



Torpoint Town Council Communications Policy

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1. Introduction

Torpoint Town Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders. Communications is a complex topic and, contrary to popular belief, it is about ensuring good communication is at the heart of everything Torpoint Town Council does, not simply public relations. Currently the Council use the following forms of communication: press releases, website, customer service, noticeboards, the Annual Report and Council documents such as agendas, minutes of meetings and letters.

This policy will look at how the Council will develop its communications over the next 12 months, whilst ensuring everyone understands the fundamentals of effective communications. The overall aim is for Council communications to be a two-way process; to give people the information to understand accurately what the Council does, so they can make informed decisions and to get information from residents and stakeholders so the Council can understand their needs.

2. Our aims, mission and vision

The Council's mission is to ensure a sustainable prosperous town economy and environment, which embraces the whole community and recognises the unique design and location as a gateway to Cornwall and the Rame Peninsula, for the benefit of residents, partners, employees, stakeholders and visitors. The Council's communications will endeavour to: -

- Raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence levels;
- Raise awareness of services provided by the Council;
- Support businesses in the town;
- Support elected members in their role as community leaders and
- Welcome visitors to the town.

The Council's communications vision is that our residents will: -

- Know what services the Council provides and the quality of service they can expect;
- Feel confident and satisfied with the Council's services and its costs and
- Understand how to get involved with, or influence, the work of the Council.

3. What should the Council be communicating?

If the Council is to build a strong reputation, effectively inform residents, engage and improve customer satisfaction then the following will form the basis of its communications strategy: -

- Direct communications
- Perceived quality of services overall
- Perceived value for money and information about the Council's Finances
- Media coverage
- Council performance.

There is also a need for proactive and reactive information: -

- Proactively – telling people information to influence and change attitudes
- Reactively – giving residents information they want to know.

4. Who should the Council be communicating with?

The Council's audiences are wide and varied, but will typically include: -

- Residents
- Town Councillors
- Town Council employees
- The media
- Cornwall Council and Ward Councillors
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- The business community
- Other public sector organisations (for example: Police, Health, Fire)
- Visitors.

5. Method of communication

The Council will aim to deliver core actions which, if achieved, would have a marked impact on the Council's reputation and the perceptions of residents.

These are:

- Manage the media effectively to promote the Town Council
- Publish a regular Council communication for residents
- Ensure the Council brand is consistently linked to services
- Maintain and develop the Town Council website
- Make best use of Council noticeboards for the benefit of residents
- Make best use of social media for the benefit of residents.

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

The Council's approach will be pro-active, sensitive to the needs, values, language and cultural differences that exist within its communities and will make communication materials available in other formats where reasonable and appropriate.

5.1 Media enquiries and Press releases

The Town Clerk will be responsible for all media enquiries and responses on behalf of the Council. The Council is open and accountable and should always explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry. Press releases will be issued by the Town Clerk and will usually include a quote from the Chairman of the Council - Town Mayor. Press releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and alternative ways of communicating should be considered, e.g. posters, mailings, social media etc. Members of the Council are advised that the media are welcome to attend meetings. During meetings Councillors and staff should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture, rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what can be a complex issue or report.

Councillors and staff who have contact with the media in a personal capacity or as members of non-Council related organisations must not refer to their Council posts and must make it clear to the media that they are speaking in a personal capacity or on behalf of the non-Council related organisation.

Guidelines should be followed if commissioning photographs of children (i.e. under 18 years of age) or if planning photography of children at events and using visual media for publicity purposes.

5.2 Election periods

In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself (Purdah) all proactive publicity about candidates or other politicians is halted. During this period publicity must ensure that individual Councillors or political party do not gain any unfair advantage by appearing in corporate publicity.

5.3 Ensure the Torpoint Town Council brand is consistent

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

- Making sure all staff have access to electronic logos and templates (press releases, letters, etc.)
- Using a uniform font style and Council logo
- Developing a photographic library which supports the Council's brand and is available to staff, journalists and partners online
- Ensuring the brand is reinforced through visual media such as advertising.

5.4 Social media

Social networking is now a credible communication channel that is increasingly utilised by organisations, as well as individuals, as a means of developing online communities for gathering and disseminating information that is of mutual interest.

Launching our own Council pages would provide an effective real time, two-way communication channel. It will allow us to engage with online groups that may not normally interact willingly with the Council. It will also help provide more people with access to Council services and allow the Council to engage with new audiences such as the under 25's. It is a fast, efficient way of communicating as there are no lead-in production times for print or production, you can have a message up and available for viewing by your followers in minutes. Regular monitoring of these pages will be required in order for when specific questions or issues arise, the manpower is available to address the issues before the pages are launched. The benefits of Social Networking far outweigh any potential problems or difficulties, it is therefore suggested the Council launch Facebook and Twitter pages within the next 12 months. *See the separate Social Media Policy for more information.*

5.5 Noticeboards

The Council will display official/statutory notices on the town noticeboards, currently located at the following sites: -

- Torpoint Council Chambers (Buller Road and York Road)
- Torpoint Library
- Link into Learning (window), Fore Street
- Costcutter Stores, Trevithick Avenue.

Community groups and organisations are permitted to display notices, which have been authorised by the Town Clerk.

5.6 Website Administration and Maintenance

The Council will maintain a website which is regularly updated and contains key information about the Council and important events. The Council will further develop the website to ensure it keeps pace with media advances. The website shall contain material that arises from Council business including:-

- Agendas and minutes
- Information about the Town Council and Town Councillors
- Online enquiry system for booking Council facilities
- Reports, Surveys and any other material derived from the Town Council.

The website may also contain: -

- Historical and geographical information about the town of Torpoint
- News and local events
- Information about local businesses
- Details about local community groups.

The website shall not: -

- In principle contain material of a deliberately contentious or offensive nature
- In principle contain material that criticises or implies critic of one or more members of the public, individual Councillors, groups of Councillors or the Council as a whole
- Intentionally contain any material that is defamatory or in any way against the law or which could expose the Council to legal challenge.

5.7 Mayor's Communications

The Chairman (Town Mayor) of the Town Council has a wide-ranging remit and can be quoted in media material as well as undertaking media work across all areas of the Town Council's services, as required. The Chairman represents the Town Council for civic and ceremonial functions and will be pictured and quoted accordingly. The Chairman can pro-actively communicate with local media and all press releases are to be agreed by the Town Clerk.

5.8 Monitoring

It is important to monitor media for items about the Town Council in order to ensure that press releases and statements are picked up and used effectively and to keep tabs on what members of the community are saying about the Town Council.