



Bishopston Community Council

Council Communications and Engagement Strategy

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Bishopston Community Council (hereafter referred to as 'the Council ' or 'BCC') has undertaken to 'communicate, consult and engage.' BCC has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees, and stakeholders.

The purpose of this policy is therefore to set out how the Council intends to achieve this and develop and improve its communications in the future.

Our vision is that our residents will:

- Know what services the Council provides and the quality of service they can expect from us.
 - Feel confident and satisfied with our services and their costs.
 - Understand how to get involved with, or influence, our work.

The overall aim is to make Council communications a two-way process: to give people the information to understand accurately what we do, while also enabling the Council to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

2.0 Communication

2.1 Why is communication important?

Local government communications have, over the past few years, increasingly focused on reputation. Improved communications lead to recognition and respect – reputation **does** matter. Many Councils fail to effectively communicate who they are and what they do – and the less people know about an organisation, the less likely they are to rate it highly.

BCC, through good communication, will understand and better meet the needs of the community, whilst raising the profile of the Bishopston Ward.

Good communications will enable the Council to:

- Better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities.
- Raise residents' satisfaction, trust, and confidence by communicating about services and events provided by the Council as well as providing up to date information on relevant village and local matters.
- Raise the profile of Bishopston.
- Attract residents to assist with the caretaking and development of the village.
- Make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people, ethnic minority groups/people and the elderly (who may be without social media, internet, or online access)
- Support Councillors in their role as community representatives.
- Proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of the Council.

2.2 What should we be communicating?

There are two methods of communicating:

- Proactive – telling people information to influence and change attitudes
- Reactive – giving residents information they have requested

Research by MORI, an independent research organisation, and the Local Government Association, suggests that the most important drivers of Council reputation among local residents are:

- Perceived quality of services overall
- Perceived value for money
- Media coverage
- Direct communications
- Council performance
- A clean, green, and safe environment
- Positive experiences of contact with Council employees and Councillors

If the Council is to build a strong reputation, effectively inform residents, engage and improve customer satisfaction then these drivers must form the basis of its proactive and reactive communications.

2.3 Who should we be communicating with?

The Council's audiences are wide and varied but will typically include:

- Residents
- Councillors and staff
- CCOS
- Hard-to-reach groups, including young people, the very elderly and ethnic minority groups.
- The media
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- The business community
- MPs and Welsh Government
- Other public sector organisations (police, health, fire)
- Visitors and those who work in the area.

2.4 How should we be communicating?

The Council will ensure that information is easily accessible, relevant, and timely, whilst recognising the importance of communication, making a commitment to meet the expectations of the community it serves.

Different forms of communication will appeal to different ages, social groups, and demographics, so it is important to ensure that within reason, all options for increasing communication and participation are considered in order to communicate effectively with everyone.

The advances made in information technology offer exciting new ways of communicating. At the same time, for many people, traditional methods – newspapers, telephone, and leaflets – still play a fundamental role that must not be undervalued.

Currently communication is achieved through:

- The Council 's website
- Newsletters (The Bishopston Chronicle)
- Social Media
- Council agenda papers / correspondence
- Council for interaction
- Issue specific consultation.
- Events
- Telephone

Ways in which communication could be improved:

- Improved visibility of the Council and its activities by more frequent reporting
- All committee/working group chairpersons will regularly give updates on committee activity.
- Improved Council communications - e.g. newsletter, social media communication, posters etc
- Continued use of social media and promotion of the Council 's online presence
- Regular consultation with the community and feedback to them on subsequent analysis including actions resulting from the consultation. i.e. You said this, and We did that.
- Publish an Annual Report to inform residents.
- Ensure the Council logo is consistently linked to services, or anything else provided or sponsored by the Council.
- The BCC needs to be more pro-active and generate press releases that share and showcase events, funding and other positive activities that the community council is engaged in.

Publication of the annual report

The Annual Report will be electronic and will inform residents on the role of the Council , achievements across the year, financial overview, challenges, and priorities for the year/years ahead. Hard copy summary as appropriate.

Ensuring the Council identity is consistently linked to services.

The Council will look to brand its communications consistently, ensuring a consistency of style by:

- Using electronic logos and templates (press releases, letters, etc).
- Using a uniform font type: all printed communication should display the Council logo and should use Arial 12 font.
- Developing a photographic library which promotes the Council and is available to staff and Councillors.

2.4.1 Press

The media can play a strong role in shaping perceptions of local government, so informed reporting is vital.

The Communities and Local Government Report found people were most positive about their Council in areas where the Council had a good relationship with the local media.

Key points for effective management of media relations

- Respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time
- Be helpful, polite, and positive
- Never say 'no comment'
- Ensure all statements or responses to hostile enquiries are cleared by the Clerk and/or the Chair
- Issue timely and relevant press releases
- Pre-empt potential stories arising from Council agendas/minutes by issuing proactive PR (where possible)

2.4.2 Online presence - the Council 's website

It is a responsibility of the Clerk to ensure that the Council 's website is updated regularly and checked for accuracy. It will contain key information about the Council and important events. This will include the names, photographs, and email contact details for all Councillors. It is important to work out strategies for keeping the website up to date and for ensuring good links with local businesses and community groups.

2.4.3 Effective use of social media

To continue and develop effective use of social media in order to promote the activities of the Council . It is agreed that these are accepted methods of promotion of the Council 's activities and the Council will use social media as a means of communicating with residents, visitors, local business and with other online groups. It will seek to engage with groups and individuals who regularly use social media and with new audiences to provide access to Council services, such as the under-25s.

It is the responsibility of the Clerk, in conjunction with Councillors, to ensure that the use of social media is managed effectively.

The Council has a specific social media Policy to ensure the correct use of social media.

2.4.4 Better promotion of the Council 's online presence

All communications should promote the Council 's website and if appropriate its social media accounts. It is important to ensure that links on our website are provided to other key partners, e.g. County and City of Swansea Council

2.4.5 Public Consultation - Conduct regular and effective consultation.

At present, most of the Council 's consultation is by way of occasional questionnaires on specific subjects and members' interaction with the public.

The Council needs to establish means by which consultations will take place to cover all aspects of life in Bishopston, so that a full understanding of the needs of the community are developed. An action plan and Council priorities can be developed, which will be reviewed regularly.

An in-depth consultation could be repeated at the end of year 1/beginning year 2 following elections. This will help to ensure that the Council is engaged, delivering relevant services, and truly representing the needs of the community to other authorities /partners. The information obtained will also help to provide useful evidence in support of initiatives and funding bids.

In addition, regular consultation should be undertaken by the Council / Councillors to gather public opinion on perception and satisfaction of the Council and the work it does. The results of this consultation would also help to better understand the Council 's strengths and weaknesses, as well as helping the Council to measure the effectiveness of its work in general and this strategy specifically.

The format for this consultation could include the following:

Who – develop an understanding of the demographics of the community and

How - establish ways of communicating with each of these that best encourages their engagement in the process

What – consider what information is required and develop relevant means of achieving this whilst still being appropriate, accessible, and engaging

Where – define the best locations for accessing and engaging with the different groups identified.

When – develop a timetable for the consultation process including when it is intended to hold consultation 'events'

Once completed, Council should develop strategies for delivering services and improvements where identified.

2.5 Who (from the Council) should be communicating?

Staff and Councillors are all ambassadors of the Council and must remember this in all communications.

It is imperative that:

- All communication from the Council is courteous, timely, professional, appropriate and reflects the decisions and policies of the Council .
- Individual Councillors can make their own statements relating to local issues and this policy is not designed to prevent any of them expressing a personal opinion through the media. Members must make it clear however, that any view expressed which differs from Council policy are their own personal views

and should be recorded as such. E.g. such views should be expressed through personal social media platforms not Council platforms.

- Such releases may or may not be political and should bear no reference whatsoever to the Council or any officer and must not use the BCC logo. Neither the Council address, telephone number or website should be included as a point of personal contact.
- The Clerk or Chair will have the authority to delete or remove any communication by individual Councillors which is potentially damaging, or which may have a negative effect on the Council.

2.5.1 Verbal and Written Communication

The Bishopston Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all 'formal' Council communication with members of the community and outside bodies.

All Councillors and the Clerk have a Council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting Council business.

When in doubt about how to respond to an enquiry, the guidance of the Clerk should be sought.

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. At no time should elected members 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 Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- request that an item is placed on a relevant agenda
- investigate the matter personally, having first sought the guidance of the Clerk

All communication *must* be responded to, and the correspondent kept apprised of progress. The procedure for doing so is as follows:

1. having received an enquiry / complaint, the Council lor/Clerk should acknowledge receipt (if in writing) and advise of what action is intended to be taken. Clerk will respond within an acknowledgement within seven working days. Some emails will need to be actioned after full Council .
2. Advise when that action has been taken and what to expect next (e.g. a response is awaited from (a third party)
3. report back on the outcome of the enquiry or ensure that either the third party or the Clerk will / has report(ed) back on the matter

Councillors must ensure that any communication with the public pertaining to Council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of the Council regardless of the Councillor's own views on any subject.

3.0 Evaluation

It is extremely important that the Council measures the success of this strategy so that it may inform any future plan. A benchmark of the current state will be required.

What improvements can we measure as a result of better/increased communication?

- Media's assessment of the Council 's communication coverage
- Raised awareness of the Council and the services it provides.
- Attitudes of all stakeholders towards the Council
- Participation and engagement with Council projects, initiatives, and consultation processes
- Increased attendance at public meetings and organized events.
- The BCC needs to be more pro-active and generate press releases that share and showcase events, funding and other positive activities that the community council is engaged in.

How will we measure this?

- Consultation with residents – perception and satisfaction surveys.
- Increase in take up of Press Releases sent to local media.
- Hits on website.
- Number of Likes and Followers on Social Networking sites (when applicable)