

Communication Strategy 2019/2022

Approved by Council Minute 60/19/20 - Full Council 22nd July 2019

Part One

Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to strengthen community engagement, and communication with all residents and businesses in Charlton Kings parish and Parish Council partners.

Charlton Kings Parish Council will:

- Facilitate community engagement by both informing and engaging. This includes actively listening to people and what they tell us about projects, initiatives, services and events in Charlton Kings and responding effectively using a variety of media
- Promote and build a positive environment and a strong, supportive community
- Focus on current issues and look forward, embracing new thinking and ideas
- Tell residents what action it is taking on their behalf
- Inform the public about how the annual parish precept is spent and manage expectations
- Promote other organisations that provide benefit to residents e.g. community groups

Objectives

- To raise awareness of the Council and keep people informed of its priorities, activities, aims and objectives
- To understand who lives in Charlton Kings parish and apply different communication and engagement methodologies that are inclusive, and successfully connect, inform and support delivery of the Charlton Kings Parish Plan and aligned activities and initiatives
- To build the capacity and motivation of residents and partners to be involved with Parish Council initiatives and planning
- To work collaboratively with all media, to ensure the accurate presentation of our proposals and responses
- To provide relevant and up to date information e.g. a database of local organizations and groups that provide support and services for the benefit of the community
- To build trust by being open and transparent

- To share success and a sense of movement towards creating and building a strong, supportive community

Focus of communications

The following will underpin all Parish Council communications:

- The Parish Council makes a difference. It acknowledges and celebrates success with a focus on the positive aspects of living and working in the parish
- The Council wants to hear the views of others and will use a variety of methods e.g. surveys and feedback to gather data which will inform and shape its response. There is a “circle of communication” – information is gathered and fed into the Council’s actions, providing feedback to those who have provided the views/data etc and others, to say what actions have resulted (and the rationale if no action has been taken)
- All areas of Charlton Kings parish will be acknowledged and represented

Methodology

- Coherence and coordination is required. This is led through the Parish Council’s office under the guidance of the Chair. The Communications and Community Engagement Working Group (CCEWG) will shape and deliver a delivery action plan. The CCEWG will report to the Community Development standing committee and meet monthly
- A schedule of delegation is in place and the Chair has the final say on any key messages being communicated
- Briefings/lines to take are provided to councilors and staff on issues that are likely to be controversial, detailed and complex and which come to prominence
- The Clerk owns the social media accounts and ensures best practice is followed, with regular reviews to ensure that the benefits are being realised.
- An ‘image library’ is created consisting of: images/photos/pictures/diagrams. These will be made easily accessible, updated and ready to use to support communications. There will be designated photographer at all key events, or attendees will be asked to send in their photographs at events such as the Summer Fayre
- The Charlton Kings Parish Council brand is developed and used appropriately. The audience should connect with the messages and be able to recognise and trust the origin. The style should reflect a diverse audience and consideration should be given to those who are dyslexic, sight impaired or have other reading difficulties. The brand, logo, colour palette, font and presentation style will be agreed by the Communications and Community Engagement Working Group
- Targets and measures of success are agreed – quantitative and qualitative data are recorded e.g. the number of people who attend a community open meeting; the type and level of questions/information requested from residents
- The Communications and Community Engagement Working Group will review the following annually and report to the Community Development Committee:

Communications Strategy

Branding/house style

Surveys/feedback/data gathered

Use of social media

Engagement with partners and press.

Methods of communication and engagement

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

Parish Council's office	The office is open to enquiries from the public five days a week from 10.00 to 2.00 pm Monday to Friday.
Correspondence (general)	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.
Parish Council meetings	All meetings (including standing committees) are open to the public and press and advertised on the website, via social media accounts, newsletters, notice boards, and other suitable locations. Agendas and minutes are available to all, either electronically, via the Parish Council website, or in hard copy from the office (NB: Agendas are circulated so there are at least 3 working days excluding day of circulation and day of meeting – a statutory requirement.)
Parish Meeting	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 in conjunction with a Community Open Meeting, and there is a further Community Open Meeting in October.
Parish Council website	The Parish Council website is updated by the Clerk with some input from the Administrative Officer. It is the responsibility of all councilors to check the site regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and to inform the Clerk who is the website controller.
Social media	The Council has both Facebook and Twitter accounts that are controlled by the Clerk. To ensure best practice.
Parish Council notice boards	There are currently 6 notice boards around the parish: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kings Hall, Church Piece• The Parish Office, Church Piece• Nisa/Smith and Mann's, Lyefield Road West• Badham Pharmacy, Sixways• Churchill Drive, Ewens Farm• Internal notice board in the Stanton Hall These are used to display the names and contact details of Parish Councilors, schedule of council and committee meetings, agendas, newsletters, and ad hoc information. There is a notice board in Charlton Park that is not sponsored by the Parish Council. These boards need to be replaced in the next 2 years. Other locations for notice boards need to be considered. Note: The

	notice boards are a 'signpost' to residents that they live within the boundary of Charlton Kings Parish Council.
Parish Council newsletter	A monthly newsletter will be produced, in limited numbers as an A4 sheet, and posted on the website, notice boards, and business and community locations e.g. the Charlton Kings library will host a Parish Information Point. Hard copies will be made available in the office. The newsletter will also be advertised on social media.
Special topic or event posters	Posters promoting the Parish Meeting, recruitment of staff or councilors, etc. are posted on notice boards and website and are made available in the office.
Press releases	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.
Items of Interest	Items of interest relating to the parish are published monthly in the "Local Answer" e.g. Summer Fayre and Christmas Fayre
Community events	The Council will host one-off, ad hoc community consultations seeking to hear resident's views on specific issues or developments, e.g. climate change. It will lead on the design and delivery of the Summer and Christmas Fayres and will support and enable other community initiatives e.g. bicycle security marking; health and well being
Surveys and Feedback	These are a key component of listening and it is important that the Council acts on the information gathered. An annual plan (commissioned by the Communications and Community Engagement Working Group) will be in place to gather data and information – e.g. feedback from the Summer Fayre. This information will be reviewed monthly by the Clerk and any key points raised at the monthly Council meeting for action.

Detailed Guidance on the following can be found in Part Two:

- Open Government
- House style
- Relations with the Media
- Advice and training

Part Two

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 councillors 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 a 'house style'. The Communications and Community Engagement Working Group (CCEWG) is the guardian of the 'house style' and must be involved in any external communication where a variation is proposed.

There will be annual review of the 'house style' by the CCEWG to ensure it is successfully meeting the objectives of the Communications Strategy.

To ensure that all Council's 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. Special care should be taken to avoid provocative, emotive, or 'loaded' language that reflects value judgements. Council's 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

Communications: 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, the Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk must be copied in to responses, and their advice sought as appropriate.

Schedule of Delegated Authority to communicate on behalf of the Parish Council		
Topic	Delegated to	Conditions
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 and communications via the website are delegated to the Clerk
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: Community Development Committee	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.

Relations with the media

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.

Any press release 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. The Chair of Council must approve all press releases.

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 councillors and the 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 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 councillors 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

Councillors' publicity before Parish Council Elections

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for councillors and for publicity in connection with elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used for publicising individual councillors *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.