



SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

Communications Strategy

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Communications Strategy 2024

Summary

Southwater Parish Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders. Achieving the council's aims and objectives requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with, or provide services for. Building trust and confidence, and through that, strengthening relationships with residents, stakeholders and staff is the starting point of the success of our organisation.

This communication strategy outlines the key elements required for effective communication within Southwater Parish Council (SPC) and its stakeholders. It aims to enhance transparency, community engagement, and efficient information dissemination, to support the council's objectives.

The Local Government Association recommends that strategic communications should deliver:

- Leadership - clarity of purpose and commitment,
- A distinctive brand,
- A clear vision,
- Authenticity to the local area,
- A strategic approach to communications,
- A corporately agreed, fully evaluated annual communications plan,
- Communications activity based on research with robust evaluation,
- Communications that are for everyone.

Objectives

The objectives of this communications strategy are to:

- Help our residents and stakeholders feel informed about council services and policies and how to engage with them.
- Ensure communications are co-ordinated, consistent, targeted, and driven by insight so that communications are delivered at the right time, through the right media, to the right audience.
- Ensure the Council's role is understood and appreciated by residents, visitors, partners, and businesses, so they feel safe, supported, and confident about the future.
- Develop pride - across internal and external audiences - in the Council's unique role in leading Southwater forward with confidence, clarity, and an inspiring vision for the future.
- Use effective internal communication to ensure all employees and council members are supported with frequent, clear, and consistent communications and updates.
- Community Involvement: Emphasize the importance of resident participation in council decisions, activities, meetings and events.

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Highlight the council's commitment to transparency and accountability in its operations.
- **Services and Initiatives:** Communicate and promote the various services, initiatives, and projects undertaken by the council.
- **Support and Accessibility:** Promote the accessibility of council services and the availability of different types of support for residents.

Target Audiences

- **Residents:** All individuals living within Southwater Parish.
- **Local Businesses:** Businesses operating within the parish.
- **Community Groups:** Local clubs, groups, charities, services, societies, and organisations.
- **Council Members and Staff:** Internal stakeholders including council members and employees.
- **External Agencies and Partners:** Organisations and agencies collaborating with SPC.

Pro-active communications activity depends on effective targeting of audiences, ensuring resources are focused on the right way and using the communications channels each specific audiences prefer. Understanding audiences - who we are trying to reach and what we want them to communicate and then prioritising groups to create audiences based on similar characteristics (demography, psychographics, geography, likely interest), is a priority.

We will identify the ways in which our residents, businesses, visitors, and partners prefer to get information about our work and use this insight to tailor the way we communicate and engage with our various groups of audiences. This will ensure communications campaigns are effectively resourced, use the right communication channels and media, and are evaluated. We will use our existing insight and data and commission more research where needed.

Our Communication Channels

- **SPC Office:** The office is open to enquiries from the public five days a week from 10am to 2pm, Monday to Friday.
- **SPC Website:** A primary source of information, offering news, updates, documents, and contact information.
- **Social Media:** We use various Facebook pages and groups, and Instagram to reach a wider audience quickly.
- **YouTube:** We use YouTube to live stream Council and Committee meetings and to showcase some of our assets and facilities.
- **Printed Newsletters:** Monthly updates in a local magazine, delivered to each household within the parish. Digital, free subscription based newsletter will also be added in the future.
- **Public and Council Meetings, Councillor Surgeries and Events:** Opportunities for direct engagement and feedback.
- **Print Media:** Flyers and posters distributed within the community.
- **Local Press:** Press releases and news articles in local newspapers and magazines, usually submitted online.
- **Noticeboards:** Physical boards in key locations for posting news, events, notices, updates and useful contact information.
- **Direct Mail:** Letters and consultations sent to residents when necessary.
- **Email:** Email requests answered and sent to residents where available.
- **Neighbourhood Wardens:** The Council has a very close working relationship with the Neighbourhood Wardens where they have direct communication with various residents and groups within Southwater.

Strategic Actions

1. Website Enhancement

Objective: To maintain a user-friendly and informative online presence.

Update the Website design: To continue to improve the current website's layout, navigation, and overall user experience under continuous review.

Regular Updates: Ensure the website is updated weekly with news, events, meeting minutes, and other relevant information.

Interactive Features: Add interactive features such as newsletter subscription, feedback and contact forms.

Accessibility Compliance: Ensure the website complies with accessibility standards to cater to residents with disabilities.

2. Social Media Engagement

Objective: To utilise social media for broader reach and engagement.

Actions:

Platform Selection: Maintain the official accounts on Facebook, and Instagram.

Content Strategy: Develop a content calendar to post regular updates, including news, event announcements, and community highlights.

Engagement: Actively respond to comments and messages to foster interaction.

Analytics: Use social media analytics tools to monitor engagement and adjust strategies accordingly.

3. Newsletters and emails

Objective: To keep residents informed through direct communication.

Mailing List Development: Compile and regularly update a mailing list of residents and stakeholders.

Content Creation: Develop fortnightly or monthly newsletters with sections on council updates, upcoming events, community stories, climate action advice and feedback

opportunities.

Personalization: Use email marketing tools to personalize content based on subscriber interests and preferences.

Enquiry inbox: To answer questions and requests when contacted via email.

4. YouTube channel

Objective: To effectively communicate with the community, increase transparency, promote local events, and enhance community engagement through a dedicated YouTube channel.

Actions: Create a visually appealing and engaging Youtube channel.

Content Creation: Develop a variety of content types to keep the audience engaged. Live stream council and committee meetings, publish videos of local events and festivals, community activities, educational videos explaining SPC's activities and roles, interviews with local residents and businesses.

Content Schedule: Create and maintain consistent content schedule.

5. Councillor Surgeries, Public Meetings, and Events

Objective: To facilitate direct interaction and engagement with residents. Receive instant feedback.

Regular Meetings: Schedule public meetings (non-Council or committee meetings for public benefit to obtain their views) and ensure they are well-publicized through multiple channels. Provide agendas.

Special Events: Organise events such as Annual Parish Meeting.

Interactive Formats: Incorporate Q&A sessions, and interactive workshops to encourage participation.

Follow-Up: Provide summaries and feedback reports, minutes after each meeting or event.

Public documents: Upload and share documents with the public via website, noticeboards and social media platforms.

6. Print Media and Noticeboards

Objective: To ensure information reaches those who may not use digital channels.

Printed Materials: Design and distribute printed newsletters, flyers, and posters to key community locations such as libraries, community centers, and local shops.

Noticeboards: Maintain and regularly update noticeboards in prominent locations with current information.

Collaborations: Work with local businesses to display council information on their premises.

7. Strengthening Internal Communication

Objective: To enhance coordination and information flow within SPC. To boost team morale.

Team Building Exercises: To plan and implement regular team building activities for all staff members.

Collaboration Tools: Utilize tools like shared drives, project management software, and communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams.

Regular Meetings: Schedule regular internal staff meetings to discuss ongoing projects and issues.

Training Sessions: Provide training for council members and staff on effective communication practices and tools.

8. Feedback and Evaluation

Objective: To continuously improve communication efforts based on feedback.

Consultation surveys: Public consultation to get feedback on effectiveness of SPC's communication methods and use of various media channels.

Feedback Mechanisms: Establish various feedback mechanisms such as surveys, suggestion boxes, and online forms.

Data Analysis: Regularly review and analyze feedback to identify areas for improvement.

Strategy Adjustments: Adjust communication strategies and actions based on feedback and evaluations, and the type of information needs to be shared.

Reporting: Prepare quarterly reports on communication activities and outcomes for council review.

Metrics: Combine quantitative metrics like survey responses, and open rates with qualitative insights such as feedback comments.

Website: Monthly unique visitors, page views, and feedback submissions.

Social Media: Follower growth, engagement rate (likes, comments, shares), and post reach.

Email Newsletters: Open rates, click-through rates, and subscriber growth.

Public Meetings and Events: Attendance numbers, participant feedback, and engagement levels.

Print Media: Distribution numbers and feedback from printed materials.

9. Budget and Resources

To successfully implement this strategy, SPC will allocate appropriate resources, including:

Staff: Established and designated roles within the team responsible for managing and executing the strategy.

Training: Provide training for council members and staff on effective communication practices and tools.

Technology: Invest in necessary technology and tools, such as website hosting, email marketing services, editing and/or design softwares, and collaboration tools.

Print and Distribution: Budget for the production and distribution of print materials.

Consultations: Budget for the production of surveys and obtaining feedback from residents, local businesses, and stakeholders.

Events: Allocate funds for organising and promoting public meetings and events, where required.

10. Newsworthy items, media enquiries and managing negative comments

Identifying newsworthy items: It is the responsibility of everyone working within the Parish Council to identify newsworthy items; these will include a range of Parish Council activities and decisions and it is the responsibility of the Executive Officer to make the decision as to whether or not a press release should be issued.

Handling media enquiries: The Executive Officer co-ordinates all formal media enquiries to the Parish Council. Members and Parish Council staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts. If Members are in any doubt they should consult the Executive Officer. The Parish Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members. The phrase “no comment” should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The Parish Council is open and accountable and should always try to explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

Managing negative comments and issues: The Parish Council has to respond to negative issues as well. It is important that these situations are managed carefully so as to limit the potential for negative publicity. Members and Officers must alert the Executive Officer as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media. Members and Officers must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted the Parish Council about an issue.

Action plan

Media	Actions	Responsible	Timeline
1.Website Enhancement	Update website design and regular content update	Community Engagement Officer	Continuous
	Introduce newsletter subscription	Community Engagement Officer	1-2 months
	Ensure the website complies with accessibility standards	Community Engagement Officer	Continuous
2.Social Media Engagement	Maintain existing social media channels	Community Engagement Officer	Continuous
	Engagement, respond to comments, messages	Community Engagement Officer	Continuous
	Actively liking and sharing social media posts	Staff members, Councillors	Continuous
3.Newsletters	Create monthly newsletter content	Designated Councillor (s), Community Engagement Officer, Executive Officer	Continuous
	Circulate newsletter to staff, councillors, email subscribers, publicise via various media channels	Community Engagement Officer	Continuous
4.Email	Monitor Enquiry Inbox, answer emails	Operations Officer, Community Engagement Officer, Executive Officer	Continuous
	Maintain and circulate email newsletter	Community Engagement Officer	Continuous
5.Youtube channel	Create engaging and educational content	Community Engagement Officer	Continuous
	Maintain consistent schedule for sharing content	Community Engagement Officer	Monthly video upload
6.Councillor surgeries, public	Schedule meetings	Executive Officer, Community Engagement Officer,	Continuous

meetings and events		Councillors	
	Publicise meetings on various platforms	Executive Officer, Community Engagement Officer, Councillors	Continuous
	Minutes and Agendas to provide, circulate and publicise	Executive Officer, Community Engagement Officer, Operations Officer	Continuous
	Interactive formats: Q&A sessions, Interactive Workshops	Executive Officer, Community Engagement Officer, Councillors	Every second month
7.Print media, noticeboards	Printed media – create and distribute as necessary	Community Engagement Officer, Executive Officer	Continuous
	Noticeboards – update content as necessary	Executive Officer, Community Engagement Officer, Litter Wardens	Continuous
8.Internal Communication	Circulation of Information	Staff Councillors	Continuous
	Staff meetings	Executive Officer	Continuous
	Team building activities	Staff	Continuous
	Training – arrange and provide for staff members and councillors	Staff, Councillors	Continuous
	Use of communication and organising tools	Staff, Councillors	Continuous

Review of Communication Strategy

To implement this strategy successfully, SPC will allocate appropriate resources, including staffing, training, technology, and budget. The Executive Officer and the Community Engagement Officer will oversee the execution of the strategy, ensuring that all actions are carried out effectively and on schedule. Investment in technology and tools will support efficient communication processes, while training will equip council members and staff with the necessary skills to engage effectively with the community.

To ensure the effective implementation of the strategy, a yearly review should be carried out by the Executive Officer and Community Engagement Officer. Any material changes to be approved by the Council.