LOGGERHEADS PARISH COUNCIL
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Approved by Council: 15th August 2022
Date of Review: May 2024

1. Introduction

This strategy will focus the communication efforts of the Parish Council and support it to be effective and efficient in its activity to serve Loggerheads parish and our wider audiences (referred collectively as 'our community').

1.1 Policy Context

This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity ('the Code'). The Code is statutory guidance and the Parish Council must have regard to it and follow its provisions.

It also takes account of national guidance, for example 'The Good Councillor's Guide 2018 (National Association of Local Councils – 'The Guide').

1.2 The Need for a Communications Strategy

Loggerheads Parish Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders. Better communications lead to recognition and respect – reputation matters. Many councils fail to effectively communicate who they are and what they do – and the less people know about an organisation, the less likely they are to rate it highly.

Achieving the council's aims and objectives requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with, or provide services for.

Without proper co-ordination it would be difficult to make sure messages communicated by the Parish Council are consistent and accurate. But if communication is managed effectively, the Parish Council can create and seize opportunities to communicate with partners and the public and build an accurate and positive reputation.

1.3 What Should We Be Communicating?

Research by MORI, an independent research organisation, and the Local Government Association, states the most important drivers of council reputation among local residents are: -

- Perceived quality of services overall
- Perceived value for money
- Media coverage
- Direct communications
- Council performance
- Clean, green and safe environment

- Positive experiences of contact with council employees and contractors.

If the council is to build a strong reputation, effectively inform residents, engage and improve customer satisfaction then these drivers must form the basis of our communications strategy.

There is also a need for proactive and reactive information: -

- Proactively – telling people information to influence and change attitudes
- Reactively – giving residents information they want to know

2. Communicating Objectives

2.1 To ensure the Parish Council is aware of and responds in a timely manner to what the people of Loggerheads parish want and need to know

2.2 To use a variety of digital and traditional communication channels to make sure the information we provide is accessible for the whole community.

2.3 To ensure our messages are relevant, clear and factual to ensure maximum impact and interaction between the Parish Council and our community.

2.4 To provide a user friendly website that drives interaction with our audiences.

3. Communication Principles

Five principles underpin the strategy. Our communication channels need to:

- Be accessible for all
- Be convenient to access
- Help manage expectations
- Be relevant, clear and factual
- Encourage two-way positive engagement and to 'act together'

3.1 Identifying Newsworthy Items

It is the responsibility of everyone working within the Parish Council to identify newsworthy items; these will include a range of Parish Council activities and decisions and it is the responsibility of the Parish Clerk to make the decision as to whether or not a press release should be issued. The content of a Press Release should be approved by the Member of the council nominated as the Press Officer.

3.2 Handling Media Enquiries

The Parish Clerk co-ordinates all formal media enquiries to the Parish Council. Members and Parish Council staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts. If Members are in any doubt they should consult the Parish Clerk.

The Parish Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members. The phrase "no comment" should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The Parish Council is open and accountable and should always try to explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

3.2.1 Managing Negative Issues

From time to time the Parish Council has to respond to negative issues. It is important that these situations are managed carefully so as to limit the potential for negative publicity.

Members and Officers must alert the Parish Clerk as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media. Members and Officers must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted the Parish Council about an issue

3.2.2 Correcting Inaccurate Reporting

Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about the Parish Council, a quick decision needs to be taken on any action necessary to correct it. The issue should be discussed with the Parish Clerk to decide what action is appropriate. This could be a letter or news release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, a personal letter to the editor or legal advice. It will also be necessary to decide who is the most appropriate person to take the agreed action.

It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain; each case should be judged individually.

Occasionally the Parish Council will get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake, apologising and stating how the Parish Council will learn from the error or put it right.

3.3 Press Releases

The use of press releases is a key technique for publicising Parish Council activities, decisions and achievements. An official Parish Council release is made on behalf of the Parish Council as a whole; it will be written and issued by the Parish Clerk. Official Parish Council releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Parish Council, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Parish Councillor.

Parish Council press releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Parish Councillors, identify a Member's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view. All official Parish Council releases will be placed on the Parish Council's website within one working day of issue.

3.4 Interviews

Any member of staff or elected Member who is contacted by a journalist requesting an interview in their capacity as a representative of the Parish Council should refer the matter tothe Parish Clerk.

The situation and the information required by the journalist will inform the choice of person put forward for interview. Officers should never give their opinion on specific Parish Council policy but must keep to the corporate line and key messages, their role being to provide expertise and factual knowledge only in support of the Parish Council's approved and agreed policies.

3.5 Media Coverage of Council Meetings

Provision is made for members of the media to attend Parish Council and Committee meetings. During meetings Members and Officers should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue.

Where a meeting of the Parish Council and its committees includes an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Parish Council's Standing Orders. Both the media and the public are entitled to film and record council meetings held in public.

4. Information Requirements

4.1 Freedom of Information and Data Protection

Should the Parish Council receive a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on a topic on which there is correspondence (written or email), that correspondence will normally have to be disclosed unless it is exempt. The fact that the disclosure may prove embarrassing would not, in itself, prevent disclosure. In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data.

The Data Protection Act 2018 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents.

The Parish Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Parish Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Parish Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law. Parish Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Parish Council, a copy of which is available via the Parish Council's website.

4.2 Individual Councillor Policy

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all Officers and Members involved in dealing with the media and to provide guidance on how to handle media interest. It is also to ensure that the Parish Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner.

This policy does not seek to regulate Parish Councillors in their private capacity but does provide advice and guidance on their sensible use of conventional and social media. The Parish Council's communications with the media seek to

represent the corporate position and views of the Parish Council. If the views of Parish Councillors are different to the Parish Council's corporate position and views, it is the responsibility of every councillor to make thisdistinction clear.

Subject to the obligations on Parish Councillors not to disclose information referred to in section 4.1 and not to misrepresent the Parish Council's position, Parish Councillors are freeto communicate their position and views.

In all cases, the Parish Council's approach, in accordance with the Code and the Guide, is that all individual councillor communications should:

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to the Parish Council's policies, particularly Equality and Diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity (eg elections).

If in doubt, never say anything you will be uncomfortable repeating in court.

5. Communication Channels

The type of communication channels used will depend on the target audience and themessage to be communicated. These will include: -

1. Parish Council website
2. Social media
3. Consultations and feedback forms
4. Correspondence (general)
5. Direct responses (email, phone, in person representations)
6. Parish Council meetings
7. Parish Council working groups
8. Nominated Parish Council spokesperson (e.g. for social media responses)
9. Annual Parish meeting
10. Parish Councillors
11. Features submitted to local newsletters
12. Posters, flyers, newsletters
13. Village notice boards
14. Networking links with partners/stakeholders

5.1 Website

The Parish Council website is an important vehicle for the promotion of Parish Council andwider Parish activities. The website will not: -

- contain content that may result in actions for libel, defamation or other claims fordamages
- be used to process personal data other than for the purpose stated at the time ofcapture
- promote any political party or be used for campaigning

- promote personal financial interests or commercial ventures
- be used for personal campaigns
- be used in an abusive, hateful or disrespectful manner

5.2 Social Media Policy

Social media can be used by the Parish Council as an effective and measurable way toachieve resident engagement and attract publicity. The aim of this part of the policy is to make sure: -

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of Parish Council-based services through the use of social media
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
- That Parish Council information remains secure and is not compromised through theuse of social media
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
- That the Parish Council is not brought into disrepute.

Social media activity isn't something that stands alone. To be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be included in social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

6. Publicity During Elections

The rules governing publicity change when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself ('purdah') all proactive publicity about candidates and other politicians is halted. This applies to scheduled local, national or European elections, plus referendums.

During this period Parish Council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual Members or groups of Members. This is to make sure that no individual Parish Councillor or political party gains an unfair advantage by appearing in corporate publicity. In these circumstances, where a quote is required the relevant Officer may be quoted, in accordance with the guidelines in this policy.

The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature – this includes web advertising. There are additional requirements, such as imprint standards, for materials which can be downloaded from a website. Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

Accounts may need to be closed for a defined period before local and national elections in order to comply with legislation which affects local authorities.

Political blogs cannot be linked from the Parish Council's website and the Parish Council will not promote any Parish Councillors' Twitter accounts during the election purdah period.

Parish Council Members are reminded that they must not misuse Parish Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes. Any queries regarding publicity

during a purdah period should always be referred to the Parish Clerk for further advice.

7. Review

The Finance and General Purposes Committee will oversee the development and implementation of the strategy. This will be reviewed by the Finance Committee, but all decisions will be taken by the full Council.