

KIDSGROVE TOWN COUNCIL



Communication and Social Media Policy

Kidsgrove Town Council

Kidsgrove Town Council
Victoria Hall
Liverpool Road
Kidsgrove
Staffordshire
ST7 4EL

Tel: 01782 782254

www.kidsgrovetowncouncil.gov.uk



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the Kidsgrove Town Council policy for its internal and external communications using all appropriate media and technologies at its disposal.
- 1.3 The Council considers that the community of Kidsgrove comprises
 - a. All residents of the parish.
 - b. All users of Town Council services.
 - c. All those who work or own a business within Kidsgrove.
 - d. All young people who live/go to school in Kidsgrove.
 - e. All voluntary organisations, clubs and societies as well as groups or organisations representing sections of the community.
- 1.4 The Council recognises that other bodies are crucial to the quality of life in Kidsgrove and it will maintain the strong working relationships and communications with Stafford County Council, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, the Police and other local Parish and Town Councils.
- 1.5 The Council defines communication as the process of exchanging information and informing the community. This may be verbally, in writing or by other means and will be about decisions that have been made, options considered or the passing on of information.
- 1.6 The Council will engage with the community to help form opinion and review decisions.
- 1.7 The Council is always open to receiving both positive and negative feedback and has a commitment to encouraging the community to engage with the Council.
- 1.8 The procedures contained in this Policy apply equally to both council members and employees.

2. Town Council Correspondence

- 2.1 The point of contact for the town council is the clerk, and it is to the clerk that all correspondence directed to the town council as a body should be addressed.
- 2.2 The clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- 2.3 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'.
- 2.4 All official correspondence from Kidsgrove Town Council as a body should normally be sent by the clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper.
- 2.5 Where correspondence from the clerk is copied to another person, including other councillors, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).
- 2.6 Where the clerk or a councillor wishes fellow councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Clerk.
- 2.7 Councillors may sometimes need to correspond with residents and other bodies as an individual councillor. This is allowed. However, no councillor, including the mayor, can express a view or position of the Council as a body that cannot be demonstrated to be resolved in minutes of meetings. Nor should Councillors write in a manner that implies they are representing the Town Council as a body unless specifically instructed to by the Council. (see 2.4).

2.8 In all correspondence, GDPR regulations must be adhered to and data retained in compliance with the Council's adopted publication scheme. Councillor email addresses should be used.

3. Civic Correspondence

3.1 On Civic matters, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor can correspond freely and as required on letter headed paper without recourse to Council. Administration support is available.

3.2 Copies of official Civic correspondence should be retained by the office.

3.3 Invitations for Civic Events for the Mayor will be encouraged to be submitted via the office.

4. Town Council Communication with the Public and Promotion of Activities

4.1 General Statement of Policy

4.1.1 The Town Council website is the primary source of information on the Council for the community and will be kept up-to-date with all content routinely monitored. The Council aims to actively publish a wide range of information on the council and its activities.

4.1.2 The Council will utilise the noticeboards outside the Town Hall for important notices.

4.1.3 The Council will use Social Media, such as Facebook, to provide news about Kidsgrove and selectively to request opinions and comments. Respondents will be encouraged to contact the Clerk through email or by attending public consultation events.

4.1.4 The Council shall continue to set aside time at every Council and Committee meeting for members of the public to address the Council.

4.1.5 The Council shall continually look to provide opportunities for members of the public to discuss issues with councillors.

4.1.6 The Council shall continue to appoint members to represent the Council on community organisations as requested.

4.1.7 The Council will seek volunteers from the community to 'sit' on Council Task Groups and some committees to inform and enhance the communication and tasks of these groups.

4.1.8 The Clerk shall have delegated authority to determine the most appropriate communication methods from those agreed by Council to enable meaningful, efficient and timely dissemination of information from the Town Council whilst both adhering to this Policy and other Parish Council Policies.

4.2 Town Council Communication with the Press and Public

4.2.1 The clerk is the council's nominated Press Officer and will clear all press reports in the Town Council's name, or comments to the media, with the Mayor of the council and also the Chair of the relevant committee and group leaders as appropriate. The Mayor, or in his/her absence, the deputy Mayor, is a recognised spokesman for the Town Council, but must adhere to this policy.

4.2.2 Press reports from the Town Council, its committees or working parties should be from the clerk or another officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

4.2.3 It is inevitable that councillors will at times be contacted directly by the press. Unless a councillor has been authorised by the Town Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view. For

Councillors who are also Borough Councillors and/or County Councillors, they must make it clear that their comments are on behalf of their role at these bodies rather than as a Town Councillor if this be so, to comply with this policy.

- 4.2.4 As the clerk should be sending most of the council's correspondence 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.
- 4.2.5 A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the council or a Councillor's direct role within it, should be sent to the Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the clerk has been advised.
- 4.2.6 Unless a councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the council, they must make it clear to members of the public and other bodies that they are expressing a personal view.
- 4.2.7 If councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure.
- 4.2.8 Councillor correspondence to external parties in their capacity as representing the Town Council (including letters, verbal or electronic communication) should be avoided wherever possible and any communication can only be done with the explicit prior permission of council. All such correspondence must clearly state the capacity in which the councillor is acting and must be immediately copied to the clerk.

4.3 Town Council News Items and Articles in Publications

- 4.3.1 The clerk will seek all opportunities to promote the activities and decisions of the Town Council through regular news items:
 - a. posted on the Town Council website
 - b. posting on Social Media
 - c. by use of email distribution lists
 - d. preparation and issuing press releases
 - e. arranging for a representative of the press to be at meetings
 - f. preparing articles, in conjunction with councillors, and subject to council agreement, for issuing to the media.

4.4 Town Council use of Social Media

- 4.4.1 The Council will make best possible use of Social Media to publicise its work and decisions and to inform the community of events and matters that affect the lives of all its residents and businesses. The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication. of Social Media may include:
 - a. Facebook, Instagram, Myspace and other social networking sites
 - b. Twitter and other micro blogging sites
 - c. Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
 - d. LinkedIn
 - e. Bloggs and discussion forums
 - f. Social messaging methods such as messenger and Whatsapp.
 - g. Local radio

Social Media may be used to:

- a. Circulate agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings

- b. Advertise events and activities
- c. Good news stories linked to a website or press page
- d. Vacancies
- e. Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- f. Announcing new information including that which is time sensitive or of an urgent nature and may be inappropriate for other media.
- g. Post or Share information from other Kidsgrove related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- h. Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

4.4.2 The clerk and other officers, including staff seconded to the Town Council such as the Kidsgrove Ranger, are the only persons authorised to post any information on Town Council Social Media, with the exception of Town Mayor accounts (see below). Anything which could be considered controversial or potentially of an inflammatory nature should be agreed with either the Mayor of Council or a Chair of a relevant Committee before posting.

4.4.3 The clerk will setup and maintain all Social Media on behalf of council. Such setup will be to publish information only and Social Media will not be used for discussion of any posted item.

4.4.4 Councillors and Officers should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites – e.g. Facebook – and adhere to these at all times.

4.4.5 The councillors Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

4.4.6 No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain (e.g. available on the Parish Council's website, published in Minutes) without the prior approval of the Mayor and Clerk.

4.4.7 Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.

4.4.8 The Council must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.

4.4.10 Other organisations should not be referenced without their permission unless the information is already freely available in the public domain– when referencing, a link back to the original source wherever possible should be included.

4.4.12 No information should be published that could be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.

4.4.23 The Town Mayor and Deputy can use any social media accounts set up by the Town Council to specifically promote the Civic side of their role, but for no other purpose other than for Civic matters.

4.5 Social Media and Code of Practice

4.5.1 When using social media (including email) councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

4.5.2 Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

4.5.3 Officers and Councillors must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Town Council and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner when posting on sites which aren't their own private pages.

4.5.4 Town councillors and council staff must not:

- a. hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- b. present personal opinions as that of the council
- c. present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- d. post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- e. post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- f. engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- g. use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- h. when publishing photographs or videos, must adhere to GDPR policies in place.
- i. post any information that infringes copyright of others
- j. post any information that may be deemed libel
- k. post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- l. bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- m. post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- n. conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

4.5.5 Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against the councillor or council.

4.5.6 Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against the council.

4.5.7 Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation.

4.5.8 Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and can be subject to a custodial sentence.

4.5.9 Councillors should take care when posting in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee.

4.5.10 Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrates others should report them in accordance with the Council's complaints policy.

4.5.12 The Clerk (or in his/her absence, another designated officer) will have authority to remove any posts or comments made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

4.5.13 Councillors and officers need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of Kidsgrove Town Council. The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If a councillor uses Social Media in what would be perceived to be their official capacity as a Councillor, they should always be mindful of the Code, and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

4.6 Town Council use of Email Lists

- 4.6.1 Some activities of the council will require it creating email lists of residents and other bodies with which it may communicate.
- 4.6.2 The clerk will be responsible for creating and maintaining such lists and this will include explicit procedures for any person or body on any email list to be able to remove themselves from the list. The Parish Council’s General Data Protection Policy will be adhered to at all times.
- 4.6.3 The clerk (or in her/his absence another nominated member of staff) will be the only person empowered by council to send council communications to the prepared email lists. All such communication will be duly authorised council communication.
- 4.6.5 All such email communications will use the ‘blind copy’ facility to ensure that the names of respondents are not visible to any of the recipients and will comply with policies set out under GDPR.

5. Communications with Town Council Staff

- 5.1 No individual councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the chair of the council, the chair of a committee or other meeting, may give instructions to the clerk or to another employee which is inconsistent or conflicts with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- 5.2 E-mails: - Instant replies should not be expected from the clerk, but the clerk will attempt to respond in a timely manner to urgent matters. - Information to councillors should normally be directed via the clerk; - councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

Adopted by Kidsgrove Town Council

Date.....

To be reviewed at least every four years.