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|  | <b>Public Communications Policy</b>     |
|   | <b>Council Approved</b>                 |
|   | <b>Administration (AD) #1204</b>        |
|   | <b>Approved</b><br>August 20, 2024      |
|   | <b>Next Review Date</b><br>August, 2027 |

## 1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 The Town of Hinton is committed to proactively providing timely and factual communications to the Public.
- 1.2 The Town communicates with the Public in a variety of manners and is dedicated to improving access to and understanding of information about Town priorities, policies, initiatives, programs, services, and decisions.
- 1.3 The Town will maintain responsive, transparent, and respectful two-way communication with the Public.

## 2.0 PURPOSE

- 2.1 The purpose of this Policy is to establish guidelines for consistent, accurate, and effective communications on behalf of the Town.

## 3.0 SCOPE

- 3.1 This Policy applies to all Town Employees, Elected Officials, and Appointed Members.
- 3.2 This Policy applies to all communication on behalf of the Town with the Public.

## 4.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 Elected and Appointed Members
  - 4.1.1 The Mayor is the primary official spokesperson to represent the collective opinion of Council and the Town.
  - 4.1.2 In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor or Acting Mayor or other designated elected official is the official spokesperson for Council.
  - 4.1.3 Members are expected to communicate with the Public as per the Council Code of Conduct Bylaw (No. 1124)

- 4.1.4 Members should redirect initial Public inquiries to be submitted through Hinton Listens.

## 4.2 Administration Leadership

- 4.2.1 The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is the primary spokesperson (unless delegated) to represent the Town in corporate-wide matters, routine communications, and official statements.
- 4.2.2 Directors are responsible for ensuring Employees understand the requirements of this Policy.
- 4.2.3 Directors are responsible for ensuring staff remain familiarized with and are adhering to the Town's current branding and messaging in outgoing communications.
- 4.2.4 Directors or their designates are responsible for ensuring proactive and routine communications to the Public is integral to all programs, services, and initiatives, with clear, accessible, up-to-date, and consistent information, consistent with Town policies and procedures, and coordinated with the Communications Service Unit.

## 4.3 Communications Service Unit will:

- 4.3.1 Support the Mayor and Council as well as all Departments within the Town in preparing and delivering accurate information to the Public in a timely and professional manner.
- 4.3.2 Ensure all communications and marketing material are consistent with the most current communications and marketing plans.
- 4.3.3 Provide training, ongoing education, and support to assist all Employees in their understanding and awareness of this Policy, as well as current Town branding, templates, and communications forms.
- 4.3.4 Respond to public inquiries submitted through Hinton Listens:
  - a) The Town must make every reasonable effort to assist the person who submitted the inquiry through Hinton Listens and to respond to each submission openly, accurately, and completely, in line with FOIP.
  - b) Hinton Listens submissions will be acknowledged by Automated Response.

- c) Town Employees must make every reasonable effort to respond to a Hinton Listens submission within three (3) business days of it being received and complete a request within fifteen (15) business days.
- d) The Town may take longer than the targeted completion date of 15 days to provide a complete response to a Hinton Listens submission but must advise the sender of the submission of the delay within the period set out in section 4.3.4 (c).
- e) The Town may deny a request if a large amount of information is requested and/or records must be searched and responding within the period set out in Section 4.3.4 (c) would unreasonably interfere with the operations of the Municipality.
  - i) The Town may recommend a Hinton Listens submission be re-submitted to the Town as an official FOIP request.
  - ii) If a Hinton Listens request for information is denied, the inquirer will be notified in writing within the period set out in Section 4.3.4 (c).

#### 4.4 Employees will:

- 4.4.1 Evaluate the need for public communications for Town projects, programs, and day-to-day business.
- 4.4.2 Act as Subject Matter Expert when required, providing timely, accurate, and comprehensive information for communications to the Public.
- 4.4.3 Develop necessary public communication documents as per current communications and marketing plans and send to Communications Coordinator for review before dissemination.
- 4.4.4 Respond to media only if qualified to do so, as outlined in Employee Code of Conduct Directive HR 1904.8.
- 4.4.5 Redirect Public inquiries to be submitted through Hinton Listens.
- 4.4.6 Communicate facts only, not personal opinions, when representing the Organization.

## 5.0 RELATED MATTERS & REFERENCES

- 5.1 Employee Code of Conduct Directive (HR 1904.8)
- 5.2 Social Media Policy (AD 1205)
- 5.3 Public Participation Policy (No. 1209)
- 5.4 Council Code of Conduct Bylaw (No. 1124)

5.5 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Government of Alberta

## 6.0 DEFINITIONS

6.1 **Administration:** The administrative and operational arm of the Municipality, comprised of the various Departments and including all Employees who operate under the leadership of the Chief Administrative Officer.

6.2 **Administration Leadership:** The Chief Administrative Officer and Department Directors employed by the Town of Hinton.

6.3 **Automated Response:** An email or message that is automatically sent upon receipt of submission.

6.4 **Chief Administrative Officer (CAO):** The person appointed by Council to the position of chief administrative officer of the Town of Hinton, or their designate.

6.5 **Council:** The municipal Council of the Town of Hinton, including the Mayor and six Councillors.

6.6 **Directive:** Approved by the CAO; provides direction to employees regarding operational matters and internal administration.

6.7 **Director:** The head of a Department of the Town of Hinton.

6.8 **Department:** The groupings of like services within the Town of Hinton, including Corporate Services, Community Services, and Development & Infrastructure Services. Each led by a Director.

6.9 **Employee:** Any person that is directly employed, on a full-time or part-time basis, whether union or salaried, with the Town of Hinton.

6.10 **FOIP:** The *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c. F-25, any associated regulations, and any amendments or successor legislation.

6.11 **Hinton Listens:** A public engagement portal found on the Town of Hinton website with public inquiry options including 'ask a question', 'request a service', and 'share a concern'. For the purposes of this Policy, each request for additional information within a Hinton Listens submission is considered a new submission.

6.12 **Mayor:** The chief elected official of the Town of Hinton.

6.13 **Member:** An official elected to Town Council including the Mayor, as well as members appointed to Council Committees or other bodies established by Council.


- 6.14 **Municipality/Town:** The municipal corporation of the Town of Hinton.
- 6.15 **Policy:** Approved by Council; a statement of commitment, position, or overall intent of Council to provide direction and guidelines for Administration; Policies set expectations for program decisions, service levels, and financial considerations.
- 6.16 **Public:** All residents, people who work in Hinton, taxpayers, partners, business owners, visitors, potential visitors, employees, media, agencies and other organizations, other governments, and all stakeholders who have a stake in the decisions, issues, and opportunities that affect our community.
- 6.17 **Subject Matter Expert (SME):** A person who is an authority in a particular area or topic.

## 7.0 APPENDICES, PROCEDURES, & FORMS

- 7.1 Municipal Communications Strategy 2022-2026

## 8.0 REVISION CONTROL

- 8.1 This Policy must be reviewed every three years.
- 8.2 Upon Council approval, all former versions of this Policy are hereby rescinded.

| Date            | Revision   |
|-----------------|--|
| August 20, 2024 |  Jordan Panasiuk, CAO |
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