourhood Plan Deputy
- What's Going On in Swaffham - managed by the Project Support Officer.

6.3 The Town Clerk also has delegated authority to authorise and withdraw administrative rights to Councillors, Volunteers, Allotment holders or Market Traders on Twitter & Facebook to maximise the Swaffham social media experience.

6.4 The Town Clerk is authorised to conduct in-house (or professionally supported) Social Media training for delegated users; for Town Council Committees and Community Groups or to support the work of the Town Council for the wider benefit of the Town.

6.5 The authorised Swaffham Town Council Twitter and Facebook accounts will be used to help keep residents, businesses, interested parties and visitors to Swaffham, informed of important Town Council related news, events and updates. A new Twitter or Facebook account may be used to support or promote any aspect of the Council's administration, a new initiative or special event.

6.6 Followers can expect Tweets or Posts covering some or all of the following:

- Alerts about new content on other digital networks, such as news, publications, events, photographs, links, publicity campaigns and Council/Committee meetings.
- Invitations to provide feedback on specific issues on which Swaffham Town Council are consulting
- Information from Committees, the Mayor or Deputy Mayor, Lead Members or Chairs of Committees and Councillors about what they are doing.
- Occasional live coverage of events
- Live coverage of Town Council meetings, including Virtual meetings
- Conversation on a wide range of topics, including methodology or ice breakers used to build relationships with key players or new contacts
- Retweets, favourites, likes, or shares on a variety of subjects at the discretion of the account operator, providing information of interest to followers

N.B. Use of 'retweet', 'like', 'share' or 'favourite' buttons should not be seen as an endorsement, these are to share or store information.

6.7 Confidential business will not be disclosed via any Twitter or Facebook account.

6.8 Social media will not be used for personal gain.

6.9 The Town Council will not automatically follow back any followers, or use the like button on Facebook, this decision is at the discretion of the account operator. Being followed or liked does not imply any endorsement of any kind.

6.10 The Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Councillors and Council staff many have Twitter or Facebook accounts that they operate personally, they are duty bound to not disclose confidential business or to bring the Council into disrepute.

6.11 **Instagram and LinkedIn** accounts are to be added during 2020/21. The first Instagram account to be created was What's going On in Swaffham, Swaffham Town Council is to follow.

## **7. Press & Media**

Standing Order 21. Relations with the press/media

7.1 Requests from the press or other media for an oral or written comment or statement from the Council, its councillors or staff shall be handled in accordance with the Council's policy in respect of dealing with the press and/or other media (as detailed within the Officer & Member Protocol No.10).

7.2 The Town Mayor and Town Clerk (or their respective Deputies in their absence) shall be permitted to give press reports or comments on Council Policy, ongoing Council business, forthcoming agenda items and related business of local interest. Individual comments by others must not relate to or be attributed to their position as a Town Councillor or Employee of the Council unless they have the delegated authority to comment on behalf of the Town Council. (N.B. this does not prevent other individual councillors or employees from talking to or being quoted by the press, but they should not claim to represent the Council as a whole or bring the Council into disrepute.)

7.3 Members of Swaffham Town Council's staff who are directly approached by the media should not answer questions themselves and should refer the enquirer to the Town Clerk.

7.4 In any response to a media enquiry the words "no comment" should not be used; the Council is open and accountable and should always explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

7.5 The Town Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and councillors.

7.6 Press releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, identify a council member's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.

7.7 Any official Town Council press releases will be placed on the council's website and appropriate social media.

## **8 General guidelines**

8.1 As a local council, Swaffham Town Council has a professional image to uphold and how staff and councillors conduct themselves publicly and online impacts on this image.

8.2 Inappropriate language or anything that might contravene libel, defamation, copyright, or data protection laws will be removed and subject to reporting to the appropriate authority. In extreme cases, persistent offenders may be blocked and/or reported as appropriate.

8.3 The general conduct of Staff and Councillors on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram must not compromise the Council as a whole and/or bring the Council into disrepute or are contrary to the Town Council's Code of Conduct.

8.4 Identity and affiliation to Swaffham Town Council should always be disclosed; false or misleading statements should not be made.

8.5 Tone of comments should be respectful and informative and never condescending. Avoid personal attacks, online arguments, and hostile communications.

8.5 Inappropriate use of Twitter or Facebook as deemed by the Town Council could be subject of disciplinary action against employees and appropriate Action against Councillors.

8.6 The Town Council Twitter and Facebook accounts will be updated regularly and monitored on occasion during working hours, and/or remotely via secure connection on a computer, laptop, iPad or Smart Phone.

8.7 The last three Tweets of @SwaffhamCouncil, shall feature on the home page of the Council's website [www.swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk) and the Town Clerk will try where possible to conclude conversation swiftly & replace with more general tweets.

8.8 Direct Messages on Twitter or via Messenger on Facebook will be monitored and answered where appropriate to do so. Personal criticism of Councillors and Staff will not be tolerated, complaints will be dealt with through the Town Council's complaints procedure or Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures.

8.9 Twitter and/or Facebook may occasionally be unavailable, and the Town Council accepts no responsibility for lack of service.

8.10 Feedback and ideas are welcomed from all sections of the community and the Town Council will endeavour to join the conversation where possible. Emerging themes or relevant suggestions will be passed to the relevant persons or authorities.

8.11 Residents and councillors should note that there will not always be immediate responses to communications, as information may be discussed at meetings, so that a response can be agreed by Swaffham Town Council

8.12 Standing Order 23. Communicating with District and County councillors

An invitation to attend a meeting of the council shall be sent, together with the agenda, to the ward councillor(s) of the District and County Council representing the area of the council. Unless the council determines otherwise, a copy of each letter sent to the District and County Council shall be sent to the ward councillor(s) representing the area of the council.