



Appendix 1(xviii)

NEW ROMNEY TOWN COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY



Introduction

This strategy will guide New Romney Town Council's (NRTC) communications with everyone who encounters it. It is based on the guiding principles that communication must be effective and that protocols should be followed to ensure clarity and professionalism. It will enable the Council to tell people about what it can and does do, as well as actively listen to what people think will enhance life in the Town Council area, so that we can better respond to people's needs and priorities. The strategy covers both internal and external communications, made by any means.

Aims

- To establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication in relation to members of the public, other agencies, fellow members, the press and Town Council staff.
- NRTC aims to provide information on matters affecting the community and to encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

Objectives

- To effectively inform residents, all those who have dealings in the Town Council area, and with NRTC stakeholders of its aims, objectives and activities.
- To build the capacity and motivation of residents and stakeholders to be involved with the Council and support the Council in its effort to improve the quality of life for those who live, work or have general involvement in the NRTC area.
- To use a variety of communication methods to ensure that the way the Council communicates keeps everyone included and informed.
- To build trust by being open and transparent.
- To improve methods of communication in line with modern technology, using current best practice to guide the Town Council in its developments.
- To engage with residents and stakeholders, demonstrating the Town Council's willingness to listen and act in respect of issues and concerns, providing residents with the opportunity to influence the future design, appearance and facilities that the town has to offer.

Approved and Adopted by Full Council: 25th March 2019

Last Reviewed: 12th April 2023

Stakeholders

We aim to reach everyone who has an interest in NRTC, be it that they live, work or visit the town and its immediate area. It is important that we can effectively communicate with anyone who is interested and may want to become involved in influencing the future of the town. These people include, but not exclusively:

- New Romney residents.
- Community groups and organisations.
- Agencies and partners (including the local police).
- Local schools.
- Sport clubs.
- County and District Councillors.
- The local MP.
- Local businesses and employers.
- Voluntary groups.
- Local media.

The Role of Councillors, Chairman and Town Clerk

Councillors represent the community in which they live and are governed by a Code of Conduct which encourages open, informed, timely and courteous communication always.

Our aim is to keep all with whom we come into contact informed of our actions and to encourage stakeholders to actively participate in influencing the future of the Town's Wards.

The Town Clerk is the executive of the Council. As such, the Town Clerk should receive all communications which ought to be formally brought to the attention of the Council and should issue all formal communications made by the Council. Councillors should refer any complaints or concerns relating to the Council received from residents to the Town Clerk to deal with.

Councillors should make it clear in all interactions with residents, the press or third parties that they have no authority to represent the Council's view unless the matter has been agreed at a Council meeting, or they have been given a specific mandate to do so at a council meeting.

It is important not to raise the expectations of the residents before a matter has been debated and agreed at a Council meeting.

Unless otherwise specified, such as in an emergency, the Chairman should comply with this protocol in the same way as other councillors.

General Rules of Communication

It is important that all Council communications are effective and in so doing must be:

- Short and to the point
- Courteous
- In plain Language
- Based on facts and information
- In a consistent format and style
- Clear about the action required or taken
- Informative

Means of Communication

The Council will use a variety of methods of communication based on what reaches its intended audience most effectively and efficiently. The Office for National Statistics state that 90% of the population generally use electronic communication, so this is the Council's preferred and primary method of communication:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2018#main-points>

However, we recognise that not all people are able to, or wish to use, electronic methods of communication, so we will continue to utilise different media and approaches in order to reach our audiences.

Here are our main methods of communication:

1. Website

In the interests of transparency and to provide electors with a clear picture of its activities, NRTC will publish information on its website. This will include Town Council meeting agendas, minutes and a publication scheme. Hard copies are available by request to the Town Clerk.

2. Social Media

The Council administers a Facebook page. Please search for *New Romney Town Council* within your Facebook search bar at the top.

- The purpose of the Facebook page is to provide information and updates regarding Town Council activities and those within the NRTC area.
- Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes.
- The Council are not responsible, liable for and do not endorse the privacy practices of Facebook or any linked websites. Your use of Facebook and any linked websites is at your own risk.

- The Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from these websites.
- Facebook may occasionally be unavailable, and the Council accept no responsibility for this lack of service.
- The presence of any externally produced advertisement on Facebook is not an endorsement of the authenticity or quality of the goods, services or website and the Council will not be held responsible for any claims arising in that respect.

The Town Clerk has access to update the Facebook page. Councillors or staff who use social media, either in their personal or professional life, may engage in online discussion on local issues, but they must make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the parish council. Councillors should be mindful of comments they make on social media, particularly with regards to their obligations on predetermination.

A Stakeholder may wish to inform the public of an item of community interest through the NRTC Facebook page. In such cases, the Stakeholder will need to contact the Town Clerk, who will decide whether the request is appropriate and act accordingly.

The Council does not currently operate any other forms of social media. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this communications policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

Most online platforms have their own rules and guidelines, which we will always abide by.

3. Printed Media

The Town Council will make use of local media, newsletters, flyers and mailshots where appropriate. The use of surveys (including [Survey Monkey](#)) to gauge opinions/successes will also be considered, along with Group Email ([GroupSpaces](#)) again where appropriate.

An annual report is published for the Annual Town Meeting and hard copies are supplied at the meeting. Published reports are also available on the website or by visiting the NRTC Office during opening times.

4. Notice boards

The notice boards are situated outside the *Town Hall*, in the *High Street*, on the *Greens* and at the *Flagstaff Land*. These display contact details for the Town Clerk, the agendas for the next meetings, any statutory notices and other items of interest. Due to limited noticeboard space, more information is available on the NRTC website.

5. Meetings

Routine NRTC Full Council meetings take place on the second Wednesday of the month at 6.45pm at the Town Hall and/or Assembly Rooms. During every NRTC meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to raise matters or to comment on an item on the agenda. After the conclusion of the public speaking section, however, members of the public are not permitted to contribute to further agenda items unless permission is granted by the Chairman. Further details can be found on published Town Council Agendas and in the NRTC Protocol.

Further meetings, such as Planning & Environment Committee and the Finance & General-Purpose Committee (F&GP), are also held regularly. All dates and times are shown on the NRTC website.

6. Annual Town Meeting

This is a meeting of the Town / Parish, consisting of both NRTC Wards (Town & Coast) and not the Town Council. Electors can contribute to the agenda and these meetings can celebrate local activities and debate current issues in the community. Seven clear days' notice of the meeting will be given, which includes publishing the NRTC report, and the meeting will generally be held in April or May each year, or within the legal window for an Annual Town Meeting.

7. Correspondence

All correspondence to the Town Council should be addressed to the Town Clerk to ensure that the matter is recorded.

If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a Town Council meeting, then the Town Clerk will have to be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda. This is, effectively, two weeks before the next appropriate meeting.

The Town Council will determine the response, if any, to correspondence received. The Town Council reserve the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Town Clerk's time. Advice will be sought upon receipt of vexatious communications and acted upon accordingly.

All official correspondence from the Town Council should be sent by the Town Clerk in the name of the Town Council. Correspondence from individual Town Councillors should be avoided; however, there may be exceptional situations when it is appropriate for a Town Councillor to issue correspondence in his/her own name. Such correspondence must be authorised by the Town Council.

Communication with the Press and Public

The Town Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Chairman. The Town Clerk will be the first point of contact for the media; however, where it is appropriate for a councillor to represent the Town Council, the Chairman or Vice-Chairman shall be authorised as the official spokesmen for the Council.

Individual councillors will not be permitted to issue media releases on behalf of the Town Council.

In the restricted period before an election, commonly known as “*purdah*”, media releases will not include quotes from councillors who are due for re-election.

Press reports from the Town Council, its committees or working groups shall be sent from the Town Clerk or via the reporter’s own attendance at a meeting.

Unless a Town Councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the media on an issue, Town 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.

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by councillors will reflect on the Council. At no time should councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the Town Council. Depending on the issue raised, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- Refer the matter to the Town Clerk, who will then deal with it as appropriate.
- Request an item on a relevant agenda.
- Investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Town Clerk.
- Give advice, and signpost to the appropriate authority, if applicable (e.g. District Council).

Unless a Town Councillor is certain that they are reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view. The only clear way of being aware of the council’s view is if the matter has been discussed at a Town Council meeting, and a decision made on that item.

Internal Communication

- E-mails should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.
- Matters for information to the other councillors should be directed via the Town Clerk.
- Instant replies should not be expected from the Town Clerk.
- Telephone calls should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.

Involvement of the Community

Where appropriate, the Council and its Working Groups will actively seek to consult a wider audience and encourage and support the involvement of residents and other interested parties in its work.

JR-03/03/19



Addendum to Appendix (1) (xviii)



Third Party Noticeboards Available for Town Council Use

Organisations and businesses that have agreed to place NRTC information on their noticeboards:

- Sainsburys
- KCC Library
- St Nicholas School
- New Romney Resource Centre

Organisations and businesses awaiting confirmation:

- ❖ Marsh Academy

Other organisations and businesses that agree to place NRTC information on their noticeboards will be added to this list in due course.