

# Dorchester Town Council

## Policy Committee

18 July 2022

**Present:** The Mayor (Councillor J. Hewitt) and Councillors B. Armstrong-Marshall, R. Biggs, S. Biles, T. Harries, F. Hogwood and S. Hosford (Chairman).

**Apologies:** Councillor G. Jones.

In Attendance

Councillors S. Jones and D. Leaper.

1. **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 16 May 2022, adopted by Council on 24 May 2022, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2. **Finance Update**

Members considered a report by the Financial Controller which updated them on the financial position of the Council as at end of June 2022 and the need for approval for a maximum loan required to complete the Municipal Buildings building project.

**Recommended**

That approval be sought from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to apply for a PWLB loan for up to £700,000 over a maximum borrowing time of 30 years for the development of the Municipal Building. The annual loan repayments will come to around a maximum of £75,000 per annum. It is not intended to increase the Council Tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments.

**Resolved**

That the payments list, totalling £621,370.58, be approved.

3. **Climate Emergency Works – Weymouth Avenue Cricket Pavilion**

The Committee had before it a report by the Financial Controller on further carbon reduction proposals for Weymouth Avenue Cricket Pavilion. These works, subject to receipt of the necessary approvals, to include the fitting of solar panels, waterless urinals and two electric vehicle (EV) charging points. It was reported that Dorset Council might have funding available for the installation of EV charging points. Some consideration should also be given to a protocol around who could use them and whether there were additional suitable locations.

### **Resolved**

That the works set out be approved, subject to the appropriate approvals being received, funded from the Climate Emergency Reserve, less any grant aid achieved.

#### **4. Communications Policy**

Further to Minute No. 30/2021-22 the Committee considered a revised Communications Policy for the Council.

Members supported the revised policy subject to the inclusion of how to treat confidential documents, ensuring, if possible, that documents could be read easily on different types of electronic device and available in different languages including brail.

### **Recommended**

That, subject to the inclusion of those matters set out above, the Communications Policy, as set out as an Appendix to these Minutes, be approved for adoption by the Council.

#### **5. Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960**

### **Resolved**

That in view of the fact that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the following matters the public and press representatives be excluded from this meeting during their discussion.

#### **6. ICT Support**

Members considered a report by the Town Clerk on the future arrangements for the provision, support and maintenance of the Council's ICT infrastructure.

The Committee supported the proposal but requested that BCP Council be contacted to see what service it might provide and that Dorset Council be asked to provide a complete Service Catalogue / Agreement.

### **Resolved**

That, following receipt of the information set out above, and the approval of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee, the Town Clerk be authorised to enter into an agreement with Dorset Council for the provision and maintenance of ICT, if that was still considered to be the most effective arrangement.

7. **Investments**

The Committee considered a report by the Financial Controller on the Council's investments.

**Resolved**

That all of the shares held in Payden and Rygel Investment be sold with the funds received deposited in the CCLA Deposit account.

Chairman.....

# **Dorchester Town Council**

## **Communications Policy**

### **29 June 2022 (second draft)**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This draft communications policy is intended for use by Dorchester Town Council Officers and Councillors to facilitate communication, particularly with the Media and Press. There are many platforms which the Town Council can use to communicate, publicly or privately, which can involve multiple and varied stakeholders, and which can be internal, external or both.

This draft policy sets out a code of practice for Council Officers and Councillors for their communications to keep information safe, ensure its veracity, avoidance of damage to the Council's reputation and be lawful. It is important to know which individuals are responsible for communication and to approach them for support when required, particularly to the Media. Inappropriate individual opinions being given as representative of the Officers or Councillors of the Town Council must be avoided.

Officers and Councillors should be briefed on an agreed policy as well as receive training when appropriate before engaging in any communication.

#### **2. SCOPE**

The policy applies to all the following personnel:

- Town Council employees, including those working from home or from other locations
- Town Councillors
- Other workers (including casual and agency workers, seconded staff and contractors) who are authorised to use the Council's equipment and networks.

#### **3. PLATFORMS**

- Zoom/ Teams/ Google virtual meetings
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, etc.)
- email
- Letters to individuals or groups
- Town Council Newsletters/ press releases (printed publications)
- Town Council Website
- Interviews: Radio, TV, local or national newspapers

#### **4. GENERAL POINTS**

Before engaging in any communication all Town Council Officers and Councillors should consider registering and sharing any request for information with an appropriate Officer and ensuring data protection procedures. It is optimal to have designated Officers or Councillors when

communicating with the Press or other Media, with a hierarchy of who should say what and to whom, but all the points below should be considered when communicating through any platform:

1) **Appropriate communication should include:**

- a) Accurate proof reading for spelling, grammar and syntax
- b) Appropriate language, avoiding profanities or colloquial language. Communications to larger audiences should be kept formal.

2) **Malicious Communications Act 1988.** Communication should not be indecent, offensive or a threat, or include information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender.

3) **Remain calm** in situations that you may disagree with and consider your reply carefully. Consider exploring a request for information, or any response given, with an appropriate colleague or designated Officer before responding.

4) **Do not share** private or inappropriate information, text or images

a) Inappropriate information is defined as:

- Pornography
- Gambling
- Promotion of discrimination of any kind
- Promotion of racial or religious hatred
- Involving threats or promoting violence
- Promotion of illegal acts
- Offensive language which relates to any protected characteristics under the Equalities act 2010, including race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief

5) The **Defamation Act 2013** c.26.

This defines defamation as an action which causes 'serious harm' to the reputation of an individual or corporation which is likely to cause serious personal or financial loss. Libel is the written form of defamation and slander is the spoken equivalent. However, any such allegations are a serious issue. Town Council Officers and Councillors must make sure that any communications, spoken or written, could not be deemed as slander and are substantiated.

6) **Images**

- a) Do not share images that are copyrighted unless you have sought permission, or they are open content or have creative common licences. Images on Google and other platforms for open content but this must be ensured.
- b) If content has close ups of people, it must be ensured that individuals in the image have signed an appropriately worded consent form. If the image is of a child, it is important that a parent, or appropriate surrogate person has signed a consent form. Consent forms should be scanned onto a PC and saved in your files with data protection rules being observed. At larger events where it may not be possible to obtain consent there should be signage which make the public aware that photographs will be taken at the event and what they will be used for. For ticketed events, the ticket could state under the terms and conditions of an event that photographs will be taken at the event and what platforms they will be used on.

- 7) **Accessibility.** Consider these points when creating content:
- a) Avoid or explain jargon, particularly acronyms or technical information
  - b) Keep paragraphs short and to the point
  - c) Make sure you use contrasting colours so text is readable
  - d) Font, sans serif fonts are more accessible these include Arial, Calibri, Century Gothic, Helvetica, Tahoma and Verdana. Calibri is the preferred font of DTC. Avoid complicated, overuse of varying fonts or underlining, mixtures of case and colours, particularly in the production of posters
  - e) Text aligned to the left is more readable than centred
  - f) Make sure that font is readable and clear
  - g) Make sure lines aren't too close together; 1.5 to 2 spacing is optimal
  - h) Content should not induce seizures, this means that it should not contain flashing images and if this can't be avoided make sure to warn users of flashing content and make sure it doesn't play automatically
  - i) Use <https://colororacle.org/> or <https://bit.ly/3pYmo0> to find out how someone who is colour blind will see your communications. Use muted background colours for those with light sensitivity or who are prone to migraine
  - j) Underline links; this makes them more recognisable to those who might have a visual impairment
  - k) Images with text should be avoided as they may not be readable with screen readers. Make sure to provide information in a text format elsewhere in the document
  - l) Official information should be proof read by an appropriate separate individual.

## 5. **VIRTUAL MEETINGS.**

Virtual meetings are a common experience following the Covid pandemic and it is important to make sure they are still treated as important forms of communication and are held with the same standards as face-to-face meetings.

- 1) **Show up on time.** If you are running late due to another meeting or you are having technical difficulties try to email or call the organiser/chair to let them know. Always give apologies if you are late.
- 2) **Technical difficulty.** If you face technical difficulty during the meeting, make sure to apologise, particularly in a smaller meeting. However, these incidents are often out of our control.
- 3) **Moderators.** It is good practice to delegate a moderator in virtual meetings, particularly if they are large. Moderators can help to field questions in the chat or spot those with virtual hands raised.
- 4) **Stay put.** Try not to move around or leave your screen during meetings. If you feel you must, you may turn off your camera so you do not cause distraction. However, speakers prefer to see their audience during a presentation and be aware they they wish to ask a question or need clarification on a point being made.

- 5) **Sharing your screen.** Make sure that you share the correct screen and documents when you are the presenter and avoid accidental showing of private or sensitive information
- 6) **Appropriate Communication.** See Section 4.1.
- 7) **Background.** If necessary blur or add your own background when on Zoom or similar platform, particularly if you don't know what others may be doing around you, or if you do not wish to share the background of your office or environment.
- 8) **Mute** yourself when you are not talking, to avoid microphone feedback and distracting noises. If you know that you are going to be doing a lot of talking in your meeting consider relocating to a quieter area of the office/ home. If this is not possible make colleagues, or those in your household, know that you will be in an online meeting.
- 9) **Accessibility.** Section 4.7. On zoom there is an option whereby you can add closed captions by clicking 'Live Transcript' and then click 'Enable Auto Transcript'. The participant can then click to 'Show Subtitles' or 'View Full Transcript'. This option is not only good for accessibility but also for taking notes during a meeting.

## **6. SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media is a popular platform to share and the Council uses a number of social media outlets.

- 1) Dorchester Town Council run pages:
  - Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/dorchestertowncouncil>
  - Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/DorchesterBoroughGardens>
  - Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/DiscoverDorchesterDorset>
  - Twitter - <https://twitter.com/DiscoverDorch>
  - Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/discoverdorchester/>
  - Tik Tok - <https://www.tiktok.com/@discoverdorchester>
- 2) Town Council Officers and Councillors must remember at all times that their online presence is seen to reflect the Town Council. This policy applies if, in their comments or posts, they are recognisable as Officers or Councillors. They should not:
  - Present personal opinions as Town Council policy
  - Post any confidential / embargoed information
  - Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council or bring it into disrepute
  - Post anything malicious, libellous or which could be deemed as harassment or bullying
  - Post anything that can be deemed as offensive or relates to any protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, including race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
  - Conduct any online activity which violates laws, regulations or constitutes a criminal offence.

- 3) Town Council Officers and Councillors should follow guidance, listed in section 6.2. above, when using their own private social media, particularly when interacting with Town Council run pages.
- 4) Staff members who use the social media pages listed in section 6.1. while working on Town Council business should consider:
  - a. Only sharing from reputable pages. Bear in mind that content can be edited even after shared by a page. Make sure that the page you shared a post from does not post anything that could be viewed as offensive, political or of a commercial nature.
  - b. Moderation. Officers may remove comments which could be deemed as being offensive, abusive or defamatory. However, if comments do not meet these criteria, then they should left on the page. The Council may also block users who act offensively on the Council's pages.
  - c. Not sharing private or inappropriate information, text or images (Section 4.4.).
  - d. Defamation (Section 4.5.).
  - e. By sharing images from reputable pages there is some reassurance that they have followed general image sharing guidance but policy guidelines should be followed (Section 4.6.).
  - f. Social media is one of the few places where it is acceptable to be more informal when talking to a wider audience. However, as Town Council Officers and Councillors communication platforms used should be appropriate and follow policy guidelines.
  - g. Improvement of accessibility can be achieved by including alternative text, or a description with images, and can explain what an image is for those with visual impairments (Section 4.7). Videos can be used with closed captions. Consider how screen readers will read your text, for examples: Emojis can be read out but should not be overused or words can be capitalised on a hash tag (such as #AccessibleWeb rather than #accessibleweb; this is called CamelCase and means that screen readers can pick up individual words)

5) Email is an important form of communication that can quickly provide information to many recipients.

- 1) Emails should always introduce the writer of the email to the recipients, especially if they have not been emailed before. The reason for contact should be established and a subject should be highlighted as the reason for contact.
- 2) It is critical to check who the email is for with the correct address. Pressing 'reply all' must be considered and only be used if the reply is intended to go to everyone.

- 3) Appropriate communication by email (Section 4.1.).
- 4) Private or inappropriate information, text or images should not be shared (Section 4.4.)
- 5) To ensure accessibility long paragraphs are tricky to read and should be avoided, especially for those with dyslexia. Paragraphs, with short lines of sentences, are the easiest to read and bullet points may be helpful for this (Section 4.7)

## **7. LETTERS**

The Town Council uses letter writing as a form of communication between Officers, Councillors, organisations and businesses. They should follow the corporate letter format (an example is attached at the end of this document) and formal language should be used.

## **8. PRINT PUBLISHING**

Print publications can come in many forms: newspapers, press release and print media. They are an important part of the Town Council's communication. An example of a press release format is included later in this document (page 10).

- 1) Private or inappropriate information, text or images should not be shared (Section 4.4)
- 2) Defamation (Section 4.5.)
- 3) Images (Section 4.6.)
- 4) Accessibility (Section 4.7)
- 5) All information provided to in print media must have facts checked by a responsible, designated Officer or Councillor.
- 6) Press releases must be approved by the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk

## **9. WEBSITE**

This is the main online face of the Town Council; it can also be used as a hub for information.

- 1) Communication must be appropriate (Section 4.1.)
- 2) Private or inappropriate information, text or images must not be shared (Section 4.4.)
- 3) Defamation (Section 4.5.)
- 4) Images (Section 4.6.)
- 5) Accessibility and functionality should be available from a keyboard, and include pages which have clear titles and appropriate subheadings

## **10. PRESS INTERVIEWS**

Interviews are an important method of providing a more personal side to a news story. Different media platforms may approach Officers or Councillors. The Town Council may approach these platforms to publicise their aims and objects and progress. If Officers or Councillors are being interviewed on behalf of the Town Council they should be briefed before the interview by the most appropriate members of staff in relation to the subject of the interview.

This guidance should be followed when being interviewed:

- 1) Ensure the correct and most up to date information is available. Take notes before the interview, particularly of the facts or figures that might be asked
- 2) The subject should be well researched so that answer questions can be answered more confidently
- 3) If the answer is unknown speculation should be avoided
- 4) Private or inappropriate information, text or images should not be shared (Section 4.4.)
- 5) Defamation (Section 4.5.)
- 6) Permissions. Only the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk are authorised to communicate with the press. Other Officers or Councillors may speak to the press if authorised to do so by the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk.

**Date Approved:**

**Reviewed Date:**

**Policy Version:**



# Dorchester Town Council

## News Release

**Issue Date:**

**Embargo Date + Time:** (if appropriate)

### **Headline – (sets out point of release)**

**Detailed Text –**

**Introduction:**

- Follow the 5W rule (who, what, where, why, when?) This may be the deciding factor in if a journalist continues to read the news release
- Who is the release written for, make sure to market it to those who are likely to be interested

**Main text:**

- Ensure dates, times and locations are clear, using bold fonts is appropriate
- Include, whenever possible, a quote from the appropriate Town Council Committee Chairman or Vice Chairman and the Mayor

**Notes:**

- Use subheadings
- Make sure to order information correctly with the key points at the beginning and the extra information towards the end
- Bullet points can be used to get points across quickly, particularly if it is a list of information
- Share facts and figures if appropriate

**Images:** attach any images with photo credits – use good quality photos. Provide description of image

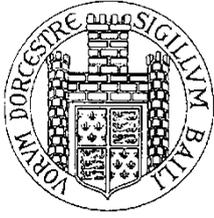
**For further information:** contact details, including telephone, email and website where appropriate.

**Logos:** attach any logos

**Notes to Editors:** Add any background or anything else the press are likely to want to know.

**ENDS**

KEEP THE PRESS RELEASE TO UNDER TWO PAGES



# DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

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Telephone: (01305) 266861

**Steve Newman, Town Clerk**

e-mail: [s.newman@dorchester-tc.gov.uk](mailto:s.newman@dorchester-tc.gov.uk)

DATE

ADDRESS  
ADDRESS  
ADDRESS  
ADDRESS

Dear

**SUBJECT OF LETTER – use capitals and bold**

Letter content – use Calibri 12 point - left hand margin no paragraph indent, do not justify.

Line space between paragraphs.

Yours sincerely or faithfully

Name  
Job Title