



Sawbridgeworth Town Council

Document 6.2

Communications Protocol

**(Relating to members of the public, other agencies, the media
councillors, and staff)**

1. Correspondence/Information to the Town Council

- 1.1 The point of contact for the Council is the Town Clerk, and it is to the Town Clerk that all correspondence for the Council should be addressed.
- 1.2 Subject to 4.3. The Town Clerk, other managers or staff should normally deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- 1.3 No individual councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Town Council, its committees, sub-committees or working parties.

2. Agenda Items and Reports for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

- 2.1 Agenda items and reports should be clear and concise. They should contain sufficient information for Councillors to make an informed decision.
- 2.2 Items and reports for information or for noting should be kept to a minimum on all agendas.
- 2.3 Where Councillors wish to circulate fellow Councillors with a matter for “information only” in relation to official council business they should, out of courtesy, provide a copy to the Town Clerk.

3. Communications with the Press and Public

- 3.1 Any requests by the press and media for comments, other than factual information, should be referred to the relevant Committee Chairman, Vice Chairman, or Mayor.
- 3.2 Press and media requests for factual information will be responded to by the Town Clerk.
- 3.3 The Town Clerk and the Mayor will normally be the only spokespersons for the Council in responding to the press and media and making public statements on behalf of the Council. Recognising the need to maintain the dignity of office and strict political impartiality, the Mayor will only comment on Civic matters and items of general interest to the town rather than any formal business of the council.
- 3.4 The Mayor or other Councillor should liaise with the Town Clerk on all forms of contact with the press and media unless it is a personal view.
- 3.5 When a news release is prepared, it should:
 - Always contain an agreed quote from the relevant Councillor or Councillors.
 - Be cleared by the relevant committee Chairman
 - Be issued by the Town Clerk after obtaining agreement from the relevant Chairman about distribution arrangements and the spokesman for responding to follow up enquiries from the press.
- 3.6 Councillors who are asked for an official comment by the press or members of the public should ask that it be clearly reported that it is their personal view. Unless a councillor is certain that they are reporting the view of Sawbridgeworth Town Council, make it clear that it is a personal view

- 3.7 All Councillors may comment from a political viewpoint and when doing so should make it clear that their comments do not necessarily reflect the official view of Sawbridgeworth Town Council and that it is a political comment.
- 3.8 If Councillors have a complaint or receive a complaint about service delivery or procedure from a member of the public, this should be presented to the Town Clerk in written format, which may include an e-mail, to be dealt with under the complaints procedure, or via a Town Council agenda item. The person's name and address should be on record.

4. Councillor Correspondence to Other Agencies

- 4.1 All personal correspondence as a Town Councillor to other agencies should make it clear that the views are the expression of the personal opinions of the writer and not necessarily those of the Town Council.
- 4.2 If appropriate, a copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Town Council or one's role within it may be sent to the Town Clerk together with a copy of any relevant inward correspondence. It should be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Town Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Town Clerk has been advised.
- 4.3 Where a Councillor writes a letter at the request of a Committee or Council, this should always be done in consultation with the Town Clerk.

5. Communications with and by Council Staff

- 5.1 Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (this would be three or more Councillors sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council and not an individual, regardless of whether or not they are the Mayor, Leader of the Council, Committee chairman etc.).
- 5.2 Telephone calls and emails should be kept to a reasonable level, be appropriate to the work of the Town Council and:
- instant detailed replies should not be expected unless genuine reasons for urgency are stated;
 - Formal matters for information about official business to the other Councillors should normally be directed via the Town Clerk;
 - E-mails to other agencies about official business should be copied to the Town Clerk;
 - E-mails should be acknowledged when requested to do so.
- 5.3 Meetings with the Town Clerk or other officers:-
- Where possible an appointment should be made
 - Meetings should be relevant to the work of the Council
 - Councillors should be clear about the matters they wish to discuss and state the reason when making an appointment.

6. Responsibilities of Officers

6.1 Officers should bear in mind that, whilst they are employed to serve the Council as a whole their work involves dealing with individual councillors. To assist in that relationship:

- Telephone calls and meetings should be relevant to the Council's work;
- Enquiries from Councillors should be dealt with in a timely fashion and if an immediate response is not possible the enquiry should be acknowledged with an indication of when a full response will be made;
- Members should be kept informed as appropriate and definitely if there is any substantial change that affects the implementation of a decision they have made or if an issue is likely to have a detrimental effect or if the issue is likely to be of interest to the press and media;
- Committee reports should normally be included with the relevant agenda when it is dispatched. Reports marked "to follow" should be the exception and to help Councillors understand why a report is not included a reference to the reasons should be made in the agenda.