

COMMUNICATION

1. Aim

To encourage effective communication within the Town of Cottesloe administration, elected body, community and absentee ratepayers.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- a. Keep people informed of the issues being considered by council and of decisions made.
- b. Provide avenues for input and feedback on major issues before decisions are made.
- c. Establish effective mechanisms to enable concerns to be raised.
- d. Create a continuous improvement system for council communication.
- e. Provide guidelines for communication between elected members and staff; Council and the media, and Council and the community.
- f. Provide an opportunity for absentee owners to access regular newsletters produced by council.

3. Principles

Inherent in the adoption of this policy is a recognition that there are costs associated with effective communication, in terms of time, human resources, materials and dollars.

The principles embodied in an effective communication strategy include the following:

- a. Council endeavours to establish and maintain an open and timely communication system within and between the stakeholders.
- b. Council recognises that effective communication requires co-operation from all parties involved.
- c. Council will endeavour to ensure that its communication is effective in that:
 - it reaches the appropriate target group
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 - it explains issues clearly and succinctly
 - it represents views fairly and equitably
 - differences are accepted and acknowledged
 - its effective communication with residents is regularly reviewed
- d. Council recognises the need to inform all affected parties in the decision making process.
- e. Council recognises that different people may hold different views and those views are valid.
- f. Council recognises that a range of communication modes may need to be considered depending on the target group, issues and time frame.

4. Issues

4.1 Stakeholders

Cottesloe, like all local governments, has a number of different stakeholders. These include:

- residents, tenants and businesses within the Town
- absentee owners
- elected members
- government departments
- staff
- visitors to the area

The different stakeholder groups may have differing needs in relation to effective communication.

4.1.1 Residents, Tenants and Businesses within the Town

This group consists of businesses and residents, owners and occupiers. It is in general the easiest group to access in terms of information dissemination because a letter box drop will reach almost all of the target group. In addition, these people have access to local papers which circulate in the district. This is the group with whom council administration and elected members have the most direct contact either in person, through correspondence or by telephone.

4.1.2 Absentee Owners

This group consists of those people who own property within the Town but do not live in the Town. While a significant proportion of these properties are units and flats, handled by leasing agents, there is also a substantial group who may be abroad or in the eastern states for a period of several years before returning to what is their family home. This group is currently contacted en masse only once per year at the time of issuing Rates Notices. From time to time during the year they may receive communication relevant to matters associated with their properties if a direct mail to owners is undertaken or if a development application for a neighbouring property has been received. Council needs to be conscious of this group which represents approximately 25% of property owners.

4.1.3 Elected Members

The nine elected members are in the closest contact with the administration of council, receiving a substantial amount of information regularly and meeting on a regular basis. Elected members may also bear the brunt of criticism and complaint from individuals. Elected members as a group need timely advice particularly regarding issues which have the potential to become controversial.

It is equally important that elected members communicate effectively with each other to ensure that their colleagues are aware of their views and concerns. Finally, it is extremely important that elected members have the capacity and opportunity to communicate with their constituents and discuss issues both formally and informally with senior staff and that such discussions be constant, ongoing, two-way and timely.

4.1.4 Government Departments/Other Councils

Communication with this group is primarily through meetings and correspondence and is mainly between the administration and staff of the relevant departments. Contact with the officers from these departments varies from time to time, dependent on issues facing council. The needs of this group tend to be related to timely communication, responses to queries and questionnaires and participation in meetings relating to specific issues.

In addition to government departments is the communication with other local authorities, particularly those adjacent to the Town of Cottesloe and those with whom council has shared projects. There is a need for cooperation and information exchange at both a formal and informal level and that staff are encouraged to communicate with members of staff from other councils.

4.1.5 Staff

Council's staff is a relatively small but pivotal stakeholder group in that the administration acts very much as a funnel for communication between all the stakeholder groups. The needs of the staff group is for a clear policy framework, effective decision making and close communication especially with the elected members. It is extremely important that elected members communicate their desires and preferences to staff in relation to any specific issues which are facing council, in order that those views may be taken into consideration when reports are developed and recommendations framed.

It is equally important that elected members read the agenda and other material provided in order that they are fully briefed on issues before council. The administration will always endeavour to provide elected members with information which is factual, relevant and free from personal views.

Notes and/or minutes from Council Advisory Groups, Committees and Working Parties will be circulated to all elected members for their information. As a general rule, information and other advice provided at the request of one elected member as part of their decision making responsibilities will be provided to all elected members.

4.1.6 Visitors to the Area

This group is transient by nature and may be either visitors, employees or residents of neighbouring councils who utilise the facilities within Cottesloe. Their needs are narrower than those of other stakeholders in that they relate to specific matters such as access to facilities, clear understanding of rights and obligations regarding local laws and effective signs.

4.1.7 People With Disabilities

This group of people have special communication needs which have been identified in Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan. These needs may relate to physical access to council, access to staff members' offices, provision of information in a range of formats or through technology aids.

4.2 Conflicting Needs

There are a number of conflicting needs among the stakeholders.

These include, but are not limited to:

residents' expectations for needs to be met immediately	versus	council policy and/or council meeting schedules and capacity of the administration to meet such expectation
absentee owners' expectations to be fully consulted	versus	access to absentee owners and/or cost of access.
elected members' need for information and action	versus	staff need for clear priorities
visitors' needs for information, services and facilities	versus	residents' desire for fewer signs, facilities etc.
government departments' needs for responses to meet their time frames	versus	council decision making process and priorities
residents' desire for access to elected members	versus	elected members' time constraints

5. Policy

5.1 General Correspondence, Including Email

- Correspondents requiring a reply from Council's administration will where possible be sent a response to their letters within 10 working days of the correspondence being received.
- Where issues raised in correspondence are to be referred to council before a final advice may be sent, letters will be acknowledged as being received and correspondents advised of the process.
- Correspondence that is received marked as a copy and addressed to a third party will not be acknowledged.
- All authors of correspondence are required to make their own arrangements for forwarding copies of correspondence to parties other than council.
- Correspondence from council staff and elected members shall be clear and respectful.
- A random sample of correspondents to Council will be surveyed each year to determine satisfaction levels with Council communication in order to provide a benchmark for continuous improvement.

5.2 Mayoral Correspondence

- Where the Mayor corresponds in his/her capacity as Mayor of the Town, the correspondence shall be on Mayoral letterhead.
- A copy of all official Mayoral correspondence, together with the originating correspondence, shall be kept on file by administration.
- Where correspondents seek detailed responses from the Mayor on matters concerning council policy, process or decision-making, the response shall be drafted on behalf of the

Mayor by the administration to be signed by the Mayor unless he/she authorises the Chief Executive Officer to sign on his/her behalf.

5.3 Media Contact

- a. The spokespeople for the Council are the Mayor and the Chief Executive Officer.
- b. The Mayor may refer media enquiries to an appropriate Councillor or the Chief Executive Officer for response, or the Chief Executive Officer may refer a matter to an Officer to respond on behalf of Council.
- c. All Council media releases must be approved by the Mayor or in his/her absence, the Deputy Mayor or the relevant Committee Chairperson.
- d. The local media is to have access to a copy of the published Full Council agenda and minutes from the same day they are circulated to Councillors.
- e. Each Committee Chairperson is responsible for drawing to the attention of the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer any matter on which he/she believes Council should make a public statement.
- f. Each elected member has the right to make personal statements to the press on matters of Council business provided:
 - (i) it is made clear to the media that such statements are not made on behalf of Council;
 - (ii) the statements do not include comments on discussions which were resolved by the committee or Council to be of a confidential nature;
 - (iii) the statements in all circumstances:
 - fairly and accurately reflect the conduct of Council business, proceedings in Council or committee meetings;
 - are intended to either provide the community with a clear expression of the opinion of the Councillor making the statements to the media; and
 - are not intended to bring the Council into disrepute or lower its standing in the community.
- g. All Council Media Releases issued shall be posted on the Town's website and elected members made aware at the time of release to the media.

5.4 Newsletters

- a. Absentee owners can access copies of Cottesloe News via the Town's website.
- b. Occasional newsletters or other communications will be distributed throughout the Town via a letterbox drop but will not be forwarded to absentee owners except by resolution of council.
- c. The production of 'Cottesloe Council News' is governed by the council policy relating to 'Cottesloe Council News'.

5.5 Email

- a. A feedback section in council's web site can be accessed through 'quick contacts' on the front page of the website.
- b. Council staff will determine whether an acknowledgement is required for Email received via this medium.

5.6 Internal Communication

Communication between elected members and staff will be governed by the *Code of Conduct* and relevant legislation.

5.7 People With Disabilities

Council will endeavour to implement a range of communication mechanisms for people with disabilities as the need arises.

Adopted	October 1997
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Expected date of review	