

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1. Aims

To establish clear, easy to use channels of communications between the Town Council and the Residents, and vice versa. To provide information on important matters in an appropriate manner to facilitate and encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

2. Introduction

Each Town Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interest of the whole community. They will endeavour to do their best and are available to help parishioners with regard to matters relating to the Town of Honiton. They may be contacted by email or telephone and a contact list is displayed on the Town Council noticeboard in the Town. If the matter is important, then a letter to the Town Clerk will ensure that this will be brought before the Town Council and dealt with in a suitable and professional manner. It is the Town Council's intention to comply with the schedule as below.

Town Council Meetings

- The Town Council will generally meet at 7pm on the 2nd Monday of the month. Changes to this date will be published in advance.
- The Annual Meeting of the Town Council will be the May meeting when Councillors will elect the Chair and appoint the Vice Chair for the forthcoming year.
- The Annual Town Meeting (a meeting of the electorate) will take place in May in each year.
- The Town Council will meet in The Beehive, Honiton, unless otherwise notified.

3. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, sub-Committees and Working Parties

- Agenda 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.
- Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.

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- Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for “information only”, this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

4. Annual Town Meeting

The Annual Town Council Meeting is held so that residents can have the opportunity to listen to the progress of the Town Council over the last year and have the opportunity to debate local issues and celebrate local events and activities.

All Staff and Councillors will ensure that:

5. Communications with the Press

- 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.
- The Council’s view and press reports are put to the press, etc, by the Chairman or by the Clerk; not by any Councillor. Comments made by an individual Councillor should be prefaced by the statement that they are not an official spokesman for the Council.
- Press reports from the council, its committees or working parties should be from the Clerk or Chair or via the reporter’s own attendance at a meeting.
- 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.

6. Correspondence and contacts

- All correspondence (letter or email) relating to the Town should be addressed to the Town 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.
- If a resident wishes a matter to be formally discussed at a Town Council meeting, then the Town Clerk must be notified at least 10 working days prior to the meeting to enable the item to be placed on the Agenda.
- As the Clerk should be sending most of the Council’s correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies, it needs to be made clear that it is

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written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Town Council.

- A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's 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.
- Meetings with the Clerk or Councillors:
 - An appointment should be made for a meeting usually in a public place.
 - Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate Council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.
 - 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 contractor which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

7. Parish Council email channel

- The email account towncouncil@honiton.gov.uk is monitored mainly between 10.00-13.00 Monday to Friday with an aim to reply to all correspondence within 5 working days.
- The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing it on to the relevant Councillor or external agency to deal with.
- The Clerk will maintain a list of email addresses where residents have supplied them for general correspondence. These addresses will not be shared and all group emails will use the Blind copy (BCC) option.

8. Noticeboard

The following items will be displayed:

- Town Councillors with contact details.
- Town Council meeting dates for the year.
- Notice of the annual audited accounts.

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- Town Council meeting Agenda and Minutes. Agenda is displayed at least 3 working days in advance of the meeting.
- Notice for Residents will be displayed as and when appropriate.

9. Honiton Town Council Website

The Honiton Town Council website (www.honiton.gov.uk) is managed by the webmaster who is responsible for the structure and content with the exception of the Parish Council information which the Clerk provides.

This includes:

- Town Councillor names and biographies.
- Town Council agendas and minutes.
- Transparency Code information including financial records, assets and organisational structure.
- Information of general interest from external organisations.

10. Social Media

- The Town Council has access to the Honiton Facebook page (www.facebook.com/honiton-town-council) and to the Twitter account (.....); both are managed by the webmaster. The Town Clerk has delegated authority to issue updates and news on these platforms on behalf of the Town Council.
- The Clerk and Town Councillors using social networking through their personal or professional lives must not comment on the activities of the Town Council to ensure that the Code of Conduct is not breached.
- When participating in online communication staff and councillors must be responsible and respectful; and be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Residents and Councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.
- If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised as a full agenda item for consideration by a Council. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

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- Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Council as required.