BRACKLEY TOWN COUNCIL

Communications Policy

T 01280 702 441
E office@brackleynorthants-tc.gov.uk
W www.brackleynorthants-tc.gov.uk

FOLLOW US

20 HIGH STREET, BRACKLEY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, NN13 7DS

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Contents

Foundations 3
- Introduction
- Purpose
- Scope
- Key Aims
- Legal Framework

Principles & responsibilities 5
- Core Principles
- Responsibilities
- Internal / External Communications
- Corporate Identity & Branding
- GDPR Basics

Communication Channels 8
- Internal Digital
- Internal Traditional
- External Digital
- External Traditional

Special Considerations 18
- Photography & Filming
- External & Legacy Media
- Resident Banner Guidelines
- Representation of private business
- Surveys & Consultations
- Security & Safety
- Complaints & Negative Correspondence

Edge Case Communications 23
- Out of Hours Comms
- Elections
- Crisis & Emergency Comms

Governance & Monitoring 24
- Monitoring & Review
- Appendices / Related Policies

Foundations

Introduction

Brackley Town Council considers timely, accurate, and accessible communication vital to building trust, informing the public, ensuring transparency, and supporting effective council operations. Well-managed communications help the council achieve its objectives, strengthen its reputation, and meet its statutory requirements.

Purpose

The purpose of this Communications Policy is to provide a clear framework for all council communications, ensuring that information shared by Brackley Town Council:

- Reflects the council's core values in tone and content
- Is informative, timely, accurate and relevant
- Is communicated in a manner that is clear, understandable, and accessible
- Meets all legal, regulatory, and ethical standards

This policy sets out the principles, responsibilities, and standards for how council staff, officers, members, and authorised representatives communicate both internally and externally.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All council officers, staff, councillors (elected or co-opted), and those acting on the council's behalf (including contractors, volunteers, and partner organisations)
- Communications made in the course of council business, regardless of channel/format (digital, printed, in-person, telephone, social media, website, etc.)
- Both formal and informal communications where the council is represented or council matters are discussed

Key Aims

The key aims of this Communications Policy are to:

1. **Promote Clear and Consistent Communication:**
   Ensure all council communication is clear, consistent, and upholds Brackley Town Council's identity, values, and reputation across all channels.
2. **Inform and Engage with the Community:**
   Provide timely and relevant information to residents, businesses, and stakeholders; encouraging public involvement and feedback in council activities, strengthening the council's relationship with the community.

3. **Provide Guidance for Council Officers, Members, and Partners:**
   Offer clear standards and practical advice to help all those acting on behalf of the council to communicate confidently and appropriately.
4. **Support Transparency, Compliance, and Accessibility:**
   Ensure council communications demonstrate openness and accountability, meet statutory obligations, protect personal data, and present information in a clear and accessible way for all members of the community in line with relevant legislation, including the Equality Act and Accessibility Regulations 2018.

Legal Framework

Brackley Town Council's communications activity must comply with relevant legislation, statutory duties, and recognised guidance governing the operation of local authorities in England. Communications must always be conducted in a lawful, ethical, and transparent manner.

Key legislation and guidance relevant to council communications includes:

- **Local Government Act 1972:**
  Local authority governance, transparency, and public access to meetings.
- **Local Government Act 1986 and Local Government Act 1988:**
  Local authority publicity and political neutrality
- **Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity:**
  Standards for council publicity and communications.
- **UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018:**
  Personal data protection and information handling.
- **Freedom of Information Act 2000:**
  Public access to information held by public authorities.
- **Equality Act 2010:**
  Fair, inclusive, and non-discriminatory communications.
- **Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018:**
  Accessibility requirements for public sector digital content.
- **Representation of the People Act 1983:**
  Election communications and political neutrality.
- **Guidance issued by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC):**
  Sector guidance and best practice.

All communications must also comply with Brackley Town Council's adopted Standing Orders and related council policies. This policy is subject to periodic review to ensure ongoing compliance with legislation and best practice.

Principles & Responsibilities

Core Principles

The core principles guiding Brackley Town Council's communications are clarity, accuracy, consistency and timeliness. Information shared should be useful, relevant and informative. Communications will be open and transparent, presented in plain English wherever possible, and tailored in tone to suit the channel, audience and subject matter. All communications should uphold and positively reflect the council's reputation.
The council will aim to reach its community effectively, using established traditional methods while exploring and adopting new channels and skills where appropriate. Consistent, well-managed communications help build trust and engagement with residents, support feedback on council projects and initiatives, and reinforce Brackley Town Council as a reliable source of local information.

Responsibilities

Clear roles and responsibilities are essential to ensure that all council communications are accurate, timely, and consistent. The responsibilities of key positions are as follows:

- **Communications Officer:**
  The Communications Officer is the main point of contact for all council communications. This role leads the development and delivery of the council's communication activities, including marketing, social media, print media, managing external media enquiries, maintaining the council's website, producing newsletters, and promoting council services, events and initiatives to residents and stakeholders.

  The Communications Officer works closely with councillors, officers and external partners to ensure information is accurate, consistent and accessible and reflects the council's priorities and values. Where necessary the Communications Officer will also monitor emerging issues, advise on communication approaches, and support internal communications within the council.

- **Clerk & Deputy Clerk:**
  The Clerks ensure that communications comply with legislation and council policies, and act in their place if the Communications Officer is unavailable.
- **Mayor, Deputy Mayor & Committee Chairs:**
  May act as a spokesperson if the Communications Officer and Clerks are unavailable.
- **Councillors:**
  Councillors represent the council and its work, and are encouraged to engage with residents and staff, but must not speak on behalf of the council unless specifically authorised.

- **Staff:**
  All staff should adhere to this policy and ensure that their communications are professional, clear, and consistent with the council's standards.

Internal & External Communications

Internal communications are those that take place between any combination of council staff and councillors. This includes all discussions relating to council business and operations. In certain circumstances internal communications can extend to parties acting on behalf of, or in partnership with the council, such as contractors and volunteers. Internal communications should be clear, professional, and always in line with the Brackley Town Council's code of conduct.

External communications are any messages or information shared from the council, its staff, or councillors to residents, businesses, stakeholders, or the wider public. All external communications should be accurate, timely, and consistent, reflecting the council's values and priorities. They should follow this policy to ensure transparency, maintain trust, and promote engagement with the community.

Corporate Identity & Branding

A corporate identity, or brand, is the visual and stylistic representation of an organisation. It is made up of elements such as logos, colours, fonts, graphics and imagery, which together create a recognisable and consistent public image.

Brackley Town Council's corporate identity includes its logo assets including the council crest and text logo, colour palette (Navy, Yellow, Red), fonts, graphical elements, and other visual assets, as approved by the council.

All communications reflect back on the council and influence public perception. Consistency with corporate identity is therefore essential. The Communications Officer is responsible for overseeing and approving all council communications, marketing, and the use of corporate assets. Communications should be presented uniformly and appropriately for each medium and audience. Any use of council logos or branded assets externally must be approved by the Communications Officer before publication.

Data Protection & Freedom of Information

Brackley Town Council's communications must comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 when handling personal information. Personal data is any information that relates to an identifiable individual, such as names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers.

This data must be collected for a specified purpose, and kept secure. Data should be limited to what is necessary for the purpose for which it was collected, accurate and retained no longer than is necessary.

Personal data must be stored securely by using council-approved systems with appropriate access controls in place. It should not be shared unless there is a lawful basis for doing so, and only the minimum amount of personal information necessary should be included in communications.

Only council email accounts and approved communication channels, as defined by the products provided through the council's IT partner, may be used for council business. Personal email accounts and social platforms must not be used to discuss issues related to the council. Using personal or non-council communication apps for council business can create complications for both UK GDPR and FOI compliance, as the council may be required to access and provide that information even if it is stored on private platforms.

Individuals have rights under UK GDPR to access, correct, or erase their data. Freedom of Information requests require the council to provide any recorded information it holds relating to a specific topic or individual. This can include emails, documents, notes, or other communications.

Further guidance and best practice are provided in the Council's Data Protection Policy - UK GDPR.

Key Points for Staff & Councillors

When handling emails or other communications, councillors and staff must ensure that personal data is managed in accordance with this policy.
To support compliance, they will:

- Only collect personal information that is necessary for council business
- Be clear why the information is being collected and how it will be used
- Store personal data securely on council-approved systems
- Not use personal or non-council platforms for council business
- Check recipient addresses carefully before sending emails
- Securely delete information once a project or matter has concluded
- Not share personal or sensitive data unless there is a lawful reason
- Remain aware that all recorded information relating to council business may be subject to Freedom of Information requests

Definitions

Personal Data
Personal data is any information that can identify a living individual. This includes explicit details such as names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses, in addition to any information that could indirectly identify someone.

Council Business

Council business refers to any information, communication, or activity relating to the work or responsibilities of the Council. This includes communications made by councillors or staff when acting in their official capacity.

Councillors and staff must keep Council and personal communications separate. If Council business is conducted through personal accounts, they fall within the Council's responsibilities as a data controller, and these personal accounts will then be liable to Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information requests.

Communication Channels

Internal Digital:

Internal digital communications refer to the use of council-approved platforms such as email (Outlook) and collaboration tools (Microsoft Teams) for conducting council business. Communications should be clear, relevant, and maintain an appropriate tone for a working environment.

Council-issued email accounts must be used for all council activity. The use of personal email accounts, messaging apps, or non-council platforms is prohibited, as these present risks to data security and compliance.

Councillors and staff are responsible for maintaining account security, including the use of strong passwords and appropriate access controls, and must not share account details with anyone other than the Communications Officer, Clerks, or the council's IT support provider. In the event of a system failure or disruption, staff and councillors should follow guidance provided by the council's IT support provider, to ensure continuity of operations.

Internal Traditional:

Internal traditional communications refer to non-digital interactions between staff, Clerks, and councillors, including meetings, briefings, telephone conversations, informal discussions, and handwritten correspondence relating to council business.

All such communications should be conducted in a respectful, clear, and constructive manner. Councillors and staff are expected to act in accordance with Brackley Town Council's Code of Conduct, and Employee Handbook at all times when engaging in these forms of communication.

Where standards of conduct are not met, concerns should be addressed in line with the council's adopted Complaints Procedure and relevant internal policies.

External Digital:

External digital communications refer to information shared by the council with residents, businesses, and stakeholders through online platforms. These include the council website,

social media channels, email newsletters, and other digital communication tools used to inform, update, and engage the community.

Social Media

Definition

Social media refers to online platforms that enable user interaction and the sharing of content in various formats, including text, images, video, and audio. These platforms allow participants to create, comment on, or view content, and facilitate communication across multiple devices such as computers, smartphones, and tablets.

Social media enables information to be shared rapidly and widely, supporting one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many interactions in real time or intermittently. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, and X.

Brackley Town Council uses social media as a tool to engage with residents, businesses, community groups, and other stakeholders. Social media provides an opportunity to share news, promote events and initiatives, and reach audiences that may not access other forms of Council communication.

Account Management and Moderation

Official Council social media accounts are managed by the Communications Officer, with oversight and support from the Clerk(s). Content published via these accounts must reflect the Council's positions and decisions, and be consistent with its communication standards and legal obligations.

Councillors and staff may contribute ideas or suggest content, but responsibility for publishing and moderating posts remains with the Communications Officer. In their absence, updates may be carried out by other authorised Officers, provided that all content, comments, and activity is approved by the Clerk(s).

Best Practice

To ensure social media is used effectively and responsibly, users should engage openly and respectfully with residents, responding promptly and honestly to enquiries, and sharing useful content in an approachable professional tone, ensuring that original sources are always credited. All activity should aim to protect the council's reputation by adhering to these values.
Users should avoid broadcasting unverified or misleading content, covering up mistakes, posting content that could damage the Council's reputation, sharing confidential material, or leaving accounts unattended for extended periods. Disrespectful, argumentative, or defamatory language is strictly prohibited.

Posting and Engagement

Council accounts are used to provide timely, accurate, and relevant updates, including news, event announcements, and information from partners or local organisations. Posts should be professional, clear, and respectful, and encourage engagement where appropriate.

Social media activity is most effective when integrated into the Council's broader communication strategy. Posts should complement and reflect other channels, including the website, newsletter, and printed publications, to ensure consistent messaging and maximum reach.

Comments and interactions on Council social media accounts must be monitored and responded to appropriately, using an informative, helpful, and approachable tone. Council accounts should only comment to provide useful information, acknowledge residents' statements, confirm that appropriate action is being taken, or direct users to the relevant organisation or service.

Brackley Town Council may follow, like, or share messages from partner organisations, local media, and other relevant bodies to help its messages reach a wider audience. Following or liking another account does not imply endorsement of that individual, organisation, or their views. However, if a followed or associated account shares content that does not align with the Council's communication objectives, the Communications Officer may choose to unfollow or disengage from that account to protect the reputation of the Council's online presence.

If any Brackley Town Council social media activity receives negative attention and gains significant public engagement, the Communications Officer and clerks will respond in line with the social media escalation protocol. This protocol provides a clear, step-by-step framework for handling such situations, ensuring councillors and staff act appropriately while protecting the council's reputation.

Mayor's Account Oversight

The Mayor's official social media accounts are managed by the Mayor, with guidance and oversight from the Communications Officer to ensure all content supports Brackley Town Council's communication objectives and standards. The Mayor may post, comment, and share content from these accounts, provided it is appropriate and consistent with Council messaging. The Communications Officer is available to advise on best practice and provide support if the Mayor has questions or is unsure about any online activity, helping to maintain a professional and accurate presence.

Councillors and Staff: Personal Use

Councillors and staff are entitled to maintain personal social media accounts, however, when posting personally, individuals must not imply that they are representing Brackley Town Council.

Personal accounts should remain for personal use and not be used to discuss, comment on, or engage in Council business. Users should remember that personal activity can still reflect on the Council, so posts should be appropriate for a councillor or staff member.

All users must follow the Council's Code of Conduct, relevant policies, and legislation, including data protection. Confidential information, derogatory content, or anything that could harm the Council's reputation must not be shared or engaged with.

If councillors or staff are unsure about social media use, they should contact the Communications Officer for guidance and support. For those needing extra assistance, additional social media training may be arranged upon request through the Communications Officer or clerks.

Risks and Considerations

While social media is a valuable tool for communication, there are inherent risks that must be managed. Content posted on social media is publicly accessible and can be widely shared, including beyond the intended audience, and may be retained even after removal.

Posts made in haste or without verification can inadvertently escalate situations or spread misinformation. Councillors and staff should take care to verify information before sharing, avoid posting unsubstantiated or misleading content, and never disclose confidential Council information. Awareness of these risks helps protect both the Council's reputation and the integrity of its communications.

Account Security and Legal Considerations

All social media accounts associated with Brackley Town Council must be protected with secure, unique passwords and access limited to authorised users. Any suspected impersonation, account takeover, or misuse should be reported immediately to the Communications Officer and the relevant platform administrators. Users must ensure that content shared complies with all applicable legislation, including copyright, data protection, and defamation laws, and should take care to avoid posting material that could damage the Council's reputation or breach confidentiality. Maintaining secure and legally compliant accounts safeguards both the Council and the integrity of its communications.

Digital Newsletter

Definition

The Brackley Town Council digital newsletter is an email-based publication distributed to subscribers who have opted in to receive updates. It is produced using a professional digital email publication platform. The newsletter collects recent news from the Council website alongside regularly updated and useful information about the town, providing residents with a concise summary of current Council activities and community information.

Tone and Style

Newsletter content must be clear, concise, and consistent with Brackley Town Council's communication standards. It should be professional, approachable, and engaging, ensuring information is easy to read and understand. Content should reflect the Council's identity, values, and reputation while providing relevant and timely updates.

Management and Administration

Overall responsibility for the newsletter rests with the Communications Officer, supported by the Clerk(s). In the absence of the Communications Officer, authorised Officers may assist with content preparation and distribution, provided that all activity is communicated and approved by the Clerk(s).

Content Planning and Scheduling

The newsletter is scheduled for distribution every two weeks, however, this may be adjusted in response to news volume or operational priorities, such as during periods of increased activity or major events. This approach ensures subscribers receive regular communication and that all content remains accurate, relevant, and of consistently high quality.

Public Facing Email

Definition

Public-facing email refers to email communication sent by Brackley Town Council when corresponding with residents, businesses, community groups, partner organisations, and other stakeholders. These communications form part of the Council's official correspondence and represent the organisation in a professional capacity.

Tone and Style

All public-facing email communication must be clear, professional, and courteous. Messages should be written in plain English, avoiding unnecessary jargon or overly technical language. Communication should remain helpful, informative, and respectful, ensuring that recipients can easily understand the information provided. Emails should reflect the Council's identity, values, and reputation, maintaining a consistent and professional tone at all times.

Responsibilities

All staff and councillors are responsible for ensuring that public-facing email communication meets the Council's standards. Users should respond to enquiries in a timely manner, or direct them to the appropriate officer where necessary. Where communication relates to

Council policy, official positions, or sensitive matters, users should seek guidance from the Clerk(s) or Communications Officer before responding.

External Traditional:

Town Talk

Definition

Town Talk is Brackley Town Council's printed magazine, distributed to households across Brackley on a quarterly basis. Typically produced as a 12 or 16 page publication, Town Talk provides useful information, updates, and news relevant to residents. It serves as one of the Council's primary communication channels and plays a key role in ensuring accessible communication with the community.

Content Direction, Tone and Style

Content within Town Talk should be informative, useful, and relevant to Brackley residents. Articles may include Council updates, information from public services, and content from partner organisations such as local authorities and public bodies. Space may also be allocated for community-focused articles where appropriate.

All content must align with the Council's communication standards, maintaining a professional, clear, and accessible tone. The publication must not include direct promotion of private businesses, in line with the Council's wider communications policy.

Responsibilities

Overall responsibility for Town Talk rests with the Communications Officer. They are responsible for planning, content coordination, editing, and production of the publication. Printing and distribution are undertaken by an external provider appointed by the Council. The Communications Officer is responsible for coordinating with the appointed provider to ensure production timelines and quality standards are met. In the absence of the Communications Officer, authorised Officers may assist with preparation and publication, with oversight and approval from the Clerk(s).

Councillors are encouraged to engage with the Communications Officer by contributing ideas, suggesting topics, and submitting articles, including those based on issues raised through engagement with residents. Contributions are not obligatory, and editorial oversight and final content decisions remain with the Communications Officer.

Audience

Town Talk is delivered to every residence within Brackley, reaching a diverse audience across all ages and demographics. As a universally distributed publication, it supports inclusive

communication and ensures that residents who may not engage with digital platforms continue to receive timely and relevant Council information.

Physical and Design Standards

Town Talk represents Brackley Town Council and must maintain a high standard of presentation and production. Writing quality, tone, and layout should reflect the Council's professional identity and communication standards.

Design, typography, and colour use for Council-led content must align with the Council's corporate identity to ensure consistency. Printing quality, including paper weight, colour reproduction, and overall finish, should also be maintained at an appropriate standard, as these elements reflect directly on the Council's reputation and the perceived quality of its communications.

Schedule and Distribution

Town Talk is produced on a quarterly basis, with editions typically issued in winter, spring, summer, and autumn. This schedule provides regular, structured communication with residents while allowing sufficient time for planning, content development, and production. The schedule may be adjusted where necessary to accommodate operational requirements or exceptional circumstances.

Noticeboards

Definition

Brackley Town Council noticeboards are physical display boards located at the Council Office, outside the Town Hall, and outside Egerton Hall. They provide a visible, public-facing channel for sharing timely Council information and relevant local updates.

Purpose and Audience

Noticeboards are intended for all pedestrians and passers-by, offering easily accessible information to residents and visitors who may not engage with digital communications. They support inclusive communication by providing key updates in a public space.

Responsibilities

The Communications Officer is responsible for preparing content for display, arranging print materials, and collecting all necessary assets, ensuring they are up to date and formatted clearly. The Facilities Team is responsible for installing and maintaining the noticeboard materials, provided by the Communications Officer.

Content

Noticeboard content includes information on Brackley Town Council projects, events, consultations, and meetings. The Communications Officer may also display useful or informative content from other local authorities, local services, or utilities where relevant. Non-Council-led events with Council involvement, such as collaborations or donations to the Mayor's charity, may also be included if appropriate. Content must align with Council communication standards and avoid marketing private businesses.

Scheduling Guidelines

Physical assets, such as posters for Council-led events, are generally displayed around four weeks before the event, coordinated with digital communications where possible. General reminders and useful information may remain on the boards for as long as they are relevant, provided space is available for Council content. Scheduling is flexible and may be adjusted to accommodate operational priorities or new content.

Print

Definition

Brackley Town Council produces a range of printed materials for public communication, including leaflets, posters, banners, and signage. These materials provide residents and visitors with timely information on Council services, events, consultations, and other relevant initiatives.

Purpose and Audience

Printed materials are designed to reach a broad audience in both public and community spaces, complementing digital communications. They ensure important information is accessible to residents who may not engage with online channels.

Responsibilities

The Communications Officer has overall responsibility for the content, design, and messaging of all print materials, with final approval authority. The Facilities and Estates Team is responsible for coordinating the placement and installation of banners, posters, and signage, and must seek confirmation from the Communications Officer before producing or displaying any public-facing print media.

Content and Design

All print content must align with Brackley Town Council communication objectives and standards. This includes maintaining professional tone, clarity, and consistency with corporate branding, including layout, colours, fonts, and logos. Printed materials must avoid

promoting private businesses, unless explicitly permitted under Council communications policy (for example, in the case of sponsorship or collaboration with Council events).

Press Releases

Definition

Press releases are official written communications issued by Brackley Town Council to inform local, regional, or national media about Council news, events, initiatives, or important information affecting the community. They are concise, factual, and professional in tone, providing journalists with accurate and clear information to support coverage. Press releases may be distributed via email, media portals, or other appropriate channels depending on the intended audience and context.

Use Cases

Press releases are used to communicate announcements about Council-led projects or services, updates on public consultations, policies, or decision-making, and reports on major events, ceremonies, or civic engagements. They may also be issued for emergency notifications or urgent public information.

Creation and Approval Process

The Communications Officer is responsible for drafting, reviewing, and approving all press releases. The Clerk(s) provide oversight to ensure compliance with Council policies, legal obligations, and messaging standards. Councillors may contribute ideas, provide input, or suggest content; however, the Communications Officer retains final responsibility for wording, tone, and distribution. All press releases must be accurate, clear, timely, and consistent with the Council's communication objectives.

Emergency or Urgent Releases

In situations requiring immediate communication, such as safety warnings, urgent service updates, or sensitive council matters that may attract significant public attention, press releases may be issued on an expedited basis. This can include incidents or issues where timely information is critical to maintaining public confidence or managing reputational risk. In these cases, the social media escalation protocol should also be referenced to ensure consistent messaging across all channels.

Office Phones

Definition

The Brackley Town Council office phone system is the official channel for verbal communication between the Council and residents, businesses, community groups, and other

stakeholders. It is used to provide information, answer enquiries, and direct callers to the appropriate officer or service.

Tone

All staff answering calls must adopt a professional, courteous, and approachable manner. Communication should be clear, patient, and respectful, ensuring that callers feel listened to and supported. Staff should provide accurate information and avoid technical jargon unless necessary, keeping explanations accessible and easy to understand.
Calls should always be handled with patience and composure. Staff must avoid language or responses that could escalate tension, imply judgement, or appear dismissive. In situations where a caller becomes verbally aggressive or distressed, staff should follow de-escalation principles, remain calm, and politely offer to escalate the matter to a senior officer or arrange a follow-up.

Responsibilities

All staff are responsible for answering phones in line with this policy and Council standards. Calls involving complaints must be recorded and managed according to the Council's complaints procedure. Staff must ensure commitments made during calls are followed up, maintaining confidentiality and accuracy at all times. Senior officers and the Clerk(s) provide oversight and support to ensure staff adhere to procedures and professional standards.

Public Facing / In Person (Office and in the Field)

Definition

Public facing communication refers to all verbal interactions between Brackley Town Council staff or councillors and residents, visitors, businesses, or other stakeholders, whether in the Council office, at Council-run events, or out in the community. This includes providing information, answering queries, and offering guidance on Council services and local initiatives.

Tone

All in-person communication should be professional, courteous, and approachable. Staff and councillors should provide clear and accurate information, listen actively, and respond respectfully to all enquiries. Interactions should reflect the Council's values, promoting trust, transparency, and helpfulness.

Staff and councillors must not make statements that could be interpreted as official Council policy unless authorised. Personal opinions should be clearly identified as such and not presented as Council guidance. Staff and councillors should remain calm and composed in all interactions, avoiding language that could escalate tension, imply judgement, or appear dismissive.

Handling Verbal Escalation

In situations where a resident becomes upset, confrontational, or distressed, staff and councillors should maintain composure, avoid argumentative responses, and refrain from making promises or commitments beyond their authority. Escalation should be handled politely and professionally by:

- Acknowledging the concern without agreeing to unverified claims
- Offering to escalate the matter to a senior officer if required
- Suggesting a follow-up via phone, email, or formal channels if appropriate
  Staff and councillors must avoid reacting emotionally, interrupting, or using dismissive language, and should always prioritise safety and professionalism.

Letters to Residents

Definition

Letters to residents are formal written communications issued by Brackley Town Council to provide information, updates, or guidance on Council services, events, consultations, or other matters affecting the community. Letters may be sent in paper or digital format, depending on the context and recipient preference.

Tone and Content

All letters should be professional, clear, and appropriate to the intended audience. The tone should reflect the purpose of the communication, whether informative, advisory, or celebratory, and remain consistent with the Council's values. Content should be concise, accurate, and free from technical jargon where possible, ensuring accessibility and understanding across all resident demographics. Sensitive or complex matters should be handled with particular care, maintaining clarity while remaining respectful.

Approval and Oversight

All letters should be reviewed and approved by either the Clerk(s) or Communications Officer prior to dispatch. In their absence, an authorised officer may assess correspondence.

Meetings and Public Speaking

Definition

Meetings and public speaking cover all official Council gatherings, events, and occasions where Brackley Town Council staff or councillors address members of the public, community groups, or partner organisations. This includes formal meetings, presentations, public consultations, and speaking engagements representing the Council.

Tone and Conduct

All communication in meetings and public speaking must adhere to the Council's core communication principles. Speakers should remain professional, courteous, and respectful, ensuring that messages are clear, accurate, and accessible to the intended audience. When expressing personal opinions or commentary, speakers must clearly distinguish these from official Council policy or positions to avoid any potential misinterpretation.

Responsibilities and Approval

All planned public speaking related to Council matters should be approved by the Communications Officer to ensure alignment with Council messaging and communication standards. Councillors and staff may contribute ideas or draft content for speeches, but final approval rests with the Communications Officer to safeguard consistency, accuracy, and adherence to Council policy.

Special Considerations

Survey's & Consultations

Definition

Surveys and consultations are structured methods for gathering feedback, opinions, and information from residents, stakeholders, and community groups. These may be conducted in digital or physical formats, depending on the context and intended audience.

Use Case

These tools are used to inform Council decisions, assess public opinion, and engage residents on specific projects, policies, or initiatives.

Tone and Content

All surveys and consultation materials must be clear, professional, and neutral, avoiding bias. Questions and information should be accessible, concise, and easy to understand.

Approval and Oversight

All surveys and consultation materials must be approved by the Communications Officer before distribution.

Responses and Data Management

Responses must be carefully considered to inform Council decision-making. Outputs and data must be handled in line with the Council's Data Protection and GDPR policies, ensuring confidentiality and secure storage.

Copyright and Third-Party Content

All content published by Brackley Town Council must respect copyright and licensing requirements. Any images, videos, text, or other materials created by third parties should only be used with permission and correctly attributed. Users must not copy or share content in a way that infringes the rights of others, and all use of third-party material must comply with copyright, intellectual property, and licensing laws. The Communications Officer is responsible for ensuring that third-party content is lawful, appropriately credited, and consistent with the Council's standards.

Photography/Filming

Photography and filming for Brackley Town Council communications includes any images or video captured for use in social media, newsletters, press releases, or other Council publications. All photography and filming undertaken for Brackley Town Council communications must comply with relevant legal and ethical standards.

In public spaces, photography is permitted, but care must be taken to avoid misuse or publication that could defame, harass, or misrepresent subjects. At private or controlled events, explicit consent must be obtained from attendees. This can be provided through clear signage informing participants that photography and filming are taking place, or via direct verbal or written consent.

Photographers, whether internal staff or outsourced, must adhere to the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 (UK GDPR), the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Children Act 1989/2004, ensuring that all images are used responsibly, stored securely, and published only for legitimate Council communications purposes.

External and Legacy Media

External and legacy media refers to traditional communication channels such as newspapers, radio, television, and other non-digital outlets. These channels are used to share Council news, announcements, and information with residents and stakeholders who may not engage with digital platforms, ensuring broad accessibility and coverage.

All interactions with legacy media must be professional, accurate, and consistent with Brackley Town Council's communication objectives and standards. Staff and councillors must not speak to the media on behalf of the Council unless explicitly authorised. Councillors may

engage with the press as individuals representing their wards, but it must always be clear that their views do not necessarily reflect Council policy or opinion.

The Communications Officer is responsible for drafting, reviewing, and approving content intended for legacy media. For sensitive or potentially contentious issues, the Clerk(s) should also review and authorise communications to ensure accuracy, legal compliance, and alignment with Council policy.

Resident Banner Guidelines

Locations:

Resident banners may only be displayed at designated Council sites, including:

- Flower beds at the Junction of Banbury Road and the High Street
- Zipwire Park at the junction of Humphries Drive and Pavillons Way
- Railings surrounding Poppyfields Way Park

Permitted Banners

Banners installed on Council-owned land must be non-commercial in nature, appropriate in content, and professionally presented. The Council reserves the right to refuse or remove any banner for reasons including offensive, inflammatory, or otherwise inappropriate material, or in response to multiple complaints.

Poppyfields Park - Special Considerations
The Council recognises that Poppyfields Park offers a valuable space to share information with the local community. As a special exemption, banners promoting commercial or non-commercial events taking place within Brackley may be permitted. Banners for events outside of Brackley, and all other commercial banners remain prohibited.

Application and Approval
Permission to install a banner must be obtained in advance via the Council office, either by phone or email, and approved by the Clerk. The approval process will confirm the permitted installation and removal dates, as well as any specific requirements regarding banner content or display.

Removal and Storage
Banners installed without permission, outside designated areas, or remaining more than three days beyond the permitted period, will be removed and stored securely at Council premises. Reasonable efforts will be made to contact the banner owner to arrange collection. Banners not collected within two weeks of removal, or where the owner cannot be reasonably identified, will be disposed of responsibly.

Representation of Private Business

Brackley Town Council is prohibited from directly marketing private business interests across all communication channels. This restriction ensures that Council communications remain impartial and focused on public service. The Council may, however, share and highlight the work of charities, non-profit organisations, community groups, and similar entities.
In limited circumstances, private businesses may be mentioned in Council communications, for example when a business directly sponsors a Council event or is involved in an official Mayoral engagement such as openings or visits. Any inclusion must be relevant, proportionate, and consistent with the Council's communication objectives, avoiding direct marketing of the business. References should focus on acknowledging support or contribution rather than promoting products, services, or the business itself.

Certain private businesses may be referenced in council communications solely to provide residents with essential information that supports day-to-day life. Such references are strictly informational and not promotional, for example, providing details such as opening hours or locations of local banks, post offices, or other key services. All content must remain factual, neutral, and relevant to the community's needs.

When communicating directly with residents, whether in person, by telephone, or via email, staff may provide information about local businesses, services, or organisations to be informative and helpful. In all cases, it must be made clear that the information is provided for guidance only and does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Brackley Town Council.

Security & Safety

All staff and councillors are responsible for maintaining the security and confidentiality of Council communications. Sensitive information must not be shared, leaked, or disclosed outside of authorised channels.

Each individual is responsible for protecting their accounts and devices, using strong, unique passwords and exercising care when accessing Council communications platforms. Devices should not be left unattended, and passwords or access credentials must not be shared.
Any incidents involving lost or stolen devices, compromised accounts, or suspected unauthorised access must be reported to the Communications Officer immediately. The Communications Officer will escalate the issue as quickly as possible, where appropriate, to the Council's IT provider or partner to ensure that data is protected and any necessary mitigation steps are implemented. Prompt reporting and escalation help safeguard Council data, maintain compliance with legal obligations, and protect the Council's reputation.

Complaints & Negative Correspondence

All complaints must be handled professionally, courteously, and respectfully, in line with the Council's Complaints Policy. Staff and councillors should provide clear and accurate information, avoiding argument or retaliation.

Vexatious, abusive, or persistent correspondence should be escalated to the Communications Officer or Clerk(s). Anonymous complaints should be assessed carefully, responding where possible while recognising practical limitations.

Serious or sensitive issues must follow the escalation procedure, ensuring consistent, fair, and appropriate management of all correspondence.

Edge Case Communications

Out of Hours Comms

Out of hours communications refers to any Council-related contact, messaging, or activity that occurs outside the Council's normal operating hours. These communications may be necessary in exceptional circumstances where timely information is essential.
Such circumstances may include urgent safety notices, significant operational issues, unplanned closures, sensitive situations that could escalate if not addressed promptly, or nationally significant events such as the passing of the monarch.

Any out of hours communications must be coordinated with the Communications Officer or, in their absence, the Clerk(s). Staff and councillors involved should ensure that all messaging is clear, accurate, and consistent with Council standards, avoiding speculation or unofficial statements. Communications should remain professional, informative, and measured, prioritising the delivery of essential information while maintaining the Council's reputation and following established escalation protocols.

Elections

During the pre-election period, the Council and its representatives must take care to ensure that all communications remain neutral and do not support any political party or candidate. Official Council communications, including social media, newsletters, and press releases, should focus on factual information, statutory duties, and essential service updates.

Comms activity must be adapted to avoid content that could be perceived as influencing the outcome of the election. Staff and councillors should refer to the latest guidance from the Electoral Commission to ensure compliance with current requirements and any changes that may affect communication practices during this period.

Crisis & Emergency Comms

Crisis and emergency communications cover situations that require immediate or coordinated public messaging, such as safety incidents, operational emergencies, or sensitive events that may affect the community. In these cases, all communications must follow the established chain of command, with content approved by the Communications Officer and, where necessary, the Clerk(s). The social media escalation protocol should be used to ensure timely,

accurate, and appropriate messaging while protecting the Council's reputation and providing clear information to residents.

Governance & Monitoring

Monitoring & Review

Brackley Town Council will review this Communications Policy on a three-year cycle to ensure it remains current and effective. Reviews may also be initiated in response to significant developments in public communication methods, technology, or legislative requirements. All new staff and councillors will receive induction and training on the policy to ensure understanding of their responsibilities and adherence to the Council's communication standards.

Related policies

- GDPR Statement – Privacy Policy
- Social Media Escalation Protocol
- Code of Conduct
- Complaints Policy