



# Leyburn Town Council Communications & Media

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## Introduction

Leyburn Town Council (LTC) has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, employees and contractors and has therefore developed a Communications Policy.

This policy sets out the Leyburn Town Council methodology along with procedures for both its internal and external communications, using appropriate media and technologies at its disposal.

The procedures contained in this Policy apply equally to **both council members and employees**.

The purpose of this document is to formalise the position of the council with respect to its commitment to;

- ✓ maintaining reliable and efficient internal communications within its day to day running
- ✓ Ensuring exceptional external communications with customers, with the Press and the Public.

## *The purpose of this policy is to ensure:*

- ✓ *that the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;*
- ✓ *that the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected;*
- ✓ *that our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council;*
- ✓ *ensure the council's information and data are handled appropriately*

## *Why is Communication Important?*

The Council recognises the importance of communication and is committed to meeting the expectations of the Leyburn community; this requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with.

Leyburn Town Council will ensure that information provided is easily accessible, relevant and timely.

## *What Should the Council be communicating?*

- ✓ *Information about the Council's Decisions*
- ✓ *Advice about our Services and those of other Local Authorities*
- ✓ *Information about the Council's Finances*
- ✓ *Information supplied to us about Local facilities and groups*
- ✓ *Public consultations and Public Inquiries*

## ***Our Aims:***

The overall aim is that Council communications should be a two-way process; to give people the information to understand accurately what we do, so they can make informed decisions, and to get information from residents so we can understand their needs.

The Town Council's main aim through communications is to increase transparency and provide information for the benefit of residents, partners, employees and visitors.

The Council's communications work will:

- ✓ Engage and listen to the local community, raise trust and confidence levels and ensure residents satisfaction with our services, and their costs.
- ✓ Provide information of the facilities provided by the Council and direct people to the relevant District or County Council department where needed.
- ✓ Make best use of social media and website to engage with a wide audience including hard-to-reach groups such as young people.
- ✓ Proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of the Council.

## ***Methods of Communication***

The Council will also ensure that all communication activity takes into account the differing accessibility needs of all, regardless of culture or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexuality, geographical location or any other status.

*The Council will aim to deliver a high standard of service by:*

- ✓ *Managing the media effectively to promote the Council*
- ✓ *Ensuring the council brand is consistently linked to services*
- ✓ *Regular consultation with the community*
- ✓ *Maintain and develop the LTC website*
- ✓ *Engage in Social Media including Twitter and Facebook*

## ***Ensure that the Leyburn Town Council Brand is Consistent***

The Council will brand its communications consistently, ensuring a single brand identity by:

- ✓ Making sure all staff use the branded logos and templates (press releases, letters, etc) ensuring uniformity.

## ***Carry out Regular Consultation***

The Council is committed to consulting the local community, local businesses, service providers, market traders, our own staff and Members, to identify ways in which we can improve the services we provide.

The Council will consult by:

- ✓ Inviting public participation at meetings of the Town Council
- ✓ By inviting correspondence to the Town Clerk or through the website and social media
- ✓ Consulting with residents, traders, volunteers and tenants through the LTC dedicated sub-committees (Working Parties).

### ***Maintain and Develop the Website***

The Town Council will maintain a website which is regularly updated and contains key information about the Council and important events. The Council will further develop the website to ensure it keeps pace with media advances.

The Website shall contain material that arises from Council business including:

- ✓ Agendas and minutes
- ✓ Policies
- ✓ Factual information about the Town Council and Town Councillors
- ✓ Reports, Surveys or any other material derived from the Town Council

The website may also contain:

- News and Local Events
- Information about classes held at Thornborough Hall
- Details about local Community Groups
- Links to local external (useful) resources & the District and County Council websites where appropriate

### ***Engage in Social Media including Twitter & Facebook***

The Town Council will post urgent communications and news on Facebook & Twitter and use this media in connection with hard to reach groups.

**Officers will not be expected to engage in debate with residents through Social Media channels. Please see social media policy.**

### ***Protocol in Relation to Publicity***

Council publicity is strictly controlled by provisions in the Local Government Acts 1972 & 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 1988. All media work carried out by the Leyburn Town Council follows the provisions of these acts and the code.

*The general points of the code are outlined as:*

- *The Town Council is prevented from publishing, or helping others to publish, material, which may appear to affect public support for a political party.*
- *Any publicity describing the Town Council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.*
- *The Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk can only publicise the views of the Council.*
- *The Chair of the Town Council has a wide-ranging remit and can be quoted in media material, and undertake media work across all areas of the Town Council's services as required.*
- *On occasion, if the Chair is unavailable within the expected timeframe, the Deputy Chair in the second instance or Town Clerk or Deputy Clerk will undertake to deal with media work across all areas of Town Council services as required.*
- *The Chair represents the Town Council for civic and ceremonial functions and will be pictured and quoted accordingly.*

## ***Communications with the Press and Public***

*Leyburn Town Council aims to:*

- ✓ Respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time*
- ✓ Be helpful, polite and positive*
- ✓ Never say “no comment”*
- ✓ Ensure any statements to hostile enquiries are cleared by the most appropriate person and keep written records of responses to journalists*
- ✓ Ensure the appropriate council spokesman is fully briefed and available for interview if required*
- ✓ Issue timely and relevant press releases using the brand template*

# Communications and Media Policy

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## 1. CORRESPONDENCE

- 1.1 The point of contact for the town council is the Clerk or Deputy Clerk (referred to as Clerk), and All correspondence relating to the parish should be addressed to the Clerk in the first instance. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the relevant person or organisation as soon as practicably possible.
- 2.1 If a parishioner wishes a matter to be formally discussed at a Council meeting, then the Town Clerk must be notified at least 10 days prior to the meeting to enable the item to be placed on the Agenda.
- 3.1 All official correspondence should be sent by the clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper.

## 2. TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS

- 2.1 The Town Council will meet at 7.00pm on the third Monday of the month.
- 2.2 The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council will be the May meeting when Councillors will elect the Chair and appoint the Vice Chair for the forthcoming year.
- 2.3 The Town Council will meet in The Oak room at Thornborough Hall, unless otherwise notified.
- 2.4 A 15-minute discussion period for parishioners will be held at the beginning of the Parish Council Meeting.
- 2.5 Agendas should be clear and concise. They should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
- 2.6 The Clerk or Deputy Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- 2.7 **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 unless this has been approved by the Council in advance.** In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- 2.8 The Openness of LG Bodies Regulation 2014 became law on 6 August 2014, allowing filming, photography and/or recording of council proceedings by the press or public. No oral report or verbal running commentary is permitted during the meeting.

## 3. NOTICEBOARDS

The following items will be displayed permanently:

- 3.1 Town Councillors details with contact email addresses.
- 3.2 Town Council meeting dates for the year Notice of the annual audited accounts will be displayed when appropriate. The Town Council meeting notice will be displayed at least three days in advance of the meeting.

## 4. CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1 When responding to approaches from the media, the Town Clerk is the main contact with permission to speak to the media. The Town Mayor and the Chairmen of Committees, by the nature of their position are also authorised contacts with the media in consultation with the Town Clerk.

- 4.2 Statements made by the Town Mayor or the Chairmen of Committees should reflect the Council's opinion and set policies.
- 4.3 If other councillors are contacted directly by the media for comment, they should liaise with the Town Clerk before responding to the request.
- 4.4 Other Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that **it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council, preferably by confirming with the Town Clerk beforehand.**
- 4.5 Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers or local newsletters. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.
- 4.6 Letters representing the views of the Council should only be submitted by the Town Mayor, the Chairmen of Committees or the Town Clerk. Councillors are strongly encouraged not to use the letters page within the local press as a means of expressing their personal views.
- 4.7 At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

### **When dealing with the Press verbally, members and officers should be aware of the following:**

- ✓ Be informed and certain of all your facts
- ✓ Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Parish Council that you are aware what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy.
- ✓ Only discuss items that are in the public domain.
- ✓ Be aware of Data Protection laws.
- ✓ Be calm
- ✓ Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.

## **5. Media Interviews**

- 5.1 All requests for interviews should be directed immediately to the Town Clerk or Deputy Clerk. Where necessary, Town Clerk or Deputy Clerk will obtain approval from the relevant Town Councillor.
- 5.2 Councillors of the Town Council and employees who identify a media opportunity should refer to the Clerk so as to ensure the accuracy and consistency in any subsequent press release or contact with the media.
- 5.3 Unless a councillor has been authorised by the 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 and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.
- 5.4 In response to an unsolicited approach from a journalist or reporter (this includes enquiries about press releases issued by other organisations), the views of the Town Council may be expressed subject to the guidelines above. The Clerk should be informed so that facts can be checked and appropriate action taken.
- 5.5 The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the council or the Chair of the relevant committee.
- 5.6 Press reports from the council, its committees or working parties should be from the clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

## **6. Councillors and Town Council Staff Communications**

- 6.1 **Councillor communication with the town council office should be by email** (in emergencies councillors may contact the Clerks by telephone). Visits to the office are by appointment only.
- 6.2 All council correspondence should be sent and received from dedicated council/ councillors email address.
- 6.3 Councillors must take care to ensure that confidential information is not disclosed so as to place the council at risk of breach of confidentiality.
- 6.4 Where correspondence from the Clerk to a councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).  
Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties.
- 6.5 Where the Clerk or a councillor wishes fellow councillors to receive matters for “information only”, this information will be circulated via the Clerk.
- 6.6 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 are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- 6.7 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.

## **7. Councillor Correspondence to external parties (including letters, verbal or electronic communication)**

- 7.1 Councillors must ensure that any communication follows the principles set out in the Code of Conduct in particular to show respect to others.
- 7.2 A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature including the content of emails and confidential items discussed at meetings. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on Council or Committee agendas or at any other private briefing
- 7.3 A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council. Should the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, then legal advice should be sought before any response is made.
- 7.4 When speaking or providing written material for personal publications or to the Press and Media, Councillors should make clear the capacity in which they are providing the information.  
For example: – as Chairman, as an individual (i.e. letter to press for publication)
- 7.5 Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the press/media or in publicised newsletters/ publications, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own personal view and not necessarily those of the council.
- 7.6 Never use the prefix “Councillor” when writing to the press as an individual or refer to your position on the Council. This implies you are stating Council policy. A copy of any written material sent to the Press and Media by a Councillor, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Clerk.
- 7.7 If councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council’s adopted complaints procedure, or via a Council Agenda item.