**West Lavington Parish Council**

**Communication Strategy**

**2023 - 2024**

1. **Introduction**

Communication is a vital part of the operation of any organisation. Communication allows the Council to both give out and receive information from a range of stakeholders that it regularly interacts with. Especially within the context of a local council, speaking to the public and hearing back their views is fundamental to its function and purpose as a democratic body. Such communication should operate to professional standards and be consistent in its production, quality, relevance and frequency.

This Communications Strategy contains information on how to achieve the above standards and outlines answers to the key questions of how we should communicate, when we should communicate and to whom we should communicate. It gives direction on the production of online, print, traditional news media, internal and any other communication activity.

**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’).

The principle is that communication should be:

• Lawful

• Cost-effective

• Objective

• Even-handed

• Appropriate

• Have regard to equality and diversity

• Treated with care during periods of heightened sensitivity (i.e., elections)

**2.0 Strategy**

Communication should be frequent, clear and in plain English. It should disseminate relevant information, with the aim of informing residents and improving the reputation and image of the Council. It is designed to work within the relevant statutory requirements relating to local government publicity.

**2.1 Vision**

Our vision is that the people of West Lavington & Littleton Panell have a clear understanding of the Parish Council’s priorities, operations and challenges and that they recognise the Council as a reputable and forward-looking council that provides good value.

**2.2 Commitment**

We will achieve this vision by communicating with the public we serve and the people we work with. This will be done by regular two-way communication with relevant stakeholders so that we both send and receive information through the appropriate channels of communication we use.

Stakeholders include (but are not limited to):

* West Lavington Parish residents
* Local authorities, including neighbouring parish councils, Wiltshire Council, Wiltshire Police and Government bodies
* Community groups and charities
* Local businesses
* Employees and Contractors appointed by the Parish Council
* West Lavington Parish Coucil

Channels of Communication include:

* Parish Council Website
* Parish Council Facebook Page
* Parish Council Twitter feed
* Parish Council Instagram feed
* Local Facebook Groups (e.g. West Lavington Posts)
* News & Views printed community newsletter
* Village noticeboards
* Written & Verbal representations via the Clerk
* Written & Verbal representations to individual councillors
* Parish Council Meetings

**2.3 Individual Councillors Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities of councillors involved with communications and to provide guidance on how to handle media interactions.

This policy does not regulate Parish Councillors in their private capacity but does provide advice and guidance on how to engage with conventional and social media. The Parish Council’s communications with the public and media seeks 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 this distinction clear.

Subject to the obligations on Parish Councillors not to disclose confidential information and not to misrepresent the Parish Council’s official position, Parish Councillors are free to communicate their position and views as private individuals. In all cases a councillors approach must be in accordance with the Code and the Guide (See 1.1).

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

**3.0 How we communicate**

A diverse range of channels will be used to communicate. Stakeholders have varying needs, and different stakeholders may require different channels. Channels can be in the form of digital, social media, print and face to face. (See 2.2)

**3.1 Notice Boards**

Any notice placed on public notice boards will be identified and approved during Parish Council Meetings.

**3.2 News and Views Parish Magazine**

The Parish Magazine carries a monthly ‘Chairpersons Report’ on the activities of the council. Should additional articles be submitted they should be reviewed by the Communications Officer as with Social Media as they are likely to be placed in multiple channels.

**3.3 Social Media Use**

Social media presents a fantastic opportunity to engage with thousands of residents in seconds without having to rely on print-run dates or physical delivery of newsletters. It is acknowledged that a large number of residents actively discuss many aspects of daily life in the parish which the Parish Council is involved with. Embracing social media allows the Parish Council to be involved in the conversation and ensure that accurate information is distributed in the community.

**4.0 What we Communicate**

* How the Parish Council works
* Parish Council documents, such as completion of an audit
* Meeting times and dates, agendas and Minutes
* Local events, groups and Village Hall user groups
* Who to contact about which service
* How to give feedback, such as raising an issue or complaint
* Contact information of the Parish Council, elected members and partner organisations
* Newly enacted Parish Council decisions
* Community Resilience planning and activation

The Communication Working Group will decide the appropriate channel to use

**5.0 Who Communicates**

**5.1** Communication is managed by the Parish Council’s Communication Working Group. This group is led by the Council’s Chairperson. The group appoints a Communications Officer and a delegate. The Officer will communicate relevant information to the public and will support other council staff and councillors in their planned communication activities to ensure consistent quality of information, publication and branding. They have responsibility for monitoring social media channels and media approaches before advising on responses. Responses suggested by the Communication Officer are subject to final approval of the Chair (or in the case that the Chair is unavailable, the Vice-Chair).

In all cases, public communication should be signed as “West Lavington Parish Council”, rather than any specific individual. This is to show the democratic unity of the Parish Council and helps to reinforce the identity of the Council and the good work that it does.

**5.2 Managing Social Media**

**Step 1** – Communications Officer creates content for the Channels listed in 2.2

**Step 2** – Chair approves the content for publishing (and if necessary refers it to Council]

**Step 3** – Communications Officer publishes the content across agreed channels

* All communications should be signed by “West Lavington Parish Council”
* All communications should carry a standard footer of “If you wish to discuss this matter in more detail it is important you attend the next Parish Council meeting or write to our Clerk (clerk@westlavington.org.uk). Whilst we aim to respond to comments on social media, we cannot do this in every case. We also cannot make any decisions via social media and defer all formal discussion to our next meeting”.

**Step 4** – Communications Officer monitors social media “chatter” and responds accordingly whilst remaining within the permissions of this strategy. It is assumed that the Chair will not need to approve informal responses made by the Communications Officer unless the Communications Officer feels it is appropriate for them to do so.

**6.0 Review**

The communications working group will oversee the development and implementation of the strategy. This will be reviewed by the Risk Committee, but all decisions will be taken by the full Council.

Communications Group shall report at each Parish Council Meeting

**7.0 Policy for press or media enquiries**

Any media enquiries from members of the press or television whether national or local should be directed to the Parish Clerk. Individual councillors should refrain from comment.

Enquiries received from the media should be reviewed and answered by the Communication Working Group, the group should be sensitive to issues that may require review by full council

**Appendix 1: Communications Framework**

The communications framework outlines how new information and content should be created and what should be considered when making it.

**Who are we talking to?**

Consider who the relevant stakeholders are and what their specific requirements might be. Which channel will capture most of that audience and what information do they already know?

**What are we saying?**

Information should be written in plain English. Fonts should be clear and the layout of information logical and clear to follow. Ideally, it should contain an image to capture attention, especially on social media. It should also include key pieces of information such as date, time, location, contact information, cost etc.

**Why are we saying it?**

Part of planning is to consider why this information is being communicated. Is it designed just to inform the reader, to change their behaviour or to get feedback from them? Each option can require different considerations and be written differently.

What are the objectives of the message? It could be to ‘help advertise and increase visitor numbers to event X’ or ‘get public opinion and feedback on policy Y’. Messages should be targeted to these aims and not contain unnecessary or irrelevant information.

Consider how it fits in with other activities at the Council as it could form part of a wider campaign.

**What resources are available?**

Consider what resources are available to deliver the message. Will it require money be spent and how much? How long will it take to create and then for how long should it be promoted? Which members of staff could help? What skills are needed?

Make sure to evaluate communications and read the feedback at all points. What risks are involved? How will we know if it’s been successful? What did we learn and how do we improve this next time?