

## Communication Strategy 2014/2018

**Approved by Council Minute 136/14/13**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this strategy is to develop effective communications with all residents of the Parish and all the Parish Council's partners including the media. The Council has a duty to inform the public about how the annual Parish Precept is spent and, more generally, to tell residents what action it is taking on their behalf. It holds to the principle that the Parish Council should both tell people about what we do and actively listen to what people tell us about the service improvements they wish to see in Charlton Kings.

### **Objectives**

- To effectively inform residents and partners of the priorities, objectives and activities of the Parish Council.
- To build the capacity and motivation of residents and partners to be involved with the Parish Council.
- To use a range of communication methods to ensure that the way in which we communicate is effective for our target audience.
- To work collaboratively with print and other media, to ensure the accurate presentation of our proposals and responses
- To build trust by being open and transparent.

### **Focus of our communications**

A small number of key points will underpin all Parish Council communications:

- Charlton Kings Parish Council makes a difference
- The Parish Council wants to hear the views of others
- The Parish Council needs the help and support of the community and our partners to make improvements where they are needed
- We will celebrate what has already happened, with positive messages focusing on what is good about living or working in the village.

### **Open government**

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all committee agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request, five working days prior to the meeting. In practice, Charlton Kings Parish Council provides these via the website. The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating is made available. Relevant Members and officers will be available following committee meetings for comment or interview. Public and media participation in a meeting is regulated by procedural standing orders.

The Council is aware of its responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and has published on its website a schedule of publications that contains all policy and procedural documents. All decisions of the Council, made in an open meeting, may be quoted and made available to the media.

The Openness of Local Government Regulations 2014 which apply to England, give rights to members of the press and public to:

- use modern technology and communication methods such as filming, audio-recording, blogging and tweeting to report the proceedings of the meetings of their councils and other local government bodies
- see information relating to significant decisions made outside meetings by officers acting under a general or specific delegated power

In common with all Councils, certain agenda items are debated in a closed session of a committee meeting. The guidelines for the items that will be heard in closed session are covered by the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's Standing Orders.

The Council reserves the right to withhold certain sensitive information concerning commercial transactions, for example contracts or the purchase and sale of land and property. This applies to the Council's own commercial interests and to the various parties involved in individual business transactions with the Council. This area and other matters are guided by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Data Protection Act 1998 and exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

### **House style**

Charlton Kings Parish Council has established its own, distinct, 'house style'. The Communications Working Group is the guardian of our house style and must be involved in any external communication where a variation is proposed.

To ensure that all Parish Council communications have as much impact as possible, and conform to the requirements of the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988, messages will be:

- short, to the point, and written in plain English
- clear and not conflicting
- based on fact, information, action or achievement
- focused on opportunities for involvement
- consistent with the Council's positions identified in minutes and policies.

Issues that are controversial or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council, will be handled with particular care. Issues will be presented clearly, fairly, and as arguments. The Council will not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards and will not mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.

The tone of voice of a written document can be more important than the tone of voice of something that is spoken, because once something is written down and published, correction is a longer and more difficult process. We should take special care to avoid provocative, emotive, or 'loaded' language that reflects value judgements. Our written communications must be:

- Authoritative without being authoritarian
- Approachable without being casual
- Accurate in terms of grammar, spelling and phraseology without being old fashioned
- Concise without being economical with the truth
- Considered without withholding essential information

### **Methods of communicating**

The Parish Council will use a variety of methods based on what reaches people most effectively and has most credibility.

<b>Parish Office</b>	The office is open to enquiries from the public five days a week.
<b>Correspondence (general)</b>	The Council will respond promptly to all external correspondence requiring a reply. External consultations will be acknowledged and responded to (or a nil response made) within the consultation period.
<b>Parish Council meetings</b>	All meetings (including committees) are open to the public and press and advertised on the website, newsletters, notice boards, and in any other location we can arrange. Agendas and minutes are available to all, either electronically, via social media ,or in hard copy
<b>Parish Meeting</b>	The Parish Meeting is for all residents to come together to discuss whatever aspects of community life they wish. The (statutory) annual Parish Meeting is held in May and there are two other Meetings at 4-monthly intervals.
<b>Parish Council website</b>	The Parish Council website is updated and edited by a nominated Parish Councillor who will be the website controller. It is the responsibility of all Councillors to check the site regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and to inform the website controller of these if and when they arise.
<b>Social media</b>	The Council has both Facebook and Twitter accounts. These will be run by a 'Friend of CKPC' under the mentorship of a Councillor.
<b>Parish Council notice boards</b>	We have 5 notice boards around the parish: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kings Hall, Church Piece</li><li>• The office, Church Piece</li><li>• Nisa/Smith and Mann's, Lyefield Road West</li><li>• Badham pharmacy, Sixways</li><li>• Charlton Court Road, Ewens Farm.</li></ul> These are used to display the schedule of Council and committee meetings, agendas, newsletters, and ad hoc information.
<b>Parish Council newsletter</b>	A quarterly newsletter is produced on a single A4 sheet, and posted on the website, in 18 bus shelters on the B, P and Q routes; in 5 notice boards, and 40+ in businesses that have agreed to host a Parish Information Point.
<b>Special topic or event posters</b>	Posters promoting the Parish Meeting, recruitments of staff or Members, etc. are posted in all newsletter locations.
<b>Press releases</b>	Where the Council decides to use external media to promote significant points of interest or achievement, it will issue a press release to local media. The Clerk will maintain a current list of media contacts.
<b>Community events</b>	The Parish Council will host one-off, ad hoc community consultations seeking to hear resident's views on specific issues or developments, e.g. bus timetables.

## **Relations with the media**

### **Proactive publicity – issuing a press release or other instrument to the media**

The purpose of a Press Release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of Officers and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release might be beneficial. The following protocol for handling press releases will ensure that the reputation of the Parish Council is safeguarded and enhanced, and that the message is properly communicated:

- A potential news story or topic of information is identified.
- Any necessary preliminary discussions are held between relevant Members, keeping the Clerk informed.
- Good quality photographs can enhance the impact of a story. Ideally, photographs should be sourced from within the Council which retains copyright.
- The Member responsible for leading the story drafts and redrafts the text, including any agreed quotes from Members. Each version of a document must be clearly identified.
- Members will usually have a minimum of 24 hours to comment on a draft text or texts (although in exceptional circumstances where the Council is reacting to an external story, this may not be possible). The Chairman will have the final say on the version to be published.
- The Chairman of the Parish Council must approve all press releases subject to the Schedule of Delegation (below) that identifies other Members who are authorised to communicate on behalf of the Council on specific issues or subjects.
- All press releases must be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the Council's legal responsibilities have been adhered to, the reputation of the Council is protected (and ideally enhanced), that there is consistency of style including branding, and that the use of the release can be monitored.

There are no guarantees that any press release will be used by the media, but the presentation of a newsworthy story and the adoption of the appropriate style will increase media interest.

### **Joint press releases**

Most media communications will be issued by the Council solely on its own behalf. However, there may be issues on which we share a common view on a current topic with another organisation, and where greater media impact would be achieved by issuing a joint press release.

Any such joint press release must meet all the rules in the communication strategy and have regard to the wider implications of being associated with another organisation on issues wider than the subject of the press release.

### **Responding to media requests**

A journalist or researcher should contact the appropriate committee Chair or the Clerk for informal preliminary discussions on a story. Up to date contact details are on the Council's website. All formal approaches from press, radio or TV in relation to the Parish Council's business should be directed to the Chair or the Clerk. They will discuss the nature of the story and use the Schedule of Delegation to direct the enquiry to the relevant Councillor or to the Clerk, asking them to respond.

### **Schedule of Delegation**

- ❖ The default position is that the Chair of Council must approve every significant communication issued on behalf of the Council, including press releases.
- ❖ If the issue is delegated to another person, the Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk must be copied in, and their advice sought as appropriate.

<b>Schedule of Delegated Authority to communicate on behalf of the Parish Council</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Delegated to</b>	<b>Conditions</b>
Council Minutes	Not Delegated	
Council internal Administration.	Not Delegated	
Finance	Not delegated	
Personnel	Not delegated	
Governance	Not delegated	
Communications	Not delegated	Facebook and Twitter accounts are delegated, subject to the terms of the agreement with the manager of these accounts.
Planning	Chair: Planning Committee	High profile cases to be agreed by Council Chair.
Community Development ( including all transport, energy and built/natural environment issues)	Chair: Community Development Committee	
Social issues	Chair: Community Development Committee	
Rights of Way	Chair: Rights of Way Working Group	High profile cases to be agreed by Council Chair.
Allotments	Chair: Allotments Committee	
Council responses to external consultations	Not Delegated	Delegated to named lead under extreme time pressure only.

### **Parish Council Spokesperson**

It is important that, before an issue of high public interest becomes public knowledge and likely to be the subject of media enquiries, the Chair of the Parish Council is fully briefed. In such a situation they will work with the relevant Members and Clerk to produce a communication plan that will ensure that balanced, timely information is provided to keep all parties informed.

In the event of a general media enquiry, the Clerk (in conjunction with the Chair or Vice-Chair), will be responsible for issuing a response from the Parish Council. Individual members of the Council must make clear, should they be approached for comment directly, whether they are giving an individual opinion or will be referring the matter to the Clerk for a formal Parish Council response. In any event, the Clerk must be notified of any contact with the media as soon as possible.

### **Guidance for Members making personal statements**

- Councillors should not make personal statements that could damage the reputation of the Council, or have a negative impact on partnerships with other organisations, or on the credibility of the Council or other Members.
- Councillors wishing to make a personal statement to the media must clearly inform the media:
  - that their comment is made as an individual and is not necessarily the view of the Council.

- that other Councillors may hold a different view.
- that the matter may still need to be discussed or resolved by the Council.

### **Members' publicity before Parish Council Elections**

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Members and for publicity in connection with elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used for publicising individual Members *unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council.*

These extracts from the Code illustrate the main points –

- “Publicity about individual Councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the Council (for example, Chair of Planning Committee) and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual Councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations, only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and “.....personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.”
- “Publicity should not be, or be liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual Councillor that are relevant to her/his position and responsibilities within the Council and to put forward her/his justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of a particular party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.”
- “The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity, in all its forms, of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election.”

### **Advice and training**

All Councillors and officers who are delegated to communicate on behalf of the Council must be trained to the appropriate level. The Clerk will arrange suitable training.

All new Councillors and Officers should be made aware of how this policy affects them, through induction and update programmes.

### **Communication Strategy Review**

This Strategy will be reviewed annually by the Communications Working Group of the Finance & General Purposes Committee.