



Lewes
Town
Council

Communications Strategy

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| Adoption date | 5 June 2024 |
| Policy Maker | Communications Officer |
| Responsibility | Communications and Engagement Committee |
| Review Cycle | Twice-yearly |

Introduction

Lewes Town Council aims to be open and transparent about the way it operates. The Town Council will take every opportunity to communicate with our community and beyond the community, to raise awareness of the Town Council's work, events and activities.

The Lewes Town Council Communications Policy lays out the general principles which underpin our communications and should be read in conjunction with this strategy.

This Communications Strategy explains in more detail how, when and why the council will carry out communications.

This strategy outlines the council's approach to communication with internal and external stakeholders, which is a crucial part of achieving the council's objectives of transparency and accountability.

Communication should be frequent, clear and disseminate relevant information to the right people, with the aim of informing residents and improving the reputation and image of the council. It is designed to work within the relevant statutory requirements relating to local government publicity.

This communications strategy will outline:

1. Goals
2. Values and standards
3. Objectives and principles
4. Methods
5. Roles and responsibilities
6. Evaluation

1. Communications Strategy goals

1.1 Effective communications enable public bodies, organisations, residents and visitors to understand and appreciate what Lewes Town Council does, and its vision.

1.2 The Lewes Town Council Communications Policy and the Communications Strategy lay out how we communicate.

Our aims and approach

1.3 We want to make sure people have a clear understanding of who the council is, what we do and why we do it.

1.4 The purpose of our communications is to:

- Encourage participation in the events we organise.
- Raise awareness about local issues and opportunities.

- Promote the work of Lewes Town Council and advertise the availability of its services and facilities.
- Engage with local people and enable them to communicate their views to Lewes Town Council.

1.5 The council will communicate with the people in the communities we serve, partners we work with, members and staff.

1.6 We will be focused with our messages, enable conversations and encourage feedback which is listened and responded to, in order to improve service delivery and development.

1.7 Our communication activities will align with a corporate plan, echoing its objectives and standards and making sure our audiences and stakeholders have a shared understanding of the council's vision, values and ambition.

2 Values and standards

2.1 Our communication, consultation and marketing activities will meet our values.

2.2 We will

- Treat everyone equally.
- Be prompt, courteous and respectful.
- Use plain language and avoid jargon where possible.

2.3 The standard and nature of our communications reflects the council's culture and values, and will be:

- Transparent – clear and free of jargon.
- Accurate – truthful and open, supported with facts.
- Timely – with information produced regularly that is up to date.
- Appropriate – targeted to the relevant audience, with the right message, at the right time.
- Inclusive – available in accessible formats through a variety channels, including digital and printed material.

2.3 Further to this, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations issues guidance in PR and Communication in Local Government and Public Service that recommends the following additional communication standards:

- Accurate information. All efforts should be made to ensure accuracy at the time of production. Updates and corrections should be made where errors have occurred.
- Delivers key messages. Information should relate to key policy and principles of the council. It should primarily relate to council matters.
- Accessible to all. Channels should be mixed to cover diverse groups and their needs.

- Plain language used. Information should be clear and straight forward. Key points should be emphasised.
- Appropriate timing. Communication should happen in sufficient time to allow others to react. It should be regular and be an ongoing process.
- Appropriate quality of design and production. Ideally to a professional standard
- Appropriate branding used. Make it clear who the information is coming from.
- Review and evaluate. Monitor all channels to see what is or is not successful. Seek to improve output, engagement and learn from poor practices to communicate better.
- Feedback. Include survey questions in questionnaires to gauge opinion on communication and reputation. Inform respondents what will be done with the feedback.

3. Objectives and principles

3.1 Our focus will be on our audiences and we will base communications on the insights we have into them. We will put most emphasis on communicating digitally, ensuring online is the best way for people to communicate with the council. We will listen to our audiences and respond to their needs and communications preferences, ensuring all are catered for.

3.2 Our activities will be monitored to ensure we identify what works, where improvements are needed, and how we can innovate.

3.3 We will have a collaborative approach, working with partners on shared goals.

3.4 Below are some of the objectives for our communications:

- To explain the council's work and operations.
- To show how decisions are made by the council and the committees.
- To flag up events and activities led by or supported by the council.
- To encourage understanding of and enable discussion of Lewes Town Council's work.
- To share information from other bodies and organisations.
- To send out alerts from health bodies, police or fire services etc.
- To direct people to organisations who can offer support.

4. Our methods

4.1 Communication is a two-way process. Our Communications Strategy will maximise opportunities for public bodies, organisations, residents and visitors to communicate with Lewes Town Council in a way which suits them.

4.2 Lewes Town Council's role is to serve its community first and foremost, which means we need to understand what people want and need. The council will provide opportunities for members of our community to send us information and views in a range of ways. This information will be fed into our decision-making process wherever possible.

Commented [NV1]: Has this been taken from the Chartered Institute of PR verbatim? Otherwise it might benefit from the use of semicolons perhaps?

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The focus of our communications will be on our audiences, emphasising digital communication as the best way for people to communicate with the council. We also aim to listen to our audiences and respond to their needs and communications preferences, ensuring everyone is catered for.

4.3 Stakeholders are the individuals or organisations Lewes Town Council has a relationship with or a responsibility towards. We will communicate with stakeholders in a way which is appropriate to the message, and which suits their needs.

4.4 Stakeholder mapping allows the council to identify, develop and manage our partners and is a key part of any engagement process. Every authority will have a variety of stakeholders. These can include:

- Local residents.
- Area-based groups.
- Communities of interest.
- Faith-based groups.
- Racial, ethnic and cultural groups.
- Local community and voluntary groups.
- Web-based or virtual groups.
- Statutory partners.
- Businesses.
- Visitors.

NB We must be mindful that it is impossible to engage with all of the people all of the time, and people don't want to be engaged on everything (based on LGA Guide to Engagement, February 2019).

We will:

- Focus on core activities to communicate with the widest audience.
- Maintain consistency of approach in our message.
- Our tone and voice will remain consistent.
- Ensure the council's messages are politically neutral.
- Support partner organisations with information on our social channels and website where our values and aims align.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The media through which we communicate

5.1 The council communicates to its stakeholders and audiences through the following channels:

- The Lewes Town Council website - central to all our public communications.
- Social media channels.
- Press releases.
- Notice boards, posters, flyers.
- Reports, newsletters, bulletins and meeting documentation.

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We will endeavour to engage with stakeholders effectively where relevant or appropriate, being mindful of the council's resources and capacity. We also recognise that communicating too frequently diminishes and dilutes the effectiveness of messaging and the audience's response to it (based on LGA Guide to Engagement, February 2019). With this in mind, we will:

Commented [NV5]: For future revisions of the strategy:

Is the below section 'roles and responsibilities'? It feels more like methods...

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- Facebook software enables people to view public meetings.

5.2 Members of the community can communicate with Lewes Town Council through the following channels:

- Email, letter, personal visit or phone for individual enquiries.
- On social media for comments and questions (which are visible to all).
- Engagement events and forums, open days and celebrations.
- Consultations - online or otherwise
- In the public speaking session at Full Council meetings (items on the agenda).

5.3 A summary of current communications activity is available below.

| Activity | Method of Communication | Responsibility |
|--|---|---|
| Approved and draft minutes | Website | Town Clerk |
| Agendas | Website/notice board/press. These will be published in compliance with legislation. | Town Clerk |
| Supporting information for meetings (non-confidential) | SharePoint | Town Clerk |
| Council policies/procedures | Website | Town Clerk/Comms Officer |
| Annual Town Meeting | Website/social media | Town Clerk/Comms Officer |
| Press releases | Email | Town Clerk/Comms Officer |
| Annual external audit | Website/noticeboard | Town Clerk/Finance Manager |
| Adopted Annual Accounts | Website/notice board | Town Clerk/Finance Manager |
| Councillor vacancies | Website/notice board/social media | Town Clerk/Finance Manager |
| Financial statements and other financial information | Website | Town Clerk/Finance Manager |
| Council events | Website/social media/printed material | Comms Officer/Business Development and Events Officer |
| Formal event invitations | Email/post | Civic Officer |
| What's On guide | Print/website | Comms Officer/Venue Assistants |
| Venue publicity | Website/social media/print | Venue managers/Comms Officer/Venue Assistants |
| Email newsletter | Email | Comms Officer |

Commented [NV7]: For future revisions of the strategy:

Description of activity (e.g. what is 'Adopted Annual Accounts')
 Frequency
 Audience

6. Evaluation

6.1 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.

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

- Media's assessment of Lewes Town Council's communication coverage.
- Raised awareness of the Town Council and the services it provides.
- Attitudes of all stakeholders towards Town Council.
- Participation and engagement with council projects, initiatives and consultation processes.
- Increased attendance at public meetings and organized events.

6.3 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).

Commented [NV8]: For future revisions of the strategy:

A future plan of what? Plans for more effective engagement, activities etc?

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What is the benchmark and how will we set measurements