



IT AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The Town Council understands that the use of digital and electronic communication enables it to interact in a manner that improves the communications both within the Town Council and between the Town Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Town Council has a website and uses emails to communicate. The Town Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Should the Town Council add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL – BUSINESS USE

Communications from the Town Council are expected to meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, respectful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Town Council does not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- If official council business, it will be moderated by the Town Clerk as the Proper Officer.

TOWN COUNCIL WEBSITE

Occasionally, the Town Council may direct those contacting the Council to its website to see the required information if it is in the public domain. The website can be found at <https://burystedmunds-tc.gov.uk> All information on the website is controlled by the Town Council. The Town Clerk is responsible for the website.

TOWN COUNCIL EMAIL

The Town Council has a dedicated email address towncouncilmail@burystedmunds-tc.gov.uk This email account is monitored and responded to during the working week and the emails will be answered as soon as practically possible.

The administration staff are responsible for dealing with these emails and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk or Assistant Clerk and otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Please note that all Town Council staff (except for the Town Clerk and the Town Warden) work part-time so will respond as soon as they can. The Town Council may not respond to every comment it receives particularly if it is experiencing a heavy workload or the comment is for information purposes only.

Emails to the Town Council become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.



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All Town Council staff have their own email address, and these are only monitored during their working hours.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION WITHIN THE TOWN COUNCIL

The Town Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working, and the use of electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement. Town Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct in all their work on behalf of the Town Council.

All Town Councillors have a dedicated email given to them once elected or co-opted onto the Council.

Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 covers meetings and proceedings of local authorities. Previously, paragraph 4(2)(b) requires principal and town councils to send summonses to attend meetings by post to their members' home addresses, or under 4(4), by post, to an alternative address specified. In practice, this covered all the papers to be considered at meetings, not just the agenda. The Government, under The Order made under Section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000 amended Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 to allow local authorities to send their members summonses to attend meetings, including agendas and related papers to meetings, electronically. The Town Council has amended its own Standing Orders to allow the authorising of the use of electronic communication. The electronic communication will include attachments, such as a meeting agenda or papers, or a web-link enabling a town councillor to view meeting papers.

As increased information becomes available electronically, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Town Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Town Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails and avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option (whilst ensuring that the people who need to know the information are copied in) and ensure that email trails have been removed.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION AWARENESS

Whilst town councils are expected to comply with Data Protection legislation, individual Councillors will also need to ensure that they protect an individual's personal data whether it is stored electronically or as a hard copy. This applies only to living individuals (not the deceased, companies, other authorities and charities)

Personal data includes:

- Names and addresses
- Telephone numbers
- Email addresses
- IP addresses

Councillors are required to implement the following agreed measures to comply with the legislation:

- Only use the Bury St Edmunds Town Council email account for town council correspondence



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- Ensure all town council correspondence includes the Bury St Edmunds Town Council footer containing the Privacy Statement or a link to the relevant page on the website (this will be provided by the Clerk)
- Ensure that all devices (computers, laptops, phones) are password protected.
- Not forward on emails or email threads as they may contain personal data
- Delete emails which are no longer required
- Where possible direct all correspondence to the Clerk who can obtain the necessary consent
- Where possible avoid holding an individual's information in a Councillor's home or on a Councillor's own PC. If a Councillor must hold information containing personal data on behalf of the Town Council, it needs to be stored securely in a locked room or cabinet or if on a PC, in an encrypted folder.
- Ensure that their antivirus software and operating system is up to date
- Ensure that their computers firewall is turned on
- Inform the Town Council Office of any breaches within 48 hours.