

BRACEBRIDGE HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

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Engagement & Communication Strategy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Communication and engagement are a vital part of running any organisation. Organisations that regularly communicate tend to have a better reputation and satisfaction with their service users.
- 1.2. Communication and engagement allow the council to both give out and receive information from a range of stakeholders that it regularly interacts with. As a local council, speaking to the public and hearing back their views is fundamental to its function and purpose as a democratic body. This communication should operate to professional standards and be consistent in its production, quality, relevance and frequency.
- 1.3. This strategy is about building on the good practice which already exists in the Parish and seeks to ensure that the community of Bracebridge Heath has timely and relevant opportunities to engage with the council. This will underpin the council's ambition to improve the delivery of local services and its vision to make a positive impact on life and work in the village.
- 1.4. Community engagement gives individuals, communities and partners a range of important benefits including:
 - Developing a better understanding of and relationship with communities through genuine dialogue.
 - Involving residents in public services and making sure their knowledge, experience and priorities shape those services, so they are more responsive to need.
 - Helping people to establish an improved sense of neighbourhood and more cohesive communities.
 - Engaging more people in local democracy.
- 1.5. This strategy outlines answers to the key questions of how we should communicate, when we should communicate and to whom we should communicate. It gives direction on the production of online, print, traditional news media, internal and other communication activity.

2. Vision

- 2.1. That the people of Bracebridge Heath including residents, businesses and other stakeholders, have a clear understanding of the council's priorities, operations and challenges and that they recognise the council as a reputable and forward-looking local government organisation.
- 2.2. That the people of Bracebridge Heath have opportunities to engage with the council in order to help shape the services and development of the council's activities.
- 2.3. We will achieve this vision by communicating with the public we serve, the people we employ and the local authorities, groups and businesses we work with. This will be done through regular communication with relevant stakeholders via a range of communication channels, targeting the audience and method of communication appropriately.

3. The principles of engagement and communication

3.1. Engagement principles:

- **Objectives** – There will be clear objectives for engagement, to communicate openly about decisions and actions and the reasons for them
- **Accessibility** - seek to reach communities and individuals not yet engaged
- **Diversity of media** –
 - The council will recognise and value existing channels of communication and work to make these as effective as possible.
 - A range of flexible methods will be used, avoiding reliance on one route, the council will make use of innovative and creative ways using social media where appropriate.

3.2. Communication principles:

- **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, including a mixture of one and two way channels to ensure the council achieves a balance between broadcasting and listening.
- **Plain language used** - Information should be clear and straight forward. Key points should be emphasised.
- **Appropriate timing** - Communication should happen in good time to allow others to react. It should be regular and an ongoing process.
- **Appropriate quality of design and production** – Consistent style and quality, upholding high standards of writing, production and dissemination and maintaining a professional image.
- **Appropriate branding used** - Make it clear who the information is coming from by adhering to the same consistent styles.
- **Review and evaluate** - Monitor all channels to see what is or is not successful. Seek to improve output, engagement and learn from poor practises 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.

3.3. All communication will comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011) published by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

4. Who we communicate with

4.1. A stakeholder is a person, group or organisation that has an interest in the success of the council or can be affected by the council's actions, objectives and policies. Bracebridge Heath Parish Council works with employees, individuals, partner organisations and groups to achieve its vision for the local area.

Internal Stakeholders	External stakeholders
Parish council staff	Residents
Parish councillors	People or organisations who use the council's services – e.g. allotments, play parks, recreation space, hirers of The Heath and Pavilion
Volunteers – community hub & library, Wombles, Remembrance Sunday stewards and Christmas tree helpers	Local organisations and businesses
	Local groups – e.g Scouts, Friendship Club etc
	Other tiers of government – County, District and their representatives
	Local and regional media

5. How we communicate

5.1. A diverse range of channels will be used to communicate. Channels are defined as being the medium by which information is sent and received. Stakeholders have varying needs and will often require different channels of communication.

Channel	Details
Digital and telecommunications	
Website	- This is an easily accessible platform that covers most of the council's documents, operations, important dates/times and contact information. - One-way communication - Updated weekly
Email	- Members of staff and the parish councillors are accessible to one another via council owned e-mail addresses. - Public may contact the clerk or deputy clerk about any council matter which can be passed on to all members of the council or directly to an individual councillor if needed. - Two-way communication. - E-mails are viewed daily.
Telephone – call or text message	- Members of staff are accessible via mobile phones to raise any issues of concern or request information. - Two-way communication - Officers are available during their working hours.
Social media	
Facebook page - Parish Council	- Easily accessible platform that communicates council information, meetings dates/times, local group events and pertinent information from county or district level councils. - Two-way communication. Public can post their opinions, like or share the posts. Messages can also be sent directly to the page. - Viewed weekly and posts are made as required.
Facebook Group – Parish Council	- Managed by two elected members of council. - Multiway conversations between members of the public, parish councillors, officers of the council and the council's page. - Whilst the group is owned by the council, posts from the page are not routinely shared to the group and members of the group are encouraged to seek information about council business and activities via the official Facebook page for Bracebridge Heath Parish Council.
Facebook page – Community Hub and Library	- This is an easily accessible platform that communicates information about the library, events and activities. - Two-way communication. Public can post their opinions, like or share the posts. Messages can also be sent directly to the page. - Viewed weekly and posts are made as frequently as necessary.
Printed publications	
Heath Cliff View	- A monthly article is prepared for inclusion in the community magazine. The newsletter is printed and delivered to all homes along the cliff villages. - One way communication
Printed documents	- Annual reports and other printed publications about becoming a councillor are shared in hard copy in the Community Hub and Library. - One way communication
Noticeboards	- Council information such as contact details, hiring information is shared on noticeboards. Noticeboards are also used to share information about other relevant local events and activities. Updated as necessary. - One way communication
Local media and newspapers	

	• Press releases can be sent to journalists to cover an interesting story or event happening in the village, such as the opening of a new facility, the award of money, winning a competition etc. • Journalists may contact the council to cover a developing story, for example relating to an incident.
Face to Face	
Public Speaking at Meetings	• The council provides for a public participation session at the beginning of its Full Council meetings (bi-monthly), members of the public and elected members of local authorities can raise matters to the council. • Two-way communication. Allows for direct communication and responses given in person.
Informal contact	• Councillors and staff meet with members of the public during the course of their day-to-day business. • This provides an opportunity for informal communication and often provides an individual member of the public a chance to ask more in depth questions. E.g. at coffee mornings hosted by third parties. • Two- way communication. Allows for direct communication and responses given in person.
Exhibitions or showcase	• Often linked with consultations, an exhibition or showcase allows the council to present ideas to interested members of the public and partners who attend the event. Often images, documents, plans and members of the council are available to provide information. • Two-way communication. Allows for direct communication and responses given in person. • Ad hoc and infrequent.
Consultation	
Surveys	• Surveys are taken to get a snapshot of public or user group opinion on a range of issues, such as their experiences, concerns, likes and dislikes, council reputation etc. This data then forms the basis of policy creation and action plans to ensure the proper running and functioning of the council. It is also an important, large-scale listening exercise. • One-way communication. Allows those surveyed to give information to the council. • Infrequent but help formulate documents such as the council action plan, neighbourhood plan etc
Consultation events	• Often held in conjunction with an exhibition or a survey, consultations allow for the public and partners to give their opinions, views and ideas to the council on a specific issue under consideration. They can also help to support a grant funding proposal. • One-way communication. Allows those consulted to give information to the council. • Infrequent but help formulate policy or provide evidence of community support for a grant funding application.

6. What we communicate

6.1. One of the communication principles is the requirement of relevant information. Relevancy is determined by the needs of specific stakeholders. Information they may need to receive from the council might include:

The public and local groups

- Parish council services and facilities and how to access them
- How the parish council works
- Parish council documents and meeting information
- Local events, activities and groups

- Who to contact about which service
- How to give feedback, such as raising an issue or complaint
- Contact information of the parish council, elected members and partner organisations
- Newly enacted parish council decisions or policy proposals
- How to access and apply for grants from the parish council

Partner Councils and Organisations

- Changes to services
- Planning application views and opinions
- Legally required notifications, such as Building Control Plan following a project
- Police reports

Regional and National Media

- Press releases of interesting and informative stories
- Advertise local events
- Interact with journalists on a breaking story affecting Bracebridge Heath

7. The decision to communicate

- 7.1. Day to day information arising from within the parish council, such as facility hours changes/closures, staff changes, meetings advertisements, policy announcements, newsletter articles etc can be approved and uploaded at the discretion of the Clerk and Deputy Clerk.
- 7.2. At the Clerk or Deputy Clerk's discretion, information from outside bodies will be distributed through the council's channels of communication. This will ordinarily be through posters on noticeboards and within the Community Hub and Library. Outside bodies may include user groups, local groups, other councils or businesses. There is no automatic right for such information to be published by the council and a decision to publish will be based on its usefulness, legality and quality.
- 7.3. For contentious matters, the council will agree a public statement for publication. Between meetings or in response to any urgent matters, the clerk shall prepare a statement in consultation with the chairman of the council.
- 7.4. For planned public consultations, the materials and type of communication shall be determined by the Full Council. This might apply to consultations about a change in services or facilities.

8. Who communicates

- 8.1. Everyone communicates at the parish council in some form and so an understanding and application of the communication principles is necessary to improve the flow of information and the overall reputation of the council. The key people communicating are:
- 8.2. The Clerk and Deputy Clerk
 - 8.2.1. The Clerk and Deputy Clerk will identify opportunities to communicate relevant information to the public and will support other council staff, councillors and volunteers in their planned communication activities to ensure consistent quality of information, publication and branding.
 - 8.2.2. They have responsibility for the website, Facebook page and submission of news articles to Heath Cliff View, and will help others on the parish notice boards, regional and national media, exhibitions, surveys and consultations.
- 8.3. Other staff, councillors and volunteers
 - 8.3.1. Other representatives of the council, when communicating with members of the public and other local groups through e-mail, phone calls or face to face, should uphold the communications principles and communicate in a clear, informative manner. Other staff,

councillors and volunteers should help in so far as possible to resolve an issue or forward them on to the appropriate member of staff.

9. Evaluation

- 9.1. Evaluation of this strategy should be carried out from time to time to ensure that the council's methods of communication and its engagement activities are suitable and fit for purpose.
- 9.2. Some forms of social media provide analytical data which might inform the council about how a specific channel is performing.
- 9.3. A broader way of evaluating is to request feedback directly from residents through a survey. This might be carried out every few years to help the council understand its strengths and weaknesses in communicating and engaging with its stakeholders.

Appendix A – Local media and newspapers

The chairman of the council is the authorised contact with the media in consultation with the clerk. The chairman is authorised to speak on behalf of Bracebridge Heath Parish Council when the authority has a defined and minuted opinion. If the council does not have an opinion, the chairman should make this clear.

If the media contact relates to the work of one of council's committees, the chairman of that committee may be the authorised contact. The same stipulation applies with regard to the opinions of the council as for the committee chairman.

A press release may be issued when the parish council wants to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the parish council's position on a particular issue. All officers and members should look for opportunities when a press release may be useful. Press releases made must reflect the opinion of the parish council.

Planned press releases shall be agreed by the Full Council to ensure that the legal principles are followed, that there is consistency of style across the council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

Written information provided to the media should be:

- correct in spelling and grammar;
- factually accurate and concise; and
- clear and easy to understand.

Letters representing the views of the council should only be issued by the clerk following agreement by the council or relevant committee. A record of all official contact with the media, including copies of all correspondence will be kept by the clerk.

Other councillors may talk to the media but must make sure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the council.

At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the parish council.

Appendix B – Noticeboards

Bracebridge Heath Parish Council owns several noticeboards around the village which are located at:

- Lichfield Road
- Sycamore Grove/ Stane Drive junction
- Outside St John's Church, Grantham Road
- Sleaford Road/ Main Avenue junction
- Grantham Road opposite allotments
- St John's Road/Broadway
- The Pavilion, Recreation Ground, Bath Road
- Lincolnshire Co-operative Funeral Services, Grantham Road
- The Heath: Village Hall and Library

General guidance on the display of notices

- Priority is given in all situations to notices displayed by Bracebridge Heath Parish Council.
- Notices are expected to be clean and tidy and laminated where possible.
- Notices should be A4 or A5 in size, but the size of some boards does limit the display area available.
- Notices should not be allowed to obscure other displayed material.
- It is expected that all notices provided by users other than the parish council have contact details of the advertiser and a clear finish date after which the notice needs to be removed.
- The use and location of council noticeboards may be changed at any time without notice.
- The council reserves the right to commission or decommission boards.
- The Clerk will determine the suitability of any notice.

Information which may be displayed

a. General Council information

For display at The Heath and any other noticeboard as council officers see fit. Includes but not limited to:

- Contact details for the council including names of Members
- Agendas and other formal notices from the parish council
- Information about parish council facilities
- Formal notices of election or information about casual vacancies
- Information about consultations or formal notices from principle authorities
- Information from agencies, companies or organisations acting on behalf of or with the agreement of Bracebridge Heath Parish Council

b. Other councils and authorities

- Information from other principle authorities may be displayed if the information is considered to be of direct interest to residents of Bracebridge Heath.
- Contact details for Lincolnshire Police
- Contact details for NKDC and LCC (councils and Members)

c. Charitable, voluntary or non-profit making organisations

Local organisations and organisations which exist to support the local community may display on some of the boards owned by the parish council. This might be used for example for regular activities or one-off events within or close to the village.

d. Business advertising

Business advertising is only permitted by businesses connected to Bracebridge Heath or nearby on the noticeboard attached to Lincolnshire Co-operative Funeral Services.

Appendix C – Communications Framework

The communications framework outlines how new information and content should be shared and created at Bracebridge Heath Parish Council and what should be considered when making it.

Who are we talking to?

Consider who the relevant stakeholders are and what their specific requirements might be. Which channel will capture most of that audience and what information do they already know?

What are we saying?

Information should be written in plain English. Fonts should be clear and the layout of information logical and clear to follow. Ideally, it should contain an image to capture attention, especially on social media. It should also include key pieces of information such as date, time, location, contact information, cost etc.

Why are we saying it and what are the objectives of the message?

Part of planning is to consider why this information is being communicated. Is it designed just to inform the reader, to change their behaviour or to get feedback from them? Each option can require different considerations and be written differently.

It could be to 'help advertise and increase visitor numbers to event X' or 'get public opinion and feedback on policy Y'. Messages should be targeted to these aims and not contain unnecessary or irrelevant information.

At all times, consider how it fits in with other activities at the council as it could form part of a wider campaign.

What resources are available?

Consider what resources are available to deliver the message. Will it require money to be spent and how much? How long will it take to create and then for how long should it be promoted? Which members of staff could help? What skills are needed?

Make sure to evaluate communications and read the feedback at all points. What risks are involved? How will we know if it's been successful? What did we learn and how do we improve this next time?