

Communications Strategy

2023-2027

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1 Our Communications Strategy

Communication is a vital part of running an organisation. Research shows that bodies who regularly communicate have a better reputation and satisfaction with service users than ones that don't. 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.

This strategy also forms the function of a communications audit. Such audits establish a baseline and understanding of the current way communication is done, what resources are available, who does what, what branding is used, and the current reputation of the Council. Audits can include survey results, media content analysis and a SWOT analysis that looks at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

2 Communications Strategy in Context

This strategy outlines the Council's approach to communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders, which is a crucial part of achieving the Council's objectives of transparency and accountability. Communication should be frequent, clear and disseminate relevant information to the right people, 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 Bagshot, Lightwater and Windlesham have a clear understanding of Windlesham Parish Council's priorities, operations and challenges and that they recognise the Council as a reputable and forward-looking council. It should be seen as an employer of choice and help to promote the villages of Bagshot, Lightwater and Windlesham as excellent places to live and visit.

2.2 Commitments

We will achieve this vision by communicating with the public we serve, the people we employ and the local authorities, groups and businesses 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:

- Residents and service users
- Local community groups
- Employees
- Partner bodies/organisations/authorities locally, regionally and nationally
- Business community
- Opinion formers and key influencers
- External funders

Channels of Communication include:

- Website
- Facebook Page
- Instagram Page
- NextDoor page
- YouTube
- External Communications – local magazines
- Quarterly newsletter
- Exhibitions
- Consultations and Surveys

- Parish Notice Boards
- Public speaking at meetings

3 Communication Principles

All Council communication should be consistent and uphold high standards of writing, production and dissemination. This reflects the culture at the Council and the aims and ambitions it has. Communication should encourage and enable a two-way flow of information, which involves listening to stakeholder's views and informing them of ours.

All communication will comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011) published by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Paragraph 4 states that communication should be:

- Lawful
- Cost-effective
- Objective
- Even-handed
- Appropriate
- Have regard to equality and diversity
- Issues be dealt with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Further to this, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations issues guidance in *PR and Communication in Local Government and Public Service* that recommends the following additional communication standards:

- **Accurate information.** All efforts should be made to ensure accuracy at the time of production. Updates and corrections should be made where errors have occurred.
- **Delivers key messages.** Information should relate to key policy and principles of the Council. It should primarily relate to council matters.
- **Accessible to all.** Channels should be mixed to cover diverse groups and their needs.
- **Plain language used.** Information should be clear and straight forward. Key points should be emphasised.
- **Appropriate timing.** Communication should happen in good time to allow others to react. It should be regular and be an ongoing process.
- **Appropriate quality of design and production.** Ideally to a professional standard
- **Appropriate branding used.** Make it clear who the information is coming from.
- **Review and evaluate.** Monitor all channels to see what is or is not successful. Seek to improve output, engagement and learn from poor practices to communicate better.
- **Feedback.** Include survey questions in questionnaires to gauge opinion on communication and reputation. Inform respondents what will be done with the feedback.

4 Key Objectives and Measurement of Progress

Key Objectives:

1. **Enhance Awareness and Accessibility of Council Information**
Ensure that residents can access timely, accurate, and clearly presented information across multiple platforms.
2. **Increase Community Engagement and Participation**
Foster stronger involvement from residents in council activities, decision-making processes, and local initiatives.
3. **Promote Transparency and Build Public Trust**
Maintain open and transparent communication to reinforce accountability and public confidence in the Council's operations.

Monitoring and Reporting:

Progress towards these objectives will be tracked using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. These will include, but are not limited to:

- **Website and Social Media Analytics:**
Insights such as page visits, post reach, engagement rates, and follower growth from platforms including the Council website and official social media channels.
- **Public Feedback and Surveys:**
Data gathered from resident surveys, comment forms, emails, and informal feedback to gauge community sentiment and satisfaction.
- **Attendance and Participation Metrics:**
Tracking attendance at council meetings, consultations, and events to assess levels of community involvement.
- **Communication Outputs and Responsiveness:**
Reviewing the volume, frequency, and timeliness of newsletters, notices, and responses to resident enquiries.

Progress Reporting:

Progress will be reviewed and presented at Communications Committee meetings, using appropriate formats such as statistical reports, engagement summaries, and feedback analysis. This will support continuous evaluation of the Communications Strategy and ensure it remains aligned with the Council's wider objectives.

5 Who We Communicate With

A stakeholder is a person, group or organisation that has an interest in the success of the Council or can be affected by the organisation's actions, objectives and policies.

Windlesham Parish Council works with many employees, individuals, partner organisations and groups to achieve its vision for the local area. Stakeholders include:

5.1 Internal Stakeholders

- Windlesham Parish Council Staff
 - Office staff
 - Greenspace Management & Contractors
- Windlesham Parish Council Councillors

5.2 External Stakeholders

- Residents who live in the parish of Windlesham
- People or organisations that use the Council's services
 - Non-resident users of the cemetery, playgrounds, rubbish bins etc
- Visitors to Bagshot, Lightwater and Windlesham
- Emergency services
 - Surrey Police
 - Surrey Fire and Rescue
 - Frimley Health Trust
- Schools in Bagshot, Lightwater and Windlesham
 - Bagshot Infant School
 - Hall Grove School, Bagshot
 - Connaught Junior School, Bagshot
 - Lightwater Village Infant and Junior School
 - Windlesham Village Infant School
 - Woodcote House School, Windlesham
- User groups in the local community halls
- Local and voluntary groups in the Villages
 - The Scouts
 - Windlesham Society
 - Bagshot Society
 - Lightwater Society
 - Lightwater Connected
 - St John the Baptist's Church,
 - All Saints Church
 - St Annes Church, and many others
- The Council's partner organisations
- County, Borough and other local parish councils
 - Surrey County Council and councillors
 - Surrey Heath Borough Council and councillors
 - Chobham Parish Council
 - West End Parish Council
 - Bisley Parish Council

- Constituency Member of Parliament
- Business suppliers and the business community in Windlesham parish area
- Regional and national media
- External funders that have given funds
- Opinion formers and important influencers
- External scrutineers

6 How We Communicate

A diverse range of channels will be used to communicate. Channels are defined as being the medium by which information is sent and received. 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.

6.1 Digital and Telecommunications

- Website
 - Windlesham Parish Council's website: www.Windleshampc.gov.uk
 - This is an easily accessible platform that covers most of the Council's documents, operations, important dates/times and contact information
 - It is for the giving of information and one-way communication
 - It is updated as required
- E-mail
 - Members of staff and the Parish Councillors are accessible via e-mail to discuss an issue or find information about a policy or service
 - This is a two-way channel allowing for direct interaction with the public
 - E-mails are viewed daily
- Telephone
 - Parish Councillors are accessible via either landline or mobile phones to raise an issue or request information
 - Members of staff are accessible via landline
 - This is a two-way channel allowing for direct conversation with the public
 - Out-of-hours: The landline is available Monday, Wednesday & Thursday between 9am and 2pm. Out of hours enquiries should be left on the voicemail. Parish Councillor numbers can be contacted at appropriate hours during the week

6.2 Social Media

- Facebook

Windlesham Parish Council's Facebook page: [Windlesham Parish Council - Bagshot, Lightwater & Windlesham | Facebook](#)

- This is an easily accessible platform that communicates council information, office closures and opening times, council and local group events, meeting dates and times etc.
- This is a two-way channel allowing for members of the public to post their opinions, like or share the posts. They can also direct message.
- Facebook is viewed daily, and posts are made as frequently as possible
- Meeting information is also shared via the Event feature.

- Instagram

- Windlesham Parish Council's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/windleshamparishcouncil/>
- Instagram provides a visually engaging and easily accessible platform to share council updates, community projects, office opening hours, and information about local events across Bagshot, Lightwater, and Windlesham.
- It is an ideal space for promoting local pride and engagement, using images and short videos to highlight the parish's people, places, and initiatives.
- Instagram also serves as a two-way communication channel, allowing residents to like, comment on, and share posts, as well as send direct messages to the Council.
- The account is monitored regularly, with posts published as needed to reflect current news, meetings, and community activities.

- Nextdoor page: Windlesham Parish Council – Bagshot, Lightwater & Windlesham

- A local, community-focused platform for sharing council news, office hours, events, and meeting details.
- Reaches residents directly within the parish, encouraging engagement and awareness.
- Allows two-way communication, with residents able to comment and message the Council.
- Monitored regularly, with updates posted as needed.
- Used to highlight positive local stories and promote community connection.

- YouTube Channel: The Parish Council will explore setting up a YouTube channel to share recordings of council meetings. This platform would provide an accessible and transparent way for residents to view discussions and decisions at their convenience. YouTube is a widely used, free, and easy to access tool that would allow the Council to reach a broader audience and share them through other communication channels.

6.3 Printed Publications

- Quarterly Newsletter –

- Printed and distributed around Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter and Christmas, where appropriate.
 - Distributed to key locations across the three villages – including cafes and libraries.
 - Contains event information, parish updates and community news.
 - This is a one-way channel that provides information to all residents, whether they are online or not. It has the broadest scope of all channels
 - Newsletters are published quarterly, but the collection of information is happening continuously.
- Partner Authority Newsletters
 - Where requests are made for information from Windlesham Parish Council
- Parish Notice Boards
 - These are located at various locations in Bagshot, Lightwater and Windlesham and contain relevant information, such as public notice of meetings, local events and office hours
 - This is a one-way communication channel
 - It can be updated as necessary.

6.4 Surveys and Consultations

- Surveys
 - Surveys are taken to get a snapshot of public or user group opinion on a range of issues, such as their experiences, concerns, likes and dislikes, Council reputation etc. This data then forms the basis of policy creation and action plans to ensure the proper running and functioning of the Council. It is also an important, large-scale listening exercise.
 - This is a one-way channel that allows those surveyed to give information to the Council.
 - They are held infrequently and help formulate documents such as the Parish Council Action Plan and Communications Strategy
- Consultations
 - Often held in conjunction with an exhibition, consultations allow for the public and partners to give their opinions, views and ideas to the Council on a specific issue under consideration. They can also help to support a grant funding proposal.
 - This is a one-way channel that allows those consulted to give information to the Council.
 - They are held infrequently to help formulate policy or provide evidence of community support for a grant funding application.

7 What We Communicate

One of the communication principles on pages 5 & 6 of this document is the requirement of relevant information. Relevancy is determined by the needs of specific stakeholders. Information they may need to receive from us could include:

7.1 The Public and Local Groups

- Parish Council office opening hours and closures
- Staff changes and job opportunities
- How the Parish Council works
- Parish Council documents, such as completion of an audit
- Meeting times and dates
- Local events, and 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
- What their roles and powers are
- Newly enacted Parish Council decisions
- Policy proposals
- Information on accessing and using Parish Council services and any changes to them
- Costs of using services where applicable
- How to access and apply for grants from the Parish Council

7.2 Partner Councils and Organisations

- Newly enacted Parish Council decisions
- Changes to services
- Contact information for the Parish Council office and councillors
- Planning application views and opinions
- Legally required notifications, such as Building Control Plan following a project
- Police reports and crime statistics
- School information

7.3 The Decision to Communicate

Day to day Information arising from within Windlesham Parish Council, such as office hours changes/closures, staff changes, meetings advertisements/cancellations, policy announcements, newsletter previews etc can be approved and uploaded at the discretion of the Clerk.

However, where an outside body asks to use our communications channels to distribute their own information or advertise an event to residents, this will need prior approval by

email, from the relevant committee or Full Council. Outside bodies include user groups, local groups, other councils or businesses. There is no immediate right for such information to be published and so prior permission is required. Any outside information should adhere to standards on clarity, usefulness and legality etc and should not disparage Windlesham Parish Council.

In principle, approval for one channel will mean approval for all channels. However, a newsletter article must meet formatting requirements and so something approved for social media and the website may not necessarily be approved for the newsletter if those requirements aren't met.

7.4 Accessibility

Website Accessibility and WCAG 2.2 Compliance

Parish councils must ensure their websites meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Level AA, as required by the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018.

To comply, the Parish Council should regularly check the website for accessibility issues, publish an up to date accessibility statement, and ensure all content text, images, and documents is created in an accessible format.

Meeting WCAG 2.2 AA standards demonstrates the council's commitment to inclusion and ensures all residents can access information and services.

8 Who Communicates?

Everyone communicates at the Parish Council in some form and so an understanding and application of the communication principles is necessary to improve the flow of information and the overall reputation of the Council. The key people communicating are:

The Communications and Engagement Officer

The Comms Officer identifies opportunities to 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 the website, social media pages and newsletter, and will help others on the parish notice boards, regional and national media, exhibitions, surveys and consultations.

Office Staff

The Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, along with the Assistant Clerk, Cemeteries Coordinator and Operations Coordinator will have regular interactions with the public, such as through e-mail, face to face, parish notice boards, the public speaking section at meetings, consultations and surveys. They will also communicate with partner councils,

organisations and local groups and businesses. They have a responsibility to uphold the communication principles and standards and work with the Communications Officer on delivery where required.

Other Staff and Councillors

Other representatives of the Council, when communicating with members of the public and other local groups through e-mail, phone calls or face to face, should uphold the communications principles and communicate in a clear, informative manner. They should help in so far as possible to resolve an issue or forward them on to the appropriate member of staff.

9 Evaluation

Evaluation of the communications strategy is a vital component in receiving feedback and driving improvement. This involves the monitoring and assessment of the overall strategy and individual channels of communication. They should comply with the Council's key priorities and communication principles, as well as achieving key strategic outcomes such as giving clear information or changing reader behaviour.

9.1 Channel Assessment

Digital and social media channels provide regular visitor and engagement analytics. These can be useful to see if a specific channel is being viewed and performing its intended function. Channels showing areas of concern should be reassessed or removed from the communications strategy. This data should be monitored by the Communications and Engagement Officer and brought to the attention of the Clerk and Parish Council if problems emerge.

Appendix 1: Communications Action Plan

This action plan outlines changes going forward that will improve communication further at Windlesham Parish Council. It identifies an area of focus and gives appropriate actions to achieve that outcome.

| Action | Comment |
|--------|---------|
|--------|---------|

| | |
|---|--|
| Update the website | Continue to update the website as necessary Establish frequent communication between the Clerk and Communications and Engagement Officer to upload the latest documents as they are created |
| Ensure website is WCAG 2.2 compliant | All key council documents, including policies, meeting papers, and reports, will be published in an accessible format wherever possible. This ensures that information is available to all members of the community. Requests for documents in alternative formats will be accommodated upon request, in line with the Council's accessibility commitments. |
| Social Media Content Review | Continue to review content and use analytics to assess successful campaigns. |
| Blog | Consider creating a blog to provide clear, accessible explanations of policies, projects, and decisions, offering greater transparency and insight than other channels allow, with regular posts shared via the website, social media, and newsletters |
| Publicise Local Groups | Continue to work with local groups to help advertise their events to a broader audience using our channels |
| Monitor Costs of Communication | Always monitor and evaluate the costs of communicating and ensure efficient use of resources |
| Produce a quarterly newsletter – digital and print | Continue to produce a quarterly newsletter where appropriate and distribute print copies locally. |
| Youtube Channel | Consider the creation of a YouTube channel to upload council meetings to |

Appendix 2: Media Contact Form

Please fill in the clear boxes. Grey boxes are for the Parish Council Office

| | |
|------|--|
| Name | |
|------|--|

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Company or Organisation | |
| Telephone Number | |
| E-mail Address | |
| Nature of Enquiry | |
| Deadline for Response | |
| Enquiry Received On: Date Time | |
| Message Taken By | |
| Response as follows | |
| Approved by | |
| Responded on: Date Time | |

Appendix 3:

Communications Framework

The communications framework outlines how new information and content should be created at Windlesham Parish Council 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?

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?

Appendix 4: