



The Guildhall Sandwich Communication Protocol

Sandwich Town Council
and
Sandwich Toll Bridge Fund

(Adopted on the 6th August 2012)

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Communication Protocol

Section A - CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS

1.0 **Scope:** This section of the protocol attempts to deal with the issues concerning communication between the staff in the Guildhall Sandwich and its customers. Experience has shown that it is not always clear to the public the difference between the responsibilities of Sandwich Town Council and Sandwich Toll Bridge Fund and because the administration of Sandwich Town Council and the Toll Bridge Fund are carried out in the same offices by the same staff, it is therefore sensible that the same protocol applies to both business units.

2.0 **Aim:** To ensure those who use the services of Sandwich Town Council and the Toll Bridge Fund are aware of the level of service they can expect. Users will be encouraged to comment on the services they have received.

3.0 **Detail:** This section of the protocol will be regularly monitored and where possible improved to ensure the best customer service is provided.

4.0 **Approach:** As part of the approach to dealing with customers, our staff will:

4.1 Ensure that the contents of any communication is not at risk of unnecessary or illegal disclosure

4.2 be courteous and helpful

4.3 listen to customers and make every effort to assist

4.4 when possible assist at the first point of contact

4.5 promote equality and not discriminate nor permit discrimination against anyone

4.6 make it clear who the customer will be dealing with

4.7 provide information in clear and understandable terms

4.8 not tolerate threatening or abusive language or conduct

4.9 welcome comments and investigate any complaint made concerning the service provided

5.0 **Visitors:** When a customer visits the Guildhall reception:

5.1 a member of staff will try to see the customer as quickly as possible

5.2 a response to customers queries should be made within five minutes

5.3 if there is a delay of any kind we will explain why

6.0 **Telephones:** When a customer telephones Sandwich Town Council during office hours (08:30-13:00 and 14:00 – 17:00 Monday to Friday) Our aim is to:

6.1 answer all calls within 20 seconds with an appropriate greeting

6.2 ensure callers are put through to the appropriate person

6.3 deal effectively with the majority of telephone calls at the first point of contact

6.4 tell the customer to whom they are being connected if the call is transferred

6.5 offer to call the customer back at a reasonable agreed time If we cannot help immediately

6.6 return any call within one working day when a customer telephones Sandwich Town Council outside office hours and leaves a message is on the answer phone

7.0 **Written:** When a letter, fax or email is received:

7.1 If a full response cannot be given at first contact we will acknowledge we have received the letter, fax or email within one working day

7.2 the customer will be informed within one working day if the letter, fax or email has been redirected for response to:

7.2.1 the Mayor (or Chairman)

7.2.2 Sandwich Town Council or one of the committees (Tourism, Finance etc)

7.2.3 any working group (Health & Safety etc)

7.2.4 another authority (DDC, KCC etc)

7.2.5 an agency (environment etc)

7.2.6 an elected member (MP, Councillor etc)

7.3 we will give a full response within 5 working days

7.4 if we need longer to give a full response we will make contact and explain fully the reasons why

8.0 Prepared Information: Fact sheets will be available on the website, for emailing, faxing and posting, on the following topics:

8.1 The customer communication section of this protocol

8.2 Councillors contact details including email address

8.3 The use and hire of the facilities in the Guildhall building (including forms)

8.4 The use and hire of the Guildhall forecourt (including forms)

8.5 Guidance for organising an event in Sandwich (including all points of contact)

8.6 Information on how to make a complaint about service received from the council or trustees and its employees (including forms)

8.7 Guidance on Town Council & Toll Bridge Fund funding practices

8.8 How to make a grant application Town Council (including forms)

8.9 How to make a grant application Toll Bridge Fund (including forms)

9.0 Audit trails: It is essential that separate records are maintained for both business units and brief records will be maintained of all communications, emails will be retained electronically for at least 12 weeks.

Section B - COUNCILLOR/TRUSTEE CORRESPONDENCE

- 10.0 **Scope:** This section of the protocol attempts to deal with the issues concerning communication between the staff in the Guildhall Sandwich and Sandwich Town Councillors and the trustees of Sandwich Toll Bridge Fund. As the administration of Sandwich Town Council and the Toll Bridge Fund are carried out in the same offices by the same staff, it is therefore sensible that the same protocol applies to both business units. This document does not advocate preventing those documents which are required by mandate or statute from being delivered in its appropriate format.
- 11.0 **Aim:** To ensure Sandwich Town Council and the Toll Bridge Fund receive, in a timely manner, all information required by a councillor or trustee to fulfill their respective duties.
- 12.0 **Detail:** This section of the protocol will be regularly monitored and where possible improved to ensure the best customer service is provided.
- 13.0 **Email:** All councillors, where practicable, are to have a dedicated email address for use only for council related business, which will be published for the benefit of the residents of Sandwich. A suitable email address can be supplied on request.
- 14.0 **Agendas:** The essential papers will be circulated in paper format. The following changes from previous procedures:
- 14.1 Documents that are large and available electronically (ie Adobe format) will not be photocopied but circulated by email with a copy available in the Town Clerk's Office
 - 14.2 Documents that are large and available electronically (website address) will not be photocopied but the web address and access requirements circulated by email with computer access made available in the Guildhall Offices
 - 14.3 Items for note and those deemed of little relevance by the Town Clerk initially will be circulated to councillors by email as they become available. If a councillor deems an item appropriate for discussion then they will have the facility to contact the Town Clerk to bring it onto the next appropriate agenda. Paper copies will be available in the Office
 - 14.4 Where email this is not practicable traditional paper copies will be supplied.
- 15.0 **Planning Papers:** Councillors are encouraged to monitor the Dover District Council website, planning section for planning application relevant to Sandwich.
- 16.0 **Councillor/Trustee communication:** When there is a need to contact a councillor for any reason if there is a degree of urgency the councillor should be contacted by telephone. Wherever possible email should be used as a viable alternative to post for all other communication.

Section C - DEVELOPMENT

- 17.0 **Scope:** This section of the protocol deals with the possible future development of communications at the Guildhall Sandwich.
- 18.0 **Aim:** To ensure Sandwich Town Council and the Toll Bridge Fund, keeps up to date and communicates using the most appropriate, efficient, professional and economic practices.
- 19.0 **Detail:** This section of the protocol will be regularly monitored and where possible improved to ensure the best customer service is provided.
- 20.0 **Training:** The efficient and safe use of tools requires competence. To achieve this, all staff are should be trained to an agreed, appropriate recognised standard for use of the IT equipment and software provided for use by Sandwich Town Council and the Toll Bridge Fund. Councillors and trustees should also be encouraged to become proficient in the use of computer based communications.
- 21.0 **On Line Applications:** A feasibility study should be carried out to establish which Council and Toll Bridge Fund processes can be made available as an on line procedure with specialised forms. Those items in paragraph 8.0 of this document requiring forms should be dealt with as a priority.
- 22.0 **Communication with the Press:** Taking into account the reduction of press coverage of Sandwich Town Council and Toll Bridge Fund activities, a formal procedure should be developed on:
- 22.1 the issuing of press releases to the local media in an agreed format in a timely fashion
 - 22.2 replying verbally to press enquires
- 23.0 **Communication Officer:** A member of the Guildhall staff should be given the duties of Communication Officer to monitor adherence to the agreed communication protocol, and be responsible to ensure any agreed development is completed. A councillor should be nominated to act as a link between the Communication Officer and elected members/trustees when dealing with monitoring issues and complaints.