

Council Policy

NAME: Council-Staff Communications Policy

CATEGORY: CITY GOVERNANCE

DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBLE: OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

APPROVED BY COUNCIL:

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Council-Staff Communications Policy is to establish guidelines for communication between Council Members and City Staff. This policy is intended to complement the *City of Prince George Code of Conduct Bylaw No. 9439, 2023* (the “Code of Conduct”). Specifically, this Policy offers guidance on section 9 of the Code of Conduct: “Interactions with Staff”.

POLICY OBJECTIVES:

To establish standards for effective and appropriate communications between Council Members and Staff. This policy is not intended to unduly fetter Council Members and Staff in the discharge of their respective roles. Rather, it should function as a guideline to delineate responsibilities, ensuring that communications between Council Members and Staff improve administrative efficiency and lead to positive outcomes.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all Staff and Council Members and governs all forms of communication and interaction between Staff and Council Members related to municipal business. This includes, but is not limited to, communication that occurs:

- in-person, by phone, or through virtual meetings;
- through written, electronic, or digital means, including email, text messages, messaging applications, collaboration platforms, and social media;
- on-site at City facilities, off-site at external locations, or in community settings.

This policy does not apply to:

- interactions that do not involve municipal business; or
- communications required by statute, bylaw, or other formal Council procedure.

For clarity, where a conflict arises between this Policy and a requirement under the *Community Charter, Local Government Act*, Council Procedures Bylaw, or Code of Conduct, the statutory or bylaw requirement prevails.

DEFINITIONS:

For the purposes of this Policy:

“**City**” means the City of Prince George;

“**City Manager**” means the City Manager for the City;

“**Council Members**” means the Mayor and Councillors for the City;

“**Professionalism**” means conducting oneself in a respectful and courteous manner that reflects the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of public office and public service.

“**Senior Management**” means a Staff member who holds the title of City Manager, Director, and the designated Corporate Officer; and

“**Staff**” means an officer or employee of the City, and includes Senior Management, but does not include contractors.

POLICY:

Guiding Principles, Roles and Responsibilities

1. Guiding Principles

The relationships between Council Members and Staff shall be governed by the following guiding principles:

- **Mutual Respect** – Council Members and Staff shall foster a climate of mutual respect and promote a tolerant and harassment-free workplace. Council Members and Staff shall be respectful of each other and of each other’s professional duties. Council Members and Staff understand that they all face different, often unique, challenges and recognize their overarching goal is to serve the best interests of the City.

- **Accountability** – Council Members and Staff are trusted to act competently, diligently and responsibly, and shall be accountable for the decisions and actions they make in the course of their respective professional duties.
 - **One-Employee Model:** The City Manager is Council's only employee, and functions as the conduit through which Staff and Council Members communicate. In this structure, the Council determines the policies of the City with advice, information and analysis provided by Staff, committees, and the public as warranted.
2. **Roles and Responsibilities** – Council Members and Staff shall recognize and respect each other's roles and responsibilities in serving the City. The roles and responsibilities of Council Members are established by sections 114 - 116 of the *Community Charter*. Council Members represent the City, provide direction, and make policy and service delivery decisions, but are not elected to act in their professional capacities or as technical experts. The roles of Staff are to give professional advice and implement Council's directives.
 3. **City Manager** - The powers, duties and functions of the City Manager are established by section 146 and 147 of the *Community Charter*. The City Manager shall act as a liaison between Council Members and Staff. Information regarding substantive municipal business from the City Manager shall be communicated to all Council Members. For clarity, the City Manager is not required to communicate technical matters to all Council Members.
 4. **Professionalism** – Council Members and Staff shall at all times treat each other with courtesy and Professionalism.

Guidelines for Council Members

5. **Communication with Staff** – Council Members shall not communicate directly with Staff who are not Senior Management, unless the communication is minor and for the purpose of seeking administrative clarity.¹ Council Members must instead direct questions and inquiries regarding departmental issues to the City Manager, or to the appropriate Senior Management member, and copy the City Manager. This provision is not intended to preclude appropriate social etiquette interactions between Council Members and Staff, but to ensure that Council respects and complies with the one-employee model.
6. **No Interference with Staff** - Council Members must not:

¹ "Administrative clarity" may include, for example, requesting copies of City documents that are available to the public, scheduling, and seeking clarification on minor matters as required for carrying out a Council Member's responsibilities as an elected official, and does not include substantive questions and opinions related to the subject of Staff's professional expertise. For further clarity, Council Members may communicate directly with the Executive Assistant to the Mayor for the purpose of administrative clarity and as required for the purpose of carrying out the job duties of the Executive Assistant to the Mayor.

- a. interfere with, hinder, or obstruct Staff in the exercise or performance of their roles, responsibilities, powers, duties, or functions; or
 - b. impair the ability of municipal officers or Staff to implement Council policy decisions in accordance with section 153 of the *Community Charter*.
7. **Council Members Cannot Direct Staff** – Council Members have no individual capacity to direct Staff regarding the performance of Staff's functions or duties, whether through in person, verbal, written or electronic communications. In connection with the foregoing, Council Members shall not:
- request Staff to undertake work or prepare reports, other than pursuant to a Council direction;
 - request or require that Staff undertake any personal or private work for or on behalf of a Council Member; or
 - request or require that Staff engage in political activities, or subject them to reprisal of any kind for refusing to engage in such activities.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Executive Assistant to the Mayor may provide administrative support to Council Members, including by preparing letters, reports, and presentations, to carry out their job duties.

8. **Council Members Interacting with Staff in Council Member's Capacity as a Resident** - Council Members may participate in civic processes available to all residents, such as submitting permit applications or requests for records, provided they do so strictly in their personal capacity subject to all applicable statutes, bylaws or policies of the City.

When interacting with Staff as a resident, Council Members must comply with the applicable Code of Conduct Bylaw and any other applicable statutes or bylaws, including the provisions of the *Community Charter* that apply to conflict of Interest, outside influence, and inside influence. Council members shall give due consideration to consider section 104(2) of the *Community Charter* and shall appoint representatives in respect of matters in which they have a legal right to be heard.

Council Members must clearly identify themselves in their capacity as a resident and must use the same public channels available to any other resident (e.g., 311, Service Centre, online forms).

Guidelines for Staff

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9. **Communication with Council Members** - Staff shall treat Council Members as a collective decision-making body. In connection with the foregoing, Staff who are not Senior Management shall not communicate directly with individual Council Members, unless the communication is minor and for the purpose of seeking administrative clarity and shall instead direct questions and inquiries regarding departmental issues to their supervisor or the appropriate Senior Management member. In relation to Council committees, Staff assigned as liaisons to Council committees shall communicate and provide support strictly within the scope of the committee's terms of reference. All communications from staff liaisons shall be directed toward facilitating the committee's work, offering relevant technical or administrative assistance, and ensuring alignment with the committee's mandate. Staff shall refrain from engaging in discussions or providing input on matters outside the committee's scope.
10. **Publicly Available Information** – Notwithstanding section 9, Staff may provide to a Council Member information that is readily available to any member of the public.
11. **Council Decision-Making** – This policy recognizes that Council Members are best placed to exercise their decision-making role based on information and recommendations from Staff. Staff shall make best efforts to provide all Council Members with the same administrative information prior to Council Members making any collective decision at the Council meeting table.
12. **Appearing Before Council** - When appearing before Council, Staff must make best efforts to be prepared for questions Council may have. Where possible, Council Members shall provide advance notice of questions, through Senior Management, to provide an opportunity for Staff to provide informed reports, advice, and information.
13. **Staff Interactions with Council in Staff's Capacity as a Resident** - Staff may engage with Council as a resident on matters of public interest, including by submitting correspondence, speaking at public hearings, attending Council meetings, or participating in community engagement processes.

When doing so:

- a. Staff must clearly indicate that they are participating in their personal capacity and not representing the City or providing professional advice; and
- b. Staff must not use their City position to influence Council decision-making, nor may they imply that their views reflect those of the organization.

Compliance

14. **Code of Conduct Incorporated** - A breach of this Policy may be grounds for a complaint under section 9 of the Code of Conduct.