

Detling Parish Council (the Council) Communication and Involvement Strategy and Policy

1. Introduction

This strategy will guide the Council's communications with everyone who comes into contact with it. It is based on the guiding principles that communication must be effective and that protocols should be followed to ensure clarity and professionalism. It should enable the Council to tell people about what it can and does do, as well as actively listen to what people think will enhance life in the parish, so that we can better respond to people's needs and priorities. The strategy covers both internal and external communications made by any means.

2. Aim

The Council aims to be transparent in its dealings and to ensure that all who have dealings with it are able to communicate with the Councillors and the Clerk in a timely and effective manner.

3. Objectives

- To effectively inform residents and all those who have dealings in the parish and with the Council (Stakeholders) of its aims, objectives and activities
- To build the capacity and motivation of residents and stakeholders to be involved with the Council and support the Council in its effort to improve the quality of life for those who live, work or have general involvement in the parish
- To use a variety of communication methods to ensure that the way the Council communicates keeps everyone included and informed
- To build trust by being open and transparent
- To improve methods of communication in line with modern technology

4. Stakeholders

We aim to reach everyone who has an interest in the parish, be it that they live, work or visit the village. It is important that we are able to effectively communicate with anyone who is interested and may want to become involved in influencing the future of the parish. These people include:

- Village residents
- Community groups and organisations
- Agencies and partners (including the local police)
- Local schools
- Sport clubs
- County and District Councillors

- The local MP
- Local businesses and employers
- Voluntary groups
- Local media

5. Responsibilities

The Clerk

Wherever possible all communications with should be made through the Clerk.

The Clerk, as the Proper Officer of the Council, is authorised to receive all communications from residents, the press or third parties and to issue statements on behalf of the Council in consultation with the Chairman. In the absence of the Clerk, all communications will be handled by the Chairman, in consultation with the Vice-Chairman. In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman and/or relevant Committee Chairman will be consulted.

Communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. S/he should not speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk, s/he should inform the enquirer that they will be notified of a response within 24 hours where practical. The Clerk should then consult with the Chairman or relevant Councillor(s) on a suitable response, which may in fact be “no comment”.

The Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman [or Vice Chairman/Committee Chairman] is authorised to publish press statements on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a Council meeting.

Any verbal or written statement must represent the corporate position and views of the Council, not the individual views of councillors or staff held in their official capacity.

The content of the Council's website is managed by the Clerk. However, it is the responsibility of all Councillors to check it regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and inform the Clerk if issues arise.

Councillors

Councillors represent the community in which they live and are governed by a Code of Conduct which encourages open, informed, timely and courteous communication at all times. Our aim is to keep all with whom we come into contact, informed of our actions and to encourage stakeholders to actively participate in influencing the future of the parish.

Councillors should make it clear in all interactions with residents the press or third parties that they have no authority to represent the Council's view unless the matter has been agreed at a Council meeting or they have been given specific mandate to do so at a council meeting.

Individual members of the Council must make clear, if they are approached for comment directly, whether they are giving an **individual or personal opinion** or referring the matter to the Council for a formal response. In the former case, Councillors should be mindful of the policies and decisions of the Council and respect the integrity of fellow Councillors and the

Clerk. It must be made clear that the response is from the individual concerned and NOT from the Council. In any event, the Clerk and the Chair must be notified of any contact with the media as soon as possible.

At no time should Councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the parish council. Depending on the issue raised it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- refer the matter to the parish clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- request an item on a relevant agenda
- investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the parish clerk

It is important not to raise the expectations of the residents before a matter has been debated and agreed at a Council meeting.

6. Methods of Communication

The Council will use a variety of methods of communication based on what reaches its intended audience most effectively and efficiently. Over 80% of the population generally use electronic communication now (*Office for National Statistics*), so this is the Council's preferred and primary method of communication.

However, we recognise that not all people are able to or wish to use electronic methods of communication, so we will continue to utilise different media and approaches in order to reach our audiences.

7. General Principles to be observed by Councillors and Staff

- Be calm
- Be informed and certain of all your facts
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Council that you are aware what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy
- Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or staff, into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.
- Any publicity should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both
- Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular care.
- Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although facts, issues or arguments should not be oversimplified
- Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards
- Public funds must not be used to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.
- Council resources must not be used on publicity that is, or could be

misinterpreted as being, party political or on publicity which could be seen as promoting an individual member, particularly at election times.

- The Council, its Councillors and Staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law.
- Councillors must act with integrity and observe the Members' Code of Conduct at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council.
- Councillors and staff must not communicate their personal views about the Council's business, decisions and actions.
- Councillors and Staff are not permitted to misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council or damage the reputation of others in the Council, or the Council itself.
- If expressing personal views in their private capacity, Councillors are not permitted to use their title "Councillor" and staff are not permitted to use their job title. This would imply that you are stating Council policy.
- A Councillor or Officer must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the Press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on the Council's or Committee's agenda or at any other private briefing.
- A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an officer at meetings held in public or before the Press.

8. Involvement of the Community

Wherever possible the Council and its Working Groups must actively seek to consult a wider audience and encourage and support the involvement of residents and other interested parties in its work. Where this involvement is not possible, the reasons for this should be communicated as soon as possible, in an open and transparent manner.