CHEPSTOW TOWN COUNCIL
Electronic Communication Policy

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

The Council has a website and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information.
- If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council;
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.

Next review date June 2024

Town Council Website
Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may put the item forward to Full Council for consideration at a meeting.

Town Council email
The Council's email address is admin@chepstow.co.uk which is monitored during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

The Administration Office is responsible for dealing with email received 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, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. All new Emails requiring data to be passed on will be followed up with a Data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with the community in relation to their own personal views. NB any emails sent from Councillor email address 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.

Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council; this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

Town Council Facebook
The Town Clerk and Administration team will be responsible for posting and monitoring the content of Facebook to ensure it complies with the Town Council's Social Media Policy. In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council pages are productive, respectful and consistent with the Councils mission and goals the following measures would be adopted and added to the existing Social Media Policy:

- Council members or staff must not use the Town Council's Facebook platform to promote personal or political agenda's. In particular, Council members must not use the Town Council's social media platforms for electioneering or campaigning during any pre-election period;
- The Facebook account should not be used for commercial purposes or to market products or services;
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including Chepstow Town Council members or staff, will not be permitted;
- Be considerate and respectful of others, vulgarity, swearing, threats or abusive of language will not be tolerated;

- Freely share news about Chepstow and the Town Council activities in delivering services to the community;
- When posting existing material, photographs or news items, be aware of copyright laws. Be accurate and give credit where credit is due;
- Stay on topic.

The Facebook page will not be monitored 24/7 and the Town Council does not reply individually to messages or comments received. The Town Council will however, endeavor to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant personnel as soon as practicably possible.

Sending a message / post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Town Council will not be obliged to monitor or respond to request for information through Facebook.

Personal or other private information should not be included in Facebook posts and messages to the Town Council.

The Town Council retains the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site;
- Personal attacks, bullying, insults or threatening language;
- Potentially libelous or obscene remarks, information or statements that are of a personal inflammatory, libelous or defamatory nature;
- Plagarised material or any material deemed to be in violation of any laws, including copyright;
- Private or personal information published without consent;
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum;
- Commercial promotions or spam;
- Fake accounts or accounts that are impersonating others.

The Town Council, at its discretion, reserves the right to block users and will do so for unseemly usage of social media and disregard of, or non-compliance with this policy.

SMS (texting)
Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Video Conferencing e.g. Zoom
If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council
The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.

Next review date June 2024

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. 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 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 also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

Next review date June 2024