



# Onchan District Commissioners

Aim: Ensure that we provide a quality service and provide clear and timely communications to improve the delivery of customer service.

## Communications Policy

Date: April 2021

Review: July 2024

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**Policy Review - History:**

Please be aware that a hard copy of this document may not be the latest available version, which is available in the Authority's document management system, and which supersedes all previous versions.

Those to whom this policy applies are responsible for familiarising themselves periodically with the latest version and for complying with policy requirements at all times.

<b>Effective from:</b>	<b>Replaces:</b>	<b>Originator:</b>	<b>Page X of Y</b>
April 2021		Chief Executive/Clerk	2 of 21
<b>Board Ratification:</b>			
<b>History or Most Recent Policy Changes – MUST BE COMPLETED</b>			
Version:	Date:	Change:	
1	01/07/2017	New Procedure	
2	01/04/2021	Updated	



## **Onchan District Commissioners** **Communications Policy**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to Board members and officers in Onchan District Commissioners.

The primary focus is to promote clear and timely communications from the Authority; and develop a consistent standard for external communications in a bid to improve the delivery of customer service.

It relates to communications between members of the community, Board members and staff.

The Commitment of Onchan District Commissioners is to: -

- Seek customer<sup>1</sup> feedback and views at every opportunity;
- Use this information to review our policies and procedures; and
- Use the information gathered to achieve and sustain services.

### **SCOPE**

The aim of Onchan District Commissioners is to provide the highest standard of service to all their customers.

This policy outlines what is expected of staff when answering communications, in order to protect the reputation of the authority.

The aim of the policy is to build an understanding of what is appropriate and productive use of communication, to minimise miscommunication.

### **POLICY**

The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure communications are timely and relevant, easy to understand, and are clear and brief;
- Ensure that the customer is at the heart of all service improvements and to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction and social impact; and
- Develop a consistent standard for external communications in a bid to improve the delivery of customer service.

A copy of Onchan District Commissioners' Customer Charter is detailed at Appendix 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Customer throughout this Policy and Procedure refers to social housing tenants, commercial tenants and rate payers

The Authority is committed to and will provide a quality service to the public and will co-operate with other external agencies.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Onchan District Commissioners has undertaken to 'communicate, consult and engage'. The purpose of this policy is therefore to set out how the Authority intends to achieve this and develop and improve its communications in the future.

The overall aim is to make the Authority's communications a two-way process: to give people the information to understand accurately what we do, while also enabling the Authority to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

## 2.0 COMMUNICATION

Communication plays an essential role in the conduct of the Authority's business. How staff communicate with people not only reflects on them as an individual but also on the Authority. The Authority values their ability to communicate with colleagues, residents, customers and business contacts, and invest substantially in information technology and communications systems which enable them to work more efficiently.

The Authority interacts with external stakeholders in various forms: -

- In person;
- By telephone;
- Written correspondence, both by letter and email;
- Website; and
- Social Media channels.

### 2.1 Why is communication important?

Improved communications lead to recognition and respect – reputation **does** matter.

Through good communication the Authority will understand and better meet the needs of the community, whilst also raising the profile of the District.

Good communications will enable the Authority to:

- better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities;
- raise residents' satisfaction, trust, and confidence by communicating about services provided by the Authority'
- raise the profile of Onchan as a destination;
- attract businesses/employment to the District;
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people; and
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of the Authority.

## **2.2 What should we be communicating?**

There are two methods of communicating:

- Proactive – giving people information to influence and change attitudes
- Reactive – giving residents information they have requested

Research by MORI, an independent research organisation, and the Local Government Association, suggests that the most important drivers of the Authority's reputation among local residents are:-

- perceived quality of services overall;
- perceived value for money;
- media coverage;
- direct communications;
- The Authority's performance;
- a clean, green, and safe environment; and
- positive experiences of contact with Commissioners' employees.

If the Authority is to build a strong reputation, effectively inform residents, engage, and improve customer satisfaction then these drivers must form the basis of its proactive and reactive communications.

## **2.3 Who should we be communicating with?**

The Authority's audiences are wide and varied but will typically include:-

- Residents;
- Commissioners and staff;
- Hard-to-reach groups, including young people;
- The media;
- Voluntary groups and organisations;
- The business community;
- MHKs;
- Other public sector organisations (police, health, fire);  
and
- Visitors and those who work in the area.

## **2.4 How should we be communicating?**

Onchan District Commissioners will ensure that information is easily accessible, relevant, and timely and recognises the importance of communication and commits to meet the expectations of the community it serves.

Different forms of communication will appeal to different ages, social groups, and demographics so it is important to ensure that within reason, all options for increasing communication and participation are considered in order to communicate effectively with everyone.

The advances made in information technology offer exciting new ways of communicating. At the same time, for many people, traditional methods – newspapers, telephone, and leaflets – still play a fundamental role that must not be undervalued.

***Currently communication is achieved through:-***

- Press releases;
- The Authority's website;
- Board agenda papers/correspondence;
- Commissioner interaction; and
- Issue specific consultation.

***Ways in which communication could be improved:-***

- Improved visibility of the Authority and its activities by more frequent reporting;
- Manage local media more effectively by proactive use of a template press release document to reduce factual errors in reporting;
  - In line with Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct, the Chairman and Lead Members in consultation with the Chief Executive/Clerk will regularly update the media with press releases on Authority activity.
  - The updated press template must be approved by the Chief Executive/Clerk prior to publication.
- The introduction of a regular District newsletter;
- Continue to improve the Authority's website to make it more user friendly including capturing data for a communication database;
- Use of social media;
- Better promotion of the Authority's online presence; and
- Regular consultation with the community and feedback to them on subsequent analysis including actions resulting from the consultation. i.e., You said this and we did that.

**2.4.1 Press - manage the media more effectively**

When dealing with the press, they are to be notified that the policy of the Authority with regard to public statements is to be directed through the office of the Chief Executive/Clerk in line with the Authority's Media Policy.

The media do play a strong role in shaping perceptions of local government, so informed reporting is vital. Whilst good relationships already exist, there is always room for improvement.

All communication to the media by Members in their Commissioners' role MUST be sent to the Chairman and Chief Executive/Clerk for approval.

Key points for effective management of media relations:-

- Respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time;
- Be helpful, polite and positive;
- Never say "no comment";
- Ensure all statements or responses to hostile enquiries are cleared by the Chief Executive/Clerk or the Chairman;
- Evaluate media coverage;

- Issue timely and relevant press releases;
- Pre-empt potential stories arising from Board agendas/minutes by issuing proactive PR (where possible); and
- Ensure all media contact is with the Chief Executive/Clerk or Chairman as per Standing Orders.

#### **2.4.2 Online presence - Improve the Authority's website**

The Commissioners' website is to be kept regularly updated.

It is important to work out strategies for keeping the website up to date and for ensuring good links with local businesses and community groups.

#### **2.4.3 More frequent and effective use of social media**

Please read in conjunction with the Authority's Social Media and Member Blogs Policy.

The Commissioners' Facebook page is to be kept regularly updated.

Investigate the use of social media, including Twitter, Flickr, and other social media platforms in order to promote the activities of the Authority.

#### **2.4.4 Better promotion of the Authority's online presence**

All communications should promote Onchan District Commissioners' website and if appropriate its social media accounts.

It is important to ensure that links to our website are provided from other key partners.

#### **2.4.5 Public Consultation - Carry out regular and effective consultation.**

At present, most of Onchan District Commissioners' consultation is by way of occasional questionnaires on specific subjects and members interaction with the public.

The Authority needs to establish means by which consultations will take place to cover all aspects of life in Onchan so that a full understanding of the needs of the community is developed. An action plan and Authority priorities can then be developed, which will be reviewed annually. The in-depth consultation will be repeated every five years. This will help to ensure that the Authority is engaged, delivering relevant services, and truly representing the needs of the community to other authorities/partners. The information obtained will also help to provide useful evidence in support of initiatives and funding bids.

In addition, regular (annual) consultation should be undertaken by the Authority to gather public opinion on perception and satisfaction of the Authority and the work it does. The results of this consultation would also help to better understand the Authority's strengths and weaknesses and would help the Authority to measure the effectiveness of its work in general and this strategy specifically.



The consultations need to be developed in such a way that there is an opportunity for all members of the community to engage in the process. Therefore, an analysis of the format of this consultation needs to be undertaken including:-

- **Who** – develop an understanding of the demographics of the community;
- **How** - establish ways of communicating with each of these that best encourages their engagement in the process;
- **What** – consider what information is required and develop relevant means of achieving this whilst still being appropriate, accessible, and engaging;
- **Where** – define the best locations for accessing and engaging with the different groups identified; and
- **When** – develop a timetable for the consultation process including when it is intended to hold consultation ‘events’.

Once completed, strategies for delivering services and improvements where identified should be developed with annual consultations held to measure effectiveness of the Authority’s activities and reputation and a review of the in-depth consultation every five years.

## **2.5 Who (from the Authority) should be communicating?**

It is imperative that:-

- All communication from Onchan District Commissioners is courteous, timely, professional, appropriate and reflects the decisions and policies of the Authority; and
- All individuals communicating on behalf of Onchan District Commissioners are aware that every piece of communication reflects on the reputation of the Authority in the community.

Staff and Members are ambassadors of Onchan District Commissioners and must remember this in all communications.

### **2.5.1 Chief Executive/Clerk**

The Chief Executive/Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies.

**Written communication:** The Chief Executive/Clerk, their staff and Members will be provided with an Authority email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting Onchan District Commissioners’ business.

The Chief Executive/Clerk and their staff are required to include a ‘signature’ as part of all email communication so that their name, job title, appropriate qualifications/letters and contact information is provided.

When in doubt about how to respond to an enquiry, the guidance of the Chief Executive/Clerk will be sought.

**Verbal communication:** members of staff will be required to communicate on a regular basis with the community as part of their duties. It is imperative that staff always handle all such communication with courtesy and professionalism.

Any member of staff who is unsure of how to handle difficult, angry, or vexatious complainants will be provided with the necessary training to ensure a positive outcome from such situations refer to the Vexatious Complaints, Correspondence and Behaviour Policy.

### 2.5.2 Commissioners

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Members will reflect on the Authority. Enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter, or email.

At no time should Commissioners make any promises to the public on behalf of the Authority about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the District or Authority.

It is expected that the Commissioners will refer to the Chief Executive/Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate. This will ensure that normal management and supervisory arrangements are not undermined, and that requests of a sensitive or complex nature are not referred inappropriately.

The Commissioners may request an item on a relevant agenda.

It is recommended that in line with best practice all communication is responded to and the correspondent kept apprised of progress. The procedure for doing so is as follows:-

1. Having received an enquiry/complaint, the Commissioners should acknowledge receipt (if in writing) and advise of what action is intended to be taken and forward the matter to the Chief Executive/Clerk for any further action or reply;
2. Advise when that action has been taken and what to expect next (i.e. a response is now awaited from (a third party); and
3. Report back on the outcome of the enquiry or ensure that either the third party or the Chief Executive/Clerk will/has report(ed) back on the matter.

Commissioners must ensure that all communication with the public on Authority related matters reflects the decisions and policies of Onchan District Commissioners regardless of the Commissioners' own views on any subject. If they communicate directly with the media, they must ensure the media understand their views are not necessarily the views of Onchan District Commissioners.

Any and all enquires by the media seeking a forma/official response shall be referred immediately to the Chief Executive/Clerk or Chairman.

### **3.0 CONTACT**

- Be polite and respectful;
- Be positive and efficient;
- Listen and take their views, wishes and needs seriously;
- Make sure that the staff are trained to give the help and advice that is required;
- Use plain language and not use jargon knew line all parts of the inquiry to be addressed;
- Any agreed action points to be completed within a reasonable time scale or any such defined date/time;
- Provide information and other formats – e.g. large print - where needed; and
- Do not discriminate.

#### **3.1 Written Correspondence**

After receipt of all correspondence, a substantive reply should be issued within 10 working days, if this cannot be achieved, then a holding response must be issued.

Communications are checked on a daily basis and acknowledgements are issued if required on the same day. All written correspondence goes through the office of the Chief Executive/Clerk and then distributed to the different departments for reply and response.

Issuing correspondence from the Authority should comprise an appropriate tone that is polite, positive and in plain English so that it is not easily misinterpreted.

Personal opinions in correspondence should not be included.

#### **3.2 Email Correspondence**

Any emails which are to be circulated in the public domain must have their personal work email addresses removed in line with GDPR requirements.

All officers and Commissioners must use the email template which contains the appropriate disclaimer notice and this is not to be amended in any way.

Please refer to Onchan District Commissioners Internet and Email Policy.

#### **3.3 Reception Visits**

Members of the public and visitors to the Authority should be welcomed immediately on arrival or ask to take a seat until the person they are visiting is available.

### 3.4 Response Times

Standard Information Request	within	3 Days
All other requests:	within	10 Days

If a response cannot be fulfilled within 10 working days, a holding response will be issued detailing:-

- Date of receipt for the original correspondence;
- Member of staff dealing with the enquiry;
- Expected response date; and
- Any other relevant details, e.g. correspondence being referred to the Board of Commissioners.

A full response must be sent by the date given in the holding response, or in the event of such a response not being available; a new expected response date and explanation for the delay.

### 4.0 **COMMENT, COMPLIMENT OR COMPLAINTS**

To continuously review and improve services provided and to update working practices and policies, feedback is welcomed.

The Commissioners and Officers of Onchan District Commissioners aim to meet the needs and requirements of the people of Onchan. We may not get everything right the first time and if you remain discontented with any part of the services we deliver to you please follow our complaints procedure.

A copy of the Authority's complaint's procedure is detailed at Appendix 2.

#### **(a) Complaints**

Treat complaints confidentially, while making sure that fairness is demonstrated to all involved.

In processing the complaint, it will need to include the following details:-

- Date of receipt;
- Name and contact details;
- Nature of complaint (brief description);
- Category of complaint (i.e. housing, waste, etc);
- Issue an acknowledgement;
- Inform the Chief Executive/Clerk who will forward the complaint to the Head of Department to investigate; and
- Follow the complaints procedure detailed in *Appendix 1*.

Apologise when the Authority is at fault and we will do our best to put things right.

If the complainant remains unhappy with the response, they will be advised how they can take their matter further.

**(b) Compliments**

In processing the compliment, it will need to include the following details:-

- Date of receipt;
- Name and contact details;
- Nature of compliment (brief description);
- Category of compliment (i.e. housing, waste, etc);
- Inform the Chief Executive/Clerk;
- Where necessary, issue a letter of thanks; and
- Chief Executive/Clerk to forward compliments on to the relevant section/personnel.

**5.0 CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information relating to the customers and our business operations is confidential. You must treat our paper-based and electronic information with utmost care.

**6.0 RISK MANAGEMENT**

To ensure that the employees have a right to work in a safe environment free from aggressive or threatening behaviour.

Introduction of a mechanism to ensure that communications are effective and regularly monitored.

All staff and Board Members be made aware of this policy during orientation and are provided with on-going support to assist them to effectively use the internal communication systems.

Particular care must be taken when using email and social media as a means of communication because all expressions of fact, intention and opinion may bind you and/or Onchan District Commissioners and can be produced in court in the same way as other kinds of written statements.

Please refer to the Authority's Social Media Policy and Internet and Email Policy.

**7.0 RECORD KEEPING**

All documents bearing Onchan District Commissioners name and/or logo, including digital and electronic materials, must be saved in the electronic and hard copy filing systems in line with the Authority's Document Retention Policy. This allows for others to be able to follow the audit trail of the communication.

## **8.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW OF COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chief Executive/Clerk is ultimately responsible for all business communications but subject to that will, so far as possible and appropriate, respect your privacy and autonomy while working. The Chief Executive/Clerk may monitor your business communications for reasons which include:-

- Providing evidence of business transactions;
- Ensuring that business procedures, policies and contracts with staff are adhered to;
- Complying with any legal obligations;
- Monitoring standards of service, staff performance, and for staff training; and
- Preventing or detecting unauthorised use of communications systems or criminal activities.

The policy will be reviewed every three years or as required following any major changes in legislation.

## **9. COMPLIANCE WITH THIS POLICY**

Failure to comply with any policy may result in disciplinary action being taken against you under Onchan District Commissioners' disciplinary procedures.

Please note that the procedures and policies outlined in this policy, and in any related policy, may be reviewed or changed at any time.

## **10. DATA PROTECTION**

Data protection is about the privacy of individuals, and is governed by the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations.

Members of Onchan District Commissioners who use the communications facilities, you will inevitably be involved in processing personal data for the Authority as part of your role.

## **References**

Onchan District Commissioners Code of Conduct  
Onchan District Commissioners Document Retention Policy  
Onchan District Commissioners Internet and Email Policy  
Onchan District Commissioners Media Contact Policy  
Onchan District Commissioners Social Media and Member Blogs Policy  
Onchan District Commissioners Standing Orders  
Onchan District Commissioners Vexatious Complaints, Correspondence and Behaviour Policy

## **11.0 Evaluation**

It is extremely important that Onchan District Commissioners measures the success of this policy so that it may inform any future plan. A benchmark of the current state will be required.

What communication improvements can we measure?

- Media's assessment of Onchan District Commissioners' communication coverage;
- Raised awareness of Onchan District Commissioners and the services it provides;
- Attitudes of all stakeholders towards Onchan District Commissioners;
- Participation and engagement with Onchan District Commissioners' projects, initiatives, and consultation processes; and
- Increased attendance at Public meetings and organised events.

How will we do this?

- Consultation with residents – perception and satisfaction surveys;
- Measure press coverage for saturation and against press releases for content usage;
- Hits on website; and
- Number of Likes and Followers on Social Networking sites (if applicable).



## Onchan District Commissioners

*'A Place for Everyone'*

# Customer Charter

### What to expect from us

- Listen and treat everyone's views and circumstances seriously
- Treat everyone politely and with respect at all times
- Treat everyone equally
- Provide a welcoming, friendly and accessible environment
- Provide a private, quiet area
- Staff will be trained and competent to give you the advice you need
- Treat complaints confidentially
- Offer a prior appointment wherever possible
- Offer official identification
- Answer enquiries promptly
- Respond to all emails within 10 days
- Apologise when we get things wrong

### What we expect from you

- We welcome Customer feedback to improve our services
- Treat Staff in the same manner you expect to be treated
- Let us know if you require any specific support ie, disability, large print
- BE ON TIME AND AT THE LOCATION AGREED**
- Raise concerns with the right Officers
- Let us know in good time if you need to cancel or re-arrange an appointment

**Aggressive/threatening behaviour will not be tolerated**



## Appendix 2 – Complaints Procedure



### ONCHAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS

### Complaints and Feedback Procedure

#### **Introduction:-**

The Commissioners and Officers of Onchan District Commissioners, aim to meet the needs and requirements of the people of Onchan. We may not get everything right the first time and if you remain discontented with any part of the services we deliver to you please follow our complaints procedure.

#### **First Stage (Informal):-**

Please contact the following:-

Property Maintenance issues (including Planning/Bye-Laws and refuse)	-	Property Maintenance Manager Telephone: 624967	E-Mail: <a href="mailto:surveyors@onchan.org.im">surveyors@onchan.org.im</a>
Housing issues	-	Housing Manager Telephone: 675564	E-Mail: <a href="mailto:admin@onchan.org.im">admin@onchan.org.im</a>
Rents/Rates/Arrears	-	Assistant Finance Manager Telephone: 675564	E-Mail: <a href="mailto:finance@onchan.org.im">finance@onchan.org.im</a>
Library	-	Head Librarian Telephone: 621228	E-Mail: <a href="mailto:onchan.library@onchan.org.im">onchan.library@onchan.org.im</a>

They will address your complaint and provide you with a full written answer within 10 working days.

#### **Stage 2:-**

Following the informal response and should you remain dissatisfied please contact either of the following Department Heads:-

Maintenance/Housing/Planning/ Byelaws/Refuse	District Surveyor Telephone: 693654	E-Mail: <a href="mailto:rossphillips@onchan.org.im">rossphillips@onchan.org.im</a>
Rents/Rates/Arrears	Finance Manager Telephone: 646196	E-Mail: <a href="mailto:stephaniejohnson@onchan.org.im">stephaniejohnson@onchan.org.im</a>

They will address your concerns and respond to you within 10 working days.

#### **Stage 3:-**

If you remain dissatisfied following the response received from the Department Head, please contact the Chief Executive/Clerk of the Authority in writing and within 10 working days from receiving your reply of the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage.

The Chief Executive/Clerk will look into the matter on your behalf and liaise with the necessary departments.

#### **Tynwald Commissioner for Administration Act 2011 ("the Act")**

In accordance with the Act if you still remain dissatisfied with the complaint response you can contact the Tynwald Commissioner for Administration within 6 months of the final decision at the following contact details:-

Tynwald Commissioner for Administration  
Office of the Clerk of Tynwald  
Legislative Buildings  
Finch Road  
Douglas  
Isle of Man, IM1 3PW  
E-Mail: [ombudsman@parliament.org.im](mailto:ombudsman@parliament.org.im)

**Your Commissioners are always available to support you with any complaint you may have.**

Issued by Onchan District Commissioners – January 2021