CHEPSTOW TOWN COUNCIL
Communications and IT Policy

1. Town Council Correspondence

1.1 The point of contact for the council is the Town Clerk, and it is to the Town Clerk that all correspondence for the town council should be addressed.

1.2 The Town Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

1.3 No individual Councillor or 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'.

1.4 All official correspondence should be sent by the Town Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper. Most correspondence is sent by email using Town Council approved email addresses.

1.5 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 xx).

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

2.1 The agenda should be clear and concise. It 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.

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

2.3 Where the Town Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Town Council office.

2.4 Confidential items will be printed on pink paper and Councillors are to leave these papers in the Chamber at the end of each meeting for shredding.

3. Communications with the Press and Public

3.1 The Town Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Town Mayor or the Chair of the relevant committee as appropriate.

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3.2 Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Town Clerk, a Town Council officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

3.3 Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

3.4 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.

3.5 If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a Council agenda item.

4. Councillor Correspondence to external parties

4.1 Individual Councillors are responsible for their own ward member correspondence. The Town Council does not provide a secretariat for such purpose. Councillors must ensure they make clear where they are informing on official policy and where they are stating their personal views.

4.2 A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

5. Communications with Town Council Staff

5.1 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).

5.2 No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Town Mayor or the Chair of a committee or other meeting, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee.

5.3 Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.

5.4 Instant replies should not be expected to e-mails from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;

5.5 Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

5.6 For meetings with the Clerk or other officers an appointment should be made wherever possible, meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer

and Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

6. Computer use

6.1 It is very important that the Council is able to keep its data secure. To assist with this, all employees are required to comply with instructions that may be issued from time to time regarding the use of Council-owned computers or systems.

6.2 Council portable IT devices must be kept secure and password protected at all times.

6.3 Your computer password is an important piece of confidential information and you should treat it that way. Do not share it with others, and make sure that it is not written down anywhere where an unauthorised person can find it.

6.4 Unauthorised access to any of the Council's systems will amount to gross misconduct.

7. Email

7.1 All email correspondence should be dealt with in the same professional and diligent manner as any other form of correspondence.

7.2 Council email accounts are subject to the Freedom of Information Act and you should be mindful of the fact that any email that you send will be identifiable as coming from the Council. You should therefore take care not to send anything via email that may reflect badly on the Council. In particular, you must not send content of a sexual or racist nature, junk mail, chain letters, cartoons or jokes from your Council email address.

7.3 Using a Council email address to send inappropriate material, including content of a sexual or racist nature, is strictly prohibited and may amount to gross misconduct. Should you receive any offensive or inappropriate content via email you should inform the Town Council office of this as soon as possible so that they can ensure that it is removed from the system.

7.4 You should also take care that emails will be seen only by the person intended. Particular care should be taken when sending confidential information that the email has been correctly addressed, marked 'private' and not copied in to those not authorised to see the information. Sending confidential information via email without proper authorisation or without taking sufficient care to ensure that it is properly protected will be treated as misconduct.

7.5 While a reasonable amount of personal use of email is perfectly acceptable, your email remains the property of the Council and you should not use your Council email to send or receive any information that you regard as private. The Council may, in the course of its operation, read emails that you have sent or received - although in

the absence of evidence of wrongdoing the Council will try to avoid reading personal emails if possible.

8. Internet use

8.1 Employees with access to the internet on Council-owned devices should use that access responsibly.

8.2 Excessive personal use during working hours will be treated as misconduct.

8.3 From time to time the Council may block access to sites which it considers inappropriate but whether or not a specific site has been blocked, employees must not use the internet to view or download offensive or sexually explicit material. Any attempt to do so may, depending on the circumstances, amount to gross misconduct leading to dismissal.