**BTC Newsletter policy and protocol**

**Introduction :**

Baildon Town Council ( BTC) has a duty to be open and transparent, and the law governs a range of formal processes, such as publication of agendas and minutes.

There is no law relating to the requirement to communicate, but as the whole purpose of BTC is to serve the residents of Baildon, communication with our residents is a top priority. Communication has many forms – forma and informal, one way and two way , direct and indirect etc. This paper concerns only one part of BTC communications. ***It is not, nor is intended to be, a communication strategy.*** BTC will continue to use social media and the e newsletter will of course be promoted through those channels.

The email newsletter was established in 2016 (or earlier). By definition, it is mostly a one way communication method, although it may seek or promote feedback from readers. The newsletter is an opportunity to share information on a regular basis with all those who subscribe. It is concerned principally with things that have already been decided, rather than consultations about possible decisions – these usually take place separately. ( eg we would promote a consultation re the NDP in the newsletter, but it would be a separate exercise)

As the “Foundation level” of our local communication, the aim of the newsletter is to enhance communication with the residents of Baildon by:

1. Increasing the numbers who subscribe and b. Increasing the subscribers who read it.

Since its inception, a certain custom and practice has developed. This has never been formalised as a policy or protocol. Operational decisions have to be made about what to include and what to omit. Content can be passively received or actively commissioned. Feedback is anecdotal and has not been sought in a systematic way. Obviously, the content may be a plus or minus to readership. There are some suggestions that content could be made more useful for a wider range of readers.

**Resources:**

The e newsletter is cost free other than the councillor and staff time to produce it. (which is considerable of course). Occasionally BTC will commission photographs, but these are then multi-purpose and rarely just for the newsletter.

**Performance:**

The number of subscribers to the newsletter has decreased, although now appears steady at a lower level, as reported to last Governance.

* January 2016 - 673 December 2016 - 798 ( In xxxx an award was made to the 1000th subscriber and publicised )
* 2021 : as reported at last meeting , subscriptions have slightly increased to 800 from 787 a year ago, and the open rate ( ie readership ) is generally in the upper 40%.

Clearly there is room for improvement.

It is proposed that BTC agrees to actively promote the e-newsletter through all channels – including by councillors and staff – and that we actively monitor the results.

Of course the quality of the newsletter and usefulness to residents has a major impact on subscription levels.

**Proposal:**

The monthly newsletter does take considerable time, both of the Admin assistant and the Chair, as well as those who submit items. Considerable positive feedback is received anecdotally.

This paper aims to agree the core approach ( the policy) and also the operational detail ( protocol) , in order to provide an agreed framework for all concerned. Of course in the light of experience this could and should be reviewed at least every 3 years.

Aim: The aim of the newsletter is to keep residents of Baildon informed about the activities of BTC, seek views where appropriate, and publicise or promote Baildon events or activities in the future. It is also a channel for other groups to share information

Policies:

* At least 6 and no more than 11 e- newsletters will be produced each calendar year
* The newsletter can include any content as decided by the Chair.
* It is not required that services provided by BTC or by groups funded by BTC, would have priority over other content. This is at the discretion of the Chair subject to other content.
* The newsletter should not replace or replicate the promotional activity of any activity, service, group or organisation, but amplify it. Wherever possible links should be included to guide the reader to more detailed information provided directly by the group or organisation concerned.
* BTC seeks to continuously increase the number of Baildon subscribers to the newsletter, and monthly data should be collated by the Clerk and shared with councillors and reported as needed.

The following is proposed as the **protocol for newsletter production:**

1. The newsletter will start with an introduction by the Chair of the Council, or a person nominated by the Chair.
2. To enable practical and reliable production, editorial control rests with the Chair of the Council, subject to checking content with the clerk or other staff member for accuracy.
3. The admin officer of BTC, or the clerk, has the responsibility to work with the Chair to produce a first draft, make amends, and then finalise the newsletter content and layout
4. The e newsletter is distributed by the admin officer to all who subscribe, plus all those who contribute. A record of the number of subscribers will be kept for reporting to Governance
5. The Chair may choose to include or not include content, according to their judgement, giving regard to readability, length, and priority of the items to be included
6. All councillors are always invited to submit content at any time, however this does not necessarily mean that such content will be included. Where an amendment is made (ie to make it shorter) the author will of course have to choice to accept the amendment or withdraw the item if they so wish.