



Communication & Community Engagement Policy 2022

Introduction

- 1.1 The Council believes that involving citizens in decisions which affect their lives is a means to develop an empowered and strong community and recognises that effective communication is a key component in creating an engaged community.
- 1.2 Whilst the Council cannot force anyone to engage with it or the wider community, it will make it easier and more attractive for them to do so.
- 1.3 The Council is always open to receiving both positive and negative feedback and is committed to encouraging the community to engage with it.
- 1.4 The Council considers that the Haydon Wick community comprises all residents of the parish, all users of Council services, all those who work or own businesses within Haydon Wick, all young people who go to school in Haydon Wick and all voluntary organisations, clubs and societies operating within the parish.
- 1.5 This policy sets out the Council's approach to communications and engagement and provides guidance to councillors on member press engagement.
- 1.6 During election periods the Council is required to ensure it does not do anything which could influence the outcome of the election. This is known as the purdah period. The Council will follow the guidance issued by the Government, the National Association of Local Councils, the Society of Local Council Clerks and the Local Government Association and vary its communications accordingly during these periods.
- 1.7 All communications will avoid gobbledygook, jargon and misleading public information.

Communication

- 2.1 The Council recognises that it has a role to play in facilitating communication across the community and where possible will support external organisations in disseminating information to the community.
- 2.2 The Council's website is its primary source of Council information for the community, and it shall be kept up to date.
- 2.3 The Council will submit articles for the Swindon Advertiser and sector specific publications such as The Clerk and Clerks Direct.
- 2.4 The Council will:

- distribute a monthly news ~~items~~ letter?
- utilise noticeboards at the Council Offices and across the parish
- develop the Annual Council Meeting as a forum for community discussion
- publish its agendas, minutes, and reports on the Council website
- publish an annual report of its activity

2.5 The Council shall continue to set aside time at every Council and Committee meeting (excluding Personnel) for members of the public to address the Council.

2.6 The Council recognises that communication is a two-way process, and it will always strive to promptly answer questions from and listen to suggestions put forward by members of the community.

Social Media

2.7 The Council recognises that social media is an effective means of communication and will operate Facebook and Instagram as part of its communications.

2.8 Social media messages will be non-political, uncontroversial, and used to promote and highlight the Parish.

2.9 The Council aims to use social media to support two-way communication with the community but recognises that it is not always appropriate to respond to every message/comment, publicly or otherwise. For complex issues users should be referred to traditional forms of communication e.g. email or telephone.

Consultations

3.1 When seeking the views on a specific project or idea, the Council will consult with the community. The majority of consultations will be open to the whole community but on occasion consultations may be with specific stakeholders only.

3.2 In preparation for a consultation the Council will:

- Identify the stakeholders for the consultation
- Determine the appropriate communications to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the consultation
- Determine the appropriate form of consultation
- Set a defined end date for submissions

3.3 Open consultations shall run for a minimum of four weeks. More focused consultations may run for a minimum of two weeks.

3.4 The Council shall avoid running consultations over holiday periods e.g. school summer holidays, Easter and Christmas.

3.5 Consultations will use specific, non-leading questions. The Council may ask open questions (e.g. where do you think an outdoor gym should be sited?), but not open-ended questions (e.g. why do you think an outdoor gym should be installed?).

Press Releases and Official Statements

4.1 Press releases promoting Council activity will be routinely issued under the direction of the Chief Officer. Press releases shall focus on promoting the Council as a body and not promote the views of specific members/groups, publicise individual members or encourage the public to hold a particular view.

4.2 As a minimum, press releases will be published on the Council website and issued to the Swindon Advertiser. Press releases may be disseminated further depending on the subject matter.

4.3 When a press release is prepared on an issue that the Chief Officer considers is contentious, it shall be prepared with relevant members e.g. the chairman of a committee, and / or chairman of the Council.

4.4 All requests received by officers for statements on behalf of the Council shall be referred to the Chief Officer who will provide a statement where there is a clear policy position/direction. All statements shall be matters of fact and demonstrate that the Council is:

- open and accountable
- professional
- willing to listen and engage on issues in the community

Letters to the Editor

4.5 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. These may be issued by the Chief Officer, or by the relevant councillor i.e. the Chairman of the Council or Chair of Committee.

4.6 Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.

4.7 Members are strongly encouraged not to use the letters as a means of expressing their personal views.

Member Press Engagement

5.1 As politicians and civic leaders, it is to be expected that members will be approached by the media for comment and may wish to respond to local issues. In all engagement members must not purport to speak on behalf of the Council unless expressly authorised to do so by resolution at a council/committee meeting.

5.2 Members speaking in their capacity as a Councillor must uphold the Council's Code of Conduct and are expected to follow relevant Council policies.

5.3 Members must be aware of what constitutes pre-determination and should not present themselves as having made their mind up on an issue before voting at a meeting.

5.4 Members should avoid being seen to anticipate decisions of the council and must not criticise any council employees.

Version Control

	Georgina Morgan-Denn Clerk to Council	Reviewed	Next Review
Communications & Community Policy 2022		Community Development Committee X Adopted Full Council X	