



# COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

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This Communication Strategy was adopted by the council at its meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

## **1. Introduction**

This Communications Strategy sets out how Ashington Town Council manages its communications across all platforms to ensure effective engagement with our community. The strategy incorporates our Press and Media Policy while providing practical guidance for day-to-day communications management.

## **2. Strategic Objectives**

- Provide accurate, timely information about Council services and initiatives
- Maintain transparent and accountable communication with our community
- Support community engagement and participation
- Ensure consistent, professional communication across all platforms
- Facilitate appropriate sharing of community information
- Maintain accessibility and inclusivity in all communications

## **3. Key Principles**

### **Core Values**

- Openness
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Impartiality

## **4. Legal Framework**

All communications must comply with:

- Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960
- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Government Act 1986
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018
- Council Standing Orders
- Government's Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011

## **5. Communication Channels**

### ***Website Management and Legal Obligations***

Website

- Primary source of official Council information
- Source of all Council documents

- Platform for service information and updates
- News posts are primary source of information

### ***Statutory Publications Framework***

The Council's website serves as the primary platform for meeting legal transparency requirements, guided by:

- Local Government Transparency Code 2015
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Local Government Act 1972
- Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960

## **6. Publication Timescales and Requirements**

### ***Meeting Documentation***

#### **Council and Committee Agendas**

- ✓ Published at least 3 clear working days before meeting
- ✓ Includes date, time, location of meeting
- ✓ Detailed agenda items
- ✓ Supporting documents where possible

#### **Draft Minutes**

- ✓ Published within 30 days of meeting
- ✓ Draft status clearly indicated
- ✓ To be approved at next meeting

#### **Confirmed Minutes**

- ✓ Published following formal approval
- ✓ Signed by Chair of meeting
- ✓ Marked as confirmed/approved

### ***Financial Transparency***

#### **Annual Budget**

- ✓ Published on approval, and updated monthly
- ✓ Detailed breakdown of income and expenditure

#### **Annual Accounts**

- ✓ Published in draft form in accordance with proper practice
- ✓ Published on completion of external audit

- ✓ Includes annual governance statement
- ✓ Full financial transparency documents

### **Payments over £500**

- ✓ Published monthly
- ✓ Includes supplier name, amount, and brief description
- ✓ Include legal power to pay

## **7. Website Content Management**

- Continuous review and update of published information
- Ensure accessibility standards
- Provide multiple format options
- Regular content audit
- Ensure Copyright

## **8. Accessibility Commitments**

- ✓ Comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1
- ✓ Provide alternative formats on request
- ✓ Regular accessibility testing
- ✓ Clear mechanism for reporting accessibility issues

## **9. Data Protection and Privacy**

- Adhere to UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018
- Protect personal information
- Clear privacy notices
- Minimal personal data publication
- Secure data handling practices

## **10. Social Media Management**

- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn

### ***Platform Oversight***

- Regular monitoring of social media accounts
- Consistent brand representation

- Timely response to community interactions

### ***Facebook Management***

#### **Pin Management Protocol**

- ✓ Pin most critical and current information
- ✓ Weekly review of pinned posts
- ✓ Ensure pinned content remains:
  - Relevant
  - Up-to-date
  - Accurate
  - Valuable to community

#### **Pinning Guidelines**

- ✓ Maximum of four posts pinned at any time
- ✓ Prioritise:
  - Urgent council announcements
  - Upcoming significant events
  - Critical service information
  - Community safety notifications

### ***Review Process***

- ✓ Every Monday: Comprehensive pin review
- ✓ Assess current relevance of pinned posts
- ✓ Remove outdated pins
- ✓ Replace with most critical current information
- ✓ Maintain maximum of four pinned posts

## **11. Traditional Media**

- Press releases
- Public notices
- Council notice boards

## **12. Content Management**

### ***Priority Framework***

1. Council statutory communications, i.e. meeting agendas and minutes

2. Council services and initiatives
3. Council-sponsored events
4. Community information sharing

#### ***Time Allocation***

- Primary focus on Council communications
- Maximum 1 hour daily allocated to third-party content sharing
- No obligation to share all community content

### **13. Third-Party Content Policy**

#### ***Acceptable Content***

- Community group events and activities
- Community organisation announcements
- Public service announcements
- Charitable organisation events

#### ***Excluded Content***

- Business promotional material
- Political content
- Personal promotions
- Controversial topics

#### ***Sharing Requirements***

- Must include original commentary from Council 'Share with Purpose'
- Clear attribution to original source
- Proper disclaimers
- Direction of queries to original poster

### **14. Incident and Emergency Communications**

#### ***Response Protocol***

- Immediate notification to Executive Officer
- Authorised responses only
- Consistent messaging

#### ***Special Periods***

- Period of Heightened Sensitivity 'Pre-Election' guidelines
- Election periods



- Emergency situations

## **15. Accessibility Standards**

- Clear, simple language
- Alternative text for images
- Appropriate colour contrast
- Structured content
- Multiple format availability

## **16. Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Regular review of engagement metrics
- Feedback incorporation

## **17. Operational Checklist**

### ***Pre-Publication Review***

- ☐ Draft in Word with spell check
- ☐ Policy compliance review
- ☐ Accessibility check
- ☐ Approval from relevant authority, or Executive Officer

### ***Social Media Checklist***

- ☐ Fact verification
- ☐ Image/video inclusion
- ☐ Appropriate calls to action
- ☐ Contact information

### ***Website Checklist***

- ☐ Verify legal compliance
- ☐ Check publication timescales
- ☐ Confirm document accuracy
- ☐ Ensure accessibility
- ☐ Protect sensitive information
- ☐ Maintain comprehensive records

### ***Cross-Platform Publishing***

- ☐ Website content complete
- ☐ Facebook formatting and tags

- ☐ Instagram adaptation
- ☐ LinkedIn professional presentation

***Third-Party Content***

- ☐ Meets sharing criteria
- ☐ Original commentary added
- ☐ Proper disclaimers included
- ☐ Time allocation check

***Quality Control***

- ☐ Spell check
- ☐ Links verified
- ☐ Tags checked
- ☐ Images properly attributed
- ☐ Tone appropriate
- ☐ Platform-specific requirements met

**18. Monitoring and Review of this Policy**

The Executive Officer shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice. Changes will be approved by Council.

## **APPENDIX A - Ashington Town Council Communications Do's and Don'ts**

### **General Communication**

#### ***Do's***

- ✓ Maintain openness, transparency, accountability, and impartiality
- ✓ Ensure all communications comply with legal frameworks
- ✓ Prioritise clear, simple, and accessible language
- ✓ Provide alternative formats for communications
- ✓ Verify facts before publishing
- ✓ Protect individual privacy
- ✓ Maintain a professional and consistent tone

#### ***Don'ts***

- ✗ Share personal opinions as Council statements
- ✗ Publish confidential or sensitive personal information
- ✗ Ignore legal communication requirements
- ✗ Use jargon or complex terminology
- ✗ Communicate without proper approval
- ✗ Engage in political or controversial discussions

### **Website Management**

#### ***Do's***

- ✓ Publish agendas 3 clear working days before meetings
- ✓ Publish draft minutes within 30 days of meeting
- ✓ Keep website content up-to-date
- ✓ Ensure web accessibility (WCAG 2.1 compliance)
- ✓ Conduct regular content audits
- ✓ Provide multiple format options

#### ***Don'ts***

- ✗ Delay publishing statutory documents
- ✗ Ignore accessibility requirements
- ✗ Publish incomplete or inaccurate information

✗ Neglect regular website maintenance

✗ Fail to protect personal data

### **Social Media Communication**

#### ***Do's***

✓ Pin most critical and current information

✓ Review pinned posts weekly

✓ Use @ mentions and appropriate hashtags

✓ Include images or videos

✓ Respond timely to community interactions

✓ Maintain consistent brand representation

#### ***Don'ts***

✗ Pin more than four posts at a time

✗ Share business promotional content

✗ Post personal or political content

✗ Ignore social media interactions

✗ Share controversial or inappropriate content

### **Third-Party Content Sharing**

#### ***Do's***

✓ Spend maximum 1 hour daily on third-party content

✓ Share content with original commentary

✓ Clearly attribute original sources

✓ Include proper disclaimers

✓ Direct queries to original posters

#### ***Don'ts***

✗ Share all community content

✗ Post without adding value

✗ Misrepresent third-party content

✗ Accept responsibility for third-party events

✗ Share business promotional materials

## **Incident and Emergency Communications**

### ***Do's***

- ✓ Notify Executive Officer immediately
- ✓ Provide authorised responses only
- ✓ Maintain a clear chain of command
- ✓ Ensure consistent messaging
- ✓ Protect community safety

### ***Don'ts***

- ✗ Respond without authorisation
- ✗ Speculate or spread unverified information
- ✗ Bypass communication protocols
- ✗ Engage in unauthorized communications during sensitive periods

## **Accessibility and Inclusivity**

### ***Do's***

- ✓ Use clear, simple language
- ✓ Provide alternative text for images
- ✓ Ensure appropriate colour contrast
- ✓ Use structured content
- ✓ Offer multiple format options

### ***Don'ts***

- ✗ Use complex or exclusionary language
- ✗ Ignore accessibility guidelines
- ✗ Create barriers to information access
- ✗ Fail to provide alternative formats

## **Quality Control**

### ***Do's***

- ✓ Spell check all communications
- ✓ Verify links
- ✓ Check tags and attributions

- ✔ Use appropriate tone
- ✔ Meet platform-specific requirements

### ***Don'ts***

- ✘ Publish content with errors
- ✘ Use broken or incorrect links
- ✘ Ignore platform-specific guidelines
- ✘ Fail to proofread communications

### **Final Reminder**

- Communication represents Ashington Town Council
- Every communication reflects our commitment to the community
- Prioritise clarity, accuracy, and accessibility