



Lancing Parish Council

Communication Policy and Strategy

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 What the Council plans to achieve through this strategy

The Council plans to improve communication opportunities with the local community, including better use of digital and electronic communicative methods and social media.

1.2 Why the Council implemented the strategy

The Council wants to increase community involvement. The strategy has been designed so that the Council will become better connected to its residents and more accountable for the decisions made.

1.3 What the strategy encompasses

The strategy encompasses:

1. Internal communication between Members of the Council and Officers of the Council
2. External communication between
 - a. The Council and the local community
 - b. The local community and the Council
3. How the Council will evaluate the quality and success of its communication strategy

1.4.1 When the strategy is to be implemented

Implementation will commence in autumn 2016, starting with the creation of a Parish Council Facebook page, an increased volume of press releases, and improved use of notice boards.

1.4.2 Further tasks, which are dependent upon the availability of funding and so have budgetary implications, will follow. These include, for example, increasing the number of notice boards across the Village, and publishing a regular Parish newsletter.

1.4.3 Other components of the strategy such as an extra annual public meeting will commence in the autumn of 2017.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The purpose of this Communication Strategy is to provide a clear framework as to how Lancing Parish Council intends to provide the community with connected councillors and in doing so, meeting the needs of the community whilst providing value for money. The Council has the direct ambition to improve its relationship with the community by reaching out to residents and therefore facilitating high levels of interactive engagement.
- 2.2 Using a variety of methods, the Council will provide opportunities to encourage the participation and engagement of the people of Lancing. By doing so, residents, in addition to community, voluntary and private organisations, will gain more opportunities to discuss local matters with local Councillors. The expansion and increase in the importance of online interaction means it is vital for Council to generate a social media presence, particularly via Facebook. A focal point of this strategy is to enable community involvement through digital and electronic platforms.
- 2.3 It is essential that any information given by Council is accurate, current and correlates with other Council policies and is lawful. Language and dialogue will follow the principle of plain English and be easy to understand.
- 2.4 A resident focused approach hopes to enable the Council to be viewed as approachable as well as accountable. This fits in with the Council's aim of making the community the focus of all it does by listening to and communicating with its residents in a wide range of ways.

3.0 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

3.1.1 The Parish Clerk

The Parish Clerk is responsible for overseeing communication from the office and ensures that correspondence from Officers of the Council is appropriate and constructive. The Clerk will also make sure that agendas, prepared in consultation with the appropriate Chairs of committees or Chair of the Council, are distributed three clear working days before the meeting. *Draft and unconfirmed* minutes will be verified by the Chair of the meeting before being posted online. These minutes will be confirmed at the next meeting and updated online.

- 3.1.2 The Parish Clerk will also oversee the presentation of policies and licences (for beach huts and allotments, for example), and is responsible for responding to comments, compliments and complaints (in collaboration with Council Members where appropriate). The Clerk also ensures that the 'Private Information for Councillors' section of the website is current and correct (this stores information such as staff absences and planned events on Council owned open spaces).

3.2.1 Councillors

Councillors must be mindful that their personal comments and remarks made through any medium do not necessarily represent those of the Council. Promises on behalf of the Council should not be given to residents or members of the public, only a reassurance that the issue will be investigated as soon as appropriate.

3.2.2 When dealing with local matters, the following actions may be necessary:

1. Request an item to be placed onto the relevant agenda
2. Seek guidance from the Clerk and, if necessary, investigate the matter personally
3. Refer the matter to the Clerk

3.2.3 If contacted by a resident outside of their ward, Councillors are to forward the query onto the Council representative for the resident's ward and inform the resident. When responding to correspondence from residents and organisations within the local community, Councillors should do the following:

1. Acknowledge that the comment/compliment/complaint has been received
2. Advise what action will be taken and in what time frame
3. Report the matter to the Clerk
4. Respond to initial comment/compliment/complaint, giving outcome

4.0 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

4.1 There are currently many ways in which residents can contact Members or Officers of the Council. The Council aims to improve and expand these to provide a greater opportunity for the people of Lancing to contact their Council. The following are ways by which members of the local community will be able to gain or exchange information regarding Lancing Parish Council.

4.2 Visit or Telephone the Office

The Council Office is situated in the Lancing Parish Hall on South Street. The office is open Monday to Thursday from 9am to 4.30pm and to 4pm on Friday. Those wanting to speak to an Officer of the Council are advised to make an appointment. There is also an answer-phone facility for 'out of hours' callers to leave a message and request a call back during office hours.

4.3.1 Attend a Meeting

There is a range of meetings that members of the public can attend. These are:

1. Full Council Meetings
2. Committee Meetings
3. Annual Village Forum
4. Meetings convened for specific topics or purposes such as, for example, consultation regarding proposed improvements to council owned open spaces

- 4.3.2 Meetings are advertised in advance on the website and on notice boards (this will also extend to social media). Agendas are advertised at least three full working days in advance of the meeting and members of the public, as well as Councillors, can request an item to be placed on the relevant agenda provided sufficient notice and information is given to the Clerk.
- 4.3.3 The Annual Village Forum is a statutory requirement and is normally held in May. This meeting gives residents the opportunity to have their say and present their views on all matters relating to Lancing and advise the Council on what improvements they would like to see in Lancing. This meeting is advertised throughout the village and held at the Parish Hall.
- 4.3.4 The Council also plans to schedule another meeting for residents' in autumn. This will incorporate the presentation of community awards and the announcement of successful grant applications with an opportunity for the Chair of the Council to update residents on progress made in relation the issues raised at the Annual Village Forum. The first meeting is intended to be in 2017.

4.4 Drop in Surgery

Two Members of the Council will be present at the Adur Village Action Shop on North Road fortnightly to discuss residents' issues. Dates will be advertised in the Village Action Shop, on notice boards, on Lancing Parish Council's website and via social media. Residents are encouraged to visit the shop and speak to Councillors. Issues raised by residents will be forwarded to the Clerk, the Chair and the representative for the resident's ward to be actioned as required.

4.5.1 Send a Letter/Email

Any correspondence received by letter or email will be acknowledged within three working days and a response sent within ten working days (where appropriate).

- 4.5.2 Letters sent from Officers of the Council will be sent on headed paper with the Lancing Parish Council logo visible. Emails sent from Officers of the Council will be sent with an electronic signature. Contact details such as name, position, telephone number and email address will be evident. Staff emails will be regularly monitored and action taken as necessary.

4.6.1 Visit the Website

The website holds much information and the aim is to direct users to the information they require within three clicks of the mouse. The agenda of a meeting is posted on the website at least three full working days in advance. *Draft and unconfirmed* minutes will be posted as soon as possible after the meeting, confirmed at the next meeting and again posted online. The website is frequently updated with news and local events. There are also links to different tiers of government such as Adur District Council, West Sussex County Council and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

4.6.2 Examples of the information intended to be available on the website are:

1. The Council's mission statement
2. Council responsibilities
3. Policies and procedures
4. Local history
5. Parish Hall hire
6. Planned events
7. Matters of interest
8. A link to the Parish Facebook Page and Twitter Account

4.7.1 Social Media

The Council will create and manage a Facebook page by autumn 2016 with a Twitter account to follow thereafter. This will provide information such as:

1. Council Matters
 - a. Opening hours
 - b. Contact details
 - c. Emergency procedures (out of office hours)
2. Promotions and Events
 - a. Council meetings and elections
 - b. Council events, activities and successes
 - c. Local events, activities and successes
3. Links to different tiers of government
 - a. Adur District Council and West Sussex County Council – consultations, notifications, events etc.
4. Local News – traffic/weather etc.

4.7.2 Responses to external postings must be consistent and factual. The primary response is to acknowledge the comment and give reassurance that the matter will be investigated (if appropriate). The secondary response is to advise what action has or will be taken. Requests in regards to Freedom of Information (FOI) will be treated as such and directed to the Council's FOI webpage.

4.7.3 Council posts will be frequent and relevant, with pictures where possible. The account will have high security settings and be monitored to ensure compliance with legislation (copyright, data protection etc.). The targeted time frame for responses will be within 48 hours, during office hours.

4.8.1 Newsletters

The Council intends to re-launch its quarterly Newsletter at the Annual Residents Meeting in May 2017. This will inform the local community of Council's activities and meetings and carry a message from the Chair of the Council. A budget will be required.

4.8.2 It is envisaged that Newsletters will be delivered to all households within the Parish by Members of the Council. The first 4 publications will be one folded double-sided page, with the aim to review this for 2018/2019 to either increase publication through local sponsorship or discontinue if it does not provide value for money.

4.9.1 Newspaper Articles

The Council hopes to engage with the residents through the local press by providing local interest stories. This proactive approach will entail regular submissions and photographs to media outlets (one/two per month) as well as invitations and information regarding future events. The Chair, Members and Officers of the Council will work collaboratively to write and distribute these articles.

- 4.9.2 When contacted by the press, the Clerk and/or Chair of the Council may be required to respond as necessary. The Clerk and the Chair of the Council work collaboratively when dealing with contentious council issues.

4.10 Notice Boards

The Council has three notice boards: one in Beach Green car park, one outside the Parish Hall and one outside the Post Office on North Road. The aim is to provide two more - one at West Beach and one at Elm Grove Park subject to footfall, consent and budget. Notice Boards should always appear well presented and uniform (internally and externally) – Parish information on the left side and local (and beach) information on the right side. This information is to be current, relevant and laminated.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1.1 Consultation is designed to obtain the opinions of a specific group of people and to gain a better understanding of wants and needs of the various sectors within the community. It can also stimulate the participation of the community. Additionally, effective working relationships between the Council and the community can be strengthened. However, it should be noted that consultation, even in its many forms, has its limitations in that not all issues can be consulted on, and consultation cannot satisfy the demands of all respondents.
- 5.1.2 It is important that the options available, together with their effects on the local area of community, can be clearly understood by those participating in the consultation. To this end, the Council will ensure that the local community is given sufficient relevant information to enable individuals to make an informed decision during the consultation process. The Council will also ensure that respondents are fully informed regarding the rationale of the outcome by giving strong, clear feedback.
- 5.1.3 There are many methods of conducting consultation, each designed to fit a number of circumstances and to reach a variety of groups. Below are the methods to be considered when consultation may be deemed to be appropriate.

5.2 Face to Face

This may include consultation meetings being held in a variety of locations around Lancing. During the consultation process meetings, presentations and events will be publicised and perhaps designed to target representatives of specific demographic groups, in addition to the normal meetings and surgeries etc. Members of the Council should consider coordinating visits to groups and organisations within the community in an attempt to engage with the so-called 'hard to reach' groups.

5.3 Postal Surveys or Questionnaires

Surveys or questionnaires could be used to obtain data from a statistically representative sample of residents. Considerations for this method of consultation might include the cost of posting and analysis and the level of response. A residents' or citizens' panel might prove to be a better way of obtaining quality data.

5.4 Electronic

This could include surveys or questionnaires emailed to residents and service users in addition to engaging with a residents' or citizens' panel. Surveys constructed through sites such as SurveyMonkey, or polls via social media, can also be utilised. There are, however, limitations such as residents' access to the internet, or low response rates, which will need to be considered when selecting the means of consultation. The lack of participation on a regular basis for comparatives is another element to be considered when adopting this method.

6.0 EVALUATION

6.1 There are a number of techniques available to measure the impact of this strategy. Over the next four years, the expectation is that as the Communication Strategy and Policy is implemented, the participation and engagement levels of residents will increase. Below are the ways by which this strategy will be continuously evaluated, however it should be noted that whilst quantitative data in relation to attendance at meetings and visits to the website can be easily collected, qualitative data (such as usefulness of posts via social media) is more difficult to determine.

6.2 Attendance at Meetings

The number of attendees is listed in the minutes of meetings. Residents' names and addresses are taken at the beginning of the Annual Village Forum. As the meetings become better publicised, the number of attendees should increase. During these meetings, the attitudes of residents towards the Council, and the participation and engagement level of residents will be gauged.

6.3 Website

A range of information that can be extracted from the website, including:

1. Number of current visitors
2. Number of public visitors today
3. Total number of public visitors

This information can be used to measure the usage of the website.

6.4 Social Media

The engagement levels can be measured via the amount of 'Likes', 'Comments', 'Followers' and 'Shares' on the Lancing Parish Council Facebook page (also through 'Retweets' via Twitter) . Also available are tools such as Facebook Insights and Marketing Analytics that can establish the success of the page.

6.5 Customer satisfaction surveys

Surveys or questionnaires will be sent to people and organisations that have hired rooms at the Parish Hall or Council owned open spaces such as Beach Green or a recreation grounds. This information can be considered by the Council during the decision making process regarding improvements to these spaces.