



WHITCHURCH TOWN COUNCIL

26. Communications & Marketing Policy (June 2017)

1. Introduction

This Policy is designed to guide the Town Council's Communications and Marketing activities for the next year. Communications activity is a key driver in public perception of overall Council performance. Research suggests that keeping residents informed, listening to their concerns and involving them when making decisions has a significant impact on their satisfaction with the Council and its services.

Marketing techniques are an integral part of a forward looking communications strategy. If it is to be meaningful and have some longevity, the Communications and Marketing strategy must reflect the corporate aims and priorities of the council. It will also reflect the principles set out in the Equalities Policy, Information and Data Protection Policy and Customer Care Policy, as well as being a vehicle for the delivery of other Council policies.

The Council's Corporate Strategy, entitled "Time To Lead the Community", states "The Council must articulate a clear direction, when it will then begin to have good news stories to tell. Robust policies and governance documents will set the rules about who can speak on behalf of the Council and what information can or can't be released. It is important to build up good relations with the local media and to issue press releases on important matters. It must also be clear who will be allowed to answer press enquiries and for them to be well prepared to do so."

There are a considerable number of actions in the Strategy which relate to communications and marketing, including:

- "We will work with partners to promote Whitchurch town as a place to live, work, shop and visit."
- "We will promote tourism and Whitchurch as a destination not to be missed, capitalising on our heritage and location to visit places of interest in the locality."
- "We will operate openly and share information through our website, notice boards and the media."
- To have excellent communications and transparency
 - We will continue to strive to improve the www.whitchurchcouncil.uk website.
 - We will publish an Information and Data Protection Policy.
 - We will review how residents can become more involved with our decision making.
 - We will report to each meeting on any decisions which have not been implemented.

2. Key Areas

Whitchurch Town Council's main areas of promotion, either exclusively or in partnership, are:

The Town:

- Promotion of the town to attract day visitors, shoppers and tourists
- Promotion to attract people looking to live in the town
- Promotion to businesses looking to invest in the town

The Council:

- Raising the image of the Authority
- Civic Centre promotion of the building and events within
- Statutory and other information to help residents and businesses understand its decision making, policies and priorities.
- Marketing of its services to ensure accessibility for all.

The Council will promote the town on its website, by improving signage, by supporting local events and by supporting local tourism and business initiatives. It will also use social media to engage with and keep its communities informed.

The Council will market its services and promote local governance through its website, through social media, notice boards and by supporting promotions of other public bodies and the voluntary and community organisations. It will adopt the town logo as part of its corporate image, which firmly roots the Council at the hub of the town and its community. It will however retain its Coat of Arms to reflect the Council's unique position as the elected body for the town. It will use the new town logo alongside its own on all advertising, promotion, posters and correspondence.

The Council will investigate the need for translation of information into other languages or for the visually impaired, how to access the hard to reach groups and will promote Whitchurch as "disability friendly".

People are an organisations biggest asset

- The reputation of Whitchurch Town Council lies in the hands of Councillors and staff
- The Councillors and staff meet local people and visitors daily

3. Objectives

Marketing and promotion activity for the Town Council must achieve at least one of the following:

- Improve public and community relations
- Drive income for WTC
- Raise the Council's profile
- Impart essential information
- Improve two-way communication with stakeholders, to help understanding of what they want.
- Increase recognition received for the Council's achievements.
- Increase involvement and interest in Council activities and engage people in the democratic process.

Marketing activity for the town must achieve one of the following:

- Drive footfall into the town from the community
- Drive visitors into the town
- Support local businesses
- Raise money for local charities
- Raise the town's profile in Shropshire and across the UK

4. Principles

The following principles will be adopted in all communications:

- Integrity and honesty
- Clarity
- Openness and accessibility

- Inclusiveness
- Listening and responding
- Accountability
- Consistency
- Accuracy
- Compliance with legislation and guidance

5. Stakeholders/key audiences

The stakeholders/key audiences of Whitchurch Town Council are:

- Residents
- Elected members
- Partners with the public sector (Shropshire Council, Police, Public Health, NHS, etc)
- Special interest groups including those with language or disability needs
- Business community
- Voluntary/community organisations
- Schools
- Press/media
- Town Council employees
- Potential user groups
- Visitors and tourists

6. Websites

There are 3 main websites serving Whitchurch:

www.whitchurch.info www.whitchurchcouncil.uk www.whitchurch-heritage.co.uk

- There should be mutual links between all 3 main websites serving Whitchurch
- There should be mutual links with county-wide websites
- Provide clarity on what each site is for, try to avoid duplication where possible
- Include links to social media sites
- The website addresses should be at the bottom of every brochure, leaflet, press release and advertisement created.

7. PR & Communications

- Use this policy as a PR & Communications Plan, which will be included in the Council's business plan.
- PROACTIVE: Plan ahead for positive PR opportunities that we want to tell people about – tell them about the new objectives and services.
- REACTIVE: Plan for responding to unforeseen events QUICKLY
- Introduce regular Town Council news to every household via a permanent space on a quarterly or monthly basis (the maximum allowed – Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity para. 28.). This news could be via Whitchurch Gossip magazine and/or local paper, including articles and events calendar.
- NETWORKING: with local press to build a rapport and trust.
- Media train individuals within Whitchurch Town Council to get the message across.
- Take opportunities to advertise in the local press when deemed suitable, but Whitchurch Town Council should be able to confirm that consideration has been given to the value for money that is being achieved. (Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity - para 10.)
- In some circumstances it will be difficult to quantify value for money, for example, where the publicity promotes a local amenity which is free to use. In such case Whitchurch Town Council should be able to show that they have given thought to alternative means of promoting the amenity and satisfied themselves that the means of publicity chosen is the most appropriate (Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity – para 12.)

8. Whitchurch Tourism

The Town Centre Manager will work closely with Whitchurch Chamber of Trade, local businesses and the Council's Tourist Information Hub to explore the following:

- Data capture – visitors to the Tourist Information Office could be given advice they need and then asked if they will give their name and email address, in return for some coupons and offers to use in the town during their visit. (Remember: Data capture is worth £1.25 per person)
- Promote the idea of a free prize draw for everyone who has given their name and email address. A prize per month could be donated by a local town centre business.
- Team up with local businesses to offer a booklet of coupons containing special offers for them to use.
- Once Whitchurch Town Council Tourism Hub have a list of names and email addresses a regular mailshot can be distributed with further incentives to bring people back to Whitchurch.
- Further opportunities include 'Friends & Family' coupons.

9. Friday Market – up to capacity?

The Town Centre Manager will:

- Carry out desk research into any type of produce that is not currently represented on the market and look on line for businesses to target in the area
- Produce a leaflet about the market. Liaise with businesses and explain the benefits of trading via the Friday Market and send them a leaflet with a special introductory offer.
- Incentivise potential stall holders by offering discount if stalls are paid in full for 12 months.

10. Other Council Facilities

The Civic Centre is a great public service hub for the Town Council. It is vital to establish a vision of what the Civic Centre is for. Strategy consultation responses have suggested more theatre productions, film nights and live concert streaming and 'night club' type of events would be welcomed.

A face lift for the main hall and changing facilities would give something positive to promote. It is a major asset which is currently well used, but poorly marketed. Once a vision is determined, a more detailed refurbishment can be developed and funding bids sought.

Future potential markets for the building also need to be considered, as will local competition, pricing policies, promotions, improvements to the product and concessions.

Customer satisfaction questionnaires should be developed and handed to each user to get regular feedback and understand where improvements could be made.

Wedding & Parties

- Weddings, family celebrations and parties are big business and people are looking for good value venues.
- Hub staff should offer a personal booking service to people who wish to book the Civic Centre for the above-mentioned events.
- A brochure could be produced to promote the Civic Centre, with paid-for advertising by local 'wedding/party-related' businesses, ie, cake makers, florists & accommodation providers and caterers.
- To consider obtaining a marriage license for the venue and also work with local churches to promote the Civic Centre for after-ceremony parties.

11. Getting the Product Right

The most important thing in improving the Council's image or when marketing services and facilities is to get a good product.

- Very good customer service.
- Professionalism
- Regular maintenance and painting & decorating schedule, providing a building fit for purpose.
- Having professional and interesting Council meetings.

12. Primary Publications and Communications Media

The following are primary publications and communications media which can be used by Whitchurch Town Council:

Publications:

- Agendas, reports and minutes:
 - Send to the Councillors and press in a timely manner
 - Upload Agendas and minutes to the Town Council website in a timely manner
 - Public copies of Agendas and Minutes to be available to view in the Civic Centre, on noticeboards and in the Library
 - Whitchurch Town Council papers
 - Annual Report
 - Strategy documents
 - Constitution
 - And other papers as deemed in the spirit of openness and fairness
- Noticeboards
 - Civic Centre
 - Bullring/Watergate Street
 - Elsewhere as appropriate

Media Relations

Press releases and feature material: Produced through the Town Clerk's office.

Media statements: These are mostly reactive and cleared with the Town Clerk

Advertisements: produced for information, promotional and recruitment purposes and to meet statutory requirements, (eg, public notices).

Communication

Town Council website: www.whitchurchcouncil.uk is a major vehicle for informing local people about the Town Council and the events and activities that take place in the Civic Centre.

Town website: www.whitchurch.info is the Whitchurch town website. News items about the Town Council's activities can be uploaded, all events happening at the Civic Centre and whole-town events organised by the Town Council staff can be added to the What's On calendar. This website is also advertised as the first point for information about the town.

Emails:

Social Media: See Appendix A, section G.

Face to Face

Annual Town Meeting: a chance for all residents to hear an update on events for the town and to give comments back to the Town Council. This meeting is held once a year before the end of May.

Surveys and Consultations: can be used to interact with residents about specific projects, plans and significant changes.

Civic Centre Hub: is the first point of contact for the majority of Whitchurch Town Council customers. Currently run alongside Shropshire Council's First Point of Contact staff, all staff work together well and cover each Council's work. This will need to be managed, especially if Shropshire Council withdraw staff cover, the Town Clerk will have the responsibility to negotiate and will keep all Town Councillors informed.

On-going

Town Council Grants: Whitchurch Town Council budgets for an annual grant pot and information about the grant application process and criteria are advertised in January/February and the grant closed on 1st April every year. The Finance Committee will discuss and agree which grants to allocate and make a recommendation to Full Council. The decision should be resolved by full Council no later than the month of June.

Events:

Run by Whitchurch Town Council staff in conjunction with volunteers:

- Spring Fair (1st Saturday in April)
- Food & Drink Festival (3rd weekend in May)
- Whitchurch Party in the Park (1st or 2nd Saturday in June)
- Gardeners' Markets x 2 annual (one in April and one early June)
- Christmas Lights switch-on

Run by other organisations with support from Whitchurch Town Council:

- The Makers' Markets (1st Saturday of every month, with exceptions agreed with organisers)
- Blackberry Fair (1st Saturday in October, Whitchurch Town Council allocate an annual sum to support this event)

Opportunities:

- Whitchurch Town Council could take the opportunity to have a stall at the monthly Makers' Market to speak with residents and promote the Town Council and Civic Centre.

Branding

The following should be clearly identifiable as Whitchurch Town Council:

- Whitchurch Town Council website
- Letter headed paper
- Compliment slips
- Purchase orders
- Business cards for key staff, ie, Town Clerk & Town Centre Manager
- Public notice advertisements
- Staff Uniforms for Facility Team members
- Signs on facilities such as Civic Centre or parks

Accessibility

Whitchurch Town Council contact details should always be kept up-to-date and freely available to make it as easy as possible for people to contact us via email, phone or website message. The office is staffed Monday-Friday 9am until 5pm and the Community Hub is staffed Monday-Friday 10am until 4pm and Saturday 10am until 1pm.

13. Dedicated Marketing Budget

As part of implementing the Policy, a marketing and communications (MARCOMs) plan, will be included within the Business Plan. A dedicated MARCOMs budget should be created. The approach to creating this budget should be a 'bottom-up' approach which will involve looking at each of the element of the marketing plan and assigning costs against these. Costs should be verified and kept as low as possible by seeking competitive quotes from suppliers (for things such as leaflet design and print and other areas where third parties are used). Once

committed to, the marketing budget should be managed by the Town Centre Manger and Responsible Financial Officer and should be spent accordingly.

14. Standards

The Council has adopted a **Protocol on Communications** (Appendix A), in support of the Council's Communication and Marketing Policy. Members must abide by this and a breach may also be a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct.

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011, applies to local councils as well as principal councils. Local authorities are required by law to have regard to the contents of this Code in coming to any decision on publicity. Publicity means "any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public". The code therefore applies in relation to all decisions by local authorities relating to paid advertising and leaflet campaigns, publication of free newspapers and newsheets and maintenance of websites –including the hosting of material which is created by third parties. Nothing in this code overrides the prohibition on the publication by local authorities of material which in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.

Publicity by local authorities should :-

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Paid for advertising must comply with the Advertising Standards Authority's Advertising Codes.

In relation to all publicity, local authorities should be able to confirm that consideration has been given to the value for money that is being achieved, including taking into account any loss of potential revenue arising from the use of local authority-owned facilities to host authority publicity.

In some circumstances it will be difficult to quantify value for money, for example where the publicity promotes a local amenity which is free to use. In such a case authorities should be able to show that they have given thought to alternative means of promoting the amenity and satisfied themselves that the means of publicity chosen is the most appropriate.

If another public authority, such as central government, has issued publicity on a particular topic, local authorities should incur expenditure on issuing publicity on the same matter only if they consider that additional value is achieved by the duplication of that publicity.

The purchase of advertising space should not be used as a method of subsidising voluntary, public or commercial organizations.

Local authorities should consider whether it is appropriate to seek advice from economic analyst, public relations experts or other sources of expert advice before embarking on a publicity campaign involving very large expenditure.

Local authorities should ensure that publicity relating to policies and proposals from central government is balanced and factually accurate. Such publicity may set out the local authority's views and reasons for holding those views, but should avoid anything likely to be

perceived by readers as constituting a political statement, or being a commentary on contentious areas of public policy.

Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy. It is acceptable for local authority publicity to correct erroneous material which has been published by other parties, despite the fact that the material being corrected may have been published with the intention of influencing the public's opinions about the policies of the authority.

Where paid-for advertising is used by local authorities, it should be clearly identified as being advertising.

Advertisements for the recruitment of staff should reflect the tradition of political impartiality of local authority employees.

Where local authority publicity addresses matters of political controversy it should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner.

In most circumstances it is acceptable for local authorities to publicise the work done by individual members of the authority. This might be appropriate, for example, when one councillor has been the "face" of a particular campaign. If views expressed by or attributed to individual councillors do not reflect the views of the local authority itself, such publicity should make this fact clear.

Maintenance by a local authority of a website permitting the posting of material by third parties constitutes a continuing act of publication by that local authority which must accordingly have a system for moderating and removing any unacceptable material. Where local authorities provide assistance to third parties to issue publicity they should ensure that the principles in this code are adhered to by the recipients of that assistance.

Local authorities should not incur any expenditure in retaining the services of lobbyists for the purpose of the publication of any material designed to influence public officials, Members of Parliament, political parties or the Government to take a particular view on any issue. Local authorities should not incur expenditure on providing stands or displays at conferences of political parties.

Local authorities should not publish or incur expenditure in commissioning in hard copy or on any website, newsletters, newssheets or similar communications which seek to emulate commercial newspapers in style or content. Where local councils do commission or publish newsletters, newssheets or similar communications, they should not issue them more frequently than monthly. Such communications should not include materials other than information for the public about the business, services and amenities of the council or other local service providers.

Publicity about local authorities and the services they provide should be freely available to anyone who wishes to receive such information in a format readily accessible and understandable by the person making the request or by any particular group for which services are provided.

All local authority publicity should clearly and unambiguously identify itself as a product of the local authority.

Publicity by local authorities may seek to influence positively the attitudes of local people or public behaviour in relation to matters of health, safety, crime prevention, race relations, equality, diversity and community issues. Local authorities should consider how any publicity they issue can contribute to the promotion of any duties applicable to them in relation to the elimination of discrimination, the advancement of equality and the fostering of good relations.

Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums.

PROTOCOL ON COMMUNICATIONS

Introduction

This protocol was adopted by Council on 15th June 2017, in support of the Council's Communication and Marketing Policy. It is based on a model by the National Association of Local Councils, but tailored to the needs of the Town Council.

A. Parish Council Correspondence

1. The point of contact for the town council is the Town Clerk, and it is to the Town Clerk that all correspondence for the parish council should be addressed.
2. The Town Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
3. No individual Councillor nor Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Town Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/ documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
4. All official correspondence should be sent by the Town Clerk or another officer authorised by the Town Clerk to do so, in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper. Emails are to be treated as other correspondence and may only be sent by authorised officers, on matters which are within their job descriptions and delegated authority.
5. The Mayor may sign letters prepared on his/her behalf by staff, but only on matters directly related to the role of Mayor.
6. Where correspondence from the Town Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to xxxxx). No blind email copies should be used.

B. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

1. Agendas should be clear and concise. Reports are to be attached where appropriate, which 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. Significant background documents should be circulated to Councillors.
2. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda, and will be contained in Members Briefings, which are to be circulated at least twice each month.
3. Where the Town Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Town Clerk, or with the Town Clerk's agreement.

C. Communications with the Press and Public

1. The Town Clerk will clear all press reports on behalf of the Council, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Mayor, or the Chairman of the relevant committee when appropriate.

2. Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Town Clerk or a delegated officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
3. Unless a Councillor has been specifically authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should refer them to the Town Clerk. Even if authorised, it is usually safer not to make an immediate comment and to phone back having thought about the matter. This gives time if necessary to seek advice from the Town Clerk.
4. Councillors have a right to express personal views but must make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view. Unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
5. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public about an action of the Council or lack of action, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a council agenda item. This does not limit a councillor from carrying out his or her normal caseload on behalf of members of the public which they represent.

D. Councillor Correspondence to external parties

1. As the Town 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 written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Town Council. Councillors may write letters as individual members concerning ward or Town matters as long as they make it clear they are acting as an individual councillor and do not commit the Council.
2. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it, should, out of courtesy, be sent to the Town Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Town Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Town Clerk has been advised.

E. Communications with Parish Council Staff

1. Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council). The Town Clerk however would encourage councillors to speak directly to relevant members of staff about issues, but to keep the Town Clerk advised.
2. No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Mayor, or the Chairman of a committee, may give instructions to the Town Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
3. Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council. Again, individual councillors must not appear to represent the Council as a whole, unless authorised to do so.
4. E-mails:
 - Instant replies should not be expected from the Town Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;
 - Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Town Clerk or other authorised officer;
 - E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Town Clerk;
 - Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
5. Meetings with the Town Clerk or other officers:

- Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
- Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;
- Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

F. Councillors seeking information from outside bodies, organisations or individuals

1. Councillors must not seek information from outside bodies, organisations or individuals on behalf of the Council unless authorised by the Council. They may of course do this as an individual Councillor.
2. Chairmen and other councillors may be authorised to seek information on behalf of the Council to take some work load off the Town Clerk or because of their individual experience or skills. Any form of negotiation, must always be undertaken when accompanied by an officer so that the Councillor is not compromised.
3. Councillors may only represent the Council on outside bodies if authorised to do so.

G. Social Media

1. 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.
2. Many Public Sector bodies have their own Social Networking sites. The most popular are Facebook and Twitter, Facebook currently being the larger of the two with over 18 million users in the UK although Twitter's popularity is rapidly rising.
3. Social Networking sites offer value for money and a strong community focus. Running the sites utilises existing ITC systems and is therefore effectively free to set up and update.
4. Our own Town Council Facebook page provides an effective real time, two-way communication channel. It allows us to engage with online groups that may not normally interact willingly with the Council. It also helps provide more people with access to Council services and allows the Council to engage with new audiences such as the under 25's, and will bridge the gap taking the Council to the place where the people already are.
5. There will be certain communities that the Council has previously struggled to communicate to consistently, such as the deaf or BME communities that will already be using Facebook and/or Twitter.
6. 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 fans/followers in minutes.
7. At the same time it positions Whitchurch Town Council as a modern council and helps us to change perceptions of remoteness by allowing us into the user's own space. More people will be tempted to engage with us because it does not involve attending a meeting, or even using very much of their time.
8. Social Networking sites will provide the opportunity to communicate with people immediately, in real time. This will, of course, bring its own challenge in that to be truly valued by Friends/Followers there must be a regular flow of messages and content that will encourage regular interaction. We will also need to ensure that we regularly monitor our pages so that we

can address any specific questions or issues that arise, so there are manpower issues to consider before the pages can be launched.

9. The benefits of Social Networking far outweigh any potential problems or difficulties. It is therefore recommended that the Town Council consider launching Twitter pages within the next 12 months and nominate officers to keep the Facebook page up to date and relevant.
10. Whilst these tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:
 - a. The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. You do not even need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site.
 - b. Groups on specific themes can set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard. There is no guarantee of truth and ill informed comment and gossip is as likely to be found there as useful information.
 - c. The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of Friends may not be our Friends. It is also very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

H. Policy Statement

11. It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The responsible, corporate use of social media is actively encouraged. The following applies equally to Officers and Members.
12. This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks.
13. Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.
14. The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Whitchurch Town Council:
 - a. Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
 - b. Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
 - c. Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
 - d. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
 - e. Use a disclaimer. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the council. Avoid use of the council e-mail address, logos or other council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Where possible, you should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the council's policies or opinions".
 - f. Know your obligations: you must comply with other council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.

- g. Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.
- h. Use of the Town Council's Twitter or Facebook accounts must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor. If unsure, say nothing. Councillors are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view. Councillors should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

I. Responsibilities

- 15. The Town Clerk is the designated 'Council' owner of the Council Twitter feed and any other Social Media channels agreed by the Council.
- 16. Councillors officially appointed by the Council may assist the Town Clerk to disseminate information on the Council's Twitter feed during busy times or when the Clerk is on leave to ensure the best use of the Twitter account. However all must ensure they follow this policy.
- 17. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk is permitted to operate a Twitter account but must adhere to this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.
- 18. Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own accounts but they should ensure they comply with this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.

K. Guidance for Councillors - social media and meetings

- 19. The Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of Whitchurch issues and the use of social media can help with this, especially during official council meetings. Twitter is a quick and direct way of feeding concise updates about a meeting - these principles for members are aimed at the use of Twitter but are equally applicable to other forms of social media. Below are some extra guidelines for councillors to consider for the use of social media during meetings:
 - a. Handheld devices and laptops are permitted (indeed encouraged) for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings - not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'.
 - b. Councillors' tweets/blogs during council meetings should refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting - tweeting/blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting.
 - c. Councillors have a responsibility to take council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members. Whitchurch residents expect debate and to be informed about council business, not witness petty arguments.
 - d. Remember that if you break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.

L. Facebook Strategy

20. Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by all ages in society. The most popular social networks are web-based, commercial, and not purposely designed for town council use. They include sites like Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, and Xanga. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family. For the Council the sites provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the town. Facebook, for example, offers a rich platform allowing you to share unlimited content, including images and videos. Example activity:

- a. Share articles / blog posts / expertise
- b. Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction
- c. Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors
- d. Upload images and videos
- e. Generic news – what’s happening in the area One of the hallmarks of online networks is the ability to “friend” others – creating a group of others that share interests and personal news. Care should be exercised when accepting invitations to friend others within personal social networking sites. Friends will gain access to the Council’s network of contacts on the site. Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by the Council as a body or Councillors as individuals are:
- f. As a Town Council, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
- g. Remember that people classified as “friends” have the ability to download and share your information with others.
- h. Post only what you want the world to see. It is not like posting something to your web site or blog and then realizing that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, basically once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.

21. Do not disclose confidential matters or criticize council policies or personnel.
- a. Set your profile’s security and privacy settings carefully. At a minimum, all privacy settings should be set to “only friends”. “Friends of friends” and “Networks and Friends” open the content to a large group of unknown people.
 - b. All activity on the Council facebook page must follow the Council’s agreed statement of purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool.
 - c. Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
 - d. Pay close attention to the site’s security settings and allow only approved personnel full access to the site.
 - e. Only add statements approved by either Full Council, a committee, the Town Mayor or the Town Clerk.
 - f. Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous. Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterizations.
 - g. Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Whitchurch Town Council at risk.
 - h. To reduce security risks, do not install any external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.
 - i. Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
 - j. Be careful not to fall for phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click, leading to a fake login page.
 - k. If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law. Please stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.

M. Twitter Strategy

22. Twitter is a 'microblogging' platform which allows users to post short messages and converse with other users. Unlike email or text messaging, these conversations take place in the open and engage audiences in discussions about services, products and issues – connecting a vast amount of likeminded people in an often targeted and purposeful way. Example activity:

- a. Share relevant articles / blog posts / expertise
- b. Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction
- c. Link to Facebook content / surveys / pictures / videos
- d. Follow and participate in discussions with other related tweeters
- e. Comment on tweets and re-tweet other posts to build community
- f. Offer relevant Q&A sessions
- g. Provide information and news updates on Council activities
- h. Disseminate information in emergency situations
- i. The Twitter account can be set up to inform followers of related news, events, online facilities and other matters that may be of interest to residents of the community, local businesses and visitors to the area. People following Whitchurch Town Council can expect tweets covering some or all of the following:
 - i. Updates on Council activities
 - ii. Announcements about matters of importance to Whitchurch town residents and those who may be visiting or moving to Whitchurch
 - iii. Requests for information and assistance

23. News about our online facilities - Re-tweets from organisations that we are following which meet our Twitter Policy Following: If you follow The Town Council on Twitter it will not automatically follow the person back and the right is reserved to block that person from following the Town Council. Being followed by us does not imply endorsement of any kind. Whitchurch Town Council is unable to monitor Twitter round the clock. However it will endeavour to answer all sensible tweeted questions. Please be aware that due to privacy it may not be possible to answer all tweet questions. Councillors are at liberty to set up their own accounts subject to following the guidelines. Key questions when tweeting are:

- a. What do the followers really want to know?
- b. When do they need to know it?
- c. Why is the information you're sharing relevant?
- d. Am I the most appropriate person to be responding to queries/ commenting on tweets if it is a Council-related matter? Keep the content valuable! Negative comments should only be responded to with factual information and on-line arguments must always be avoided.