

# **DRAFT ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

## **Background**

*It was agreed at the parish council meeting in June 2019, that a communications strategy should be implemented by Abbots Ann Parish Council. The lead councillor on this strategy is Cllr Clare Coffey. As part of the research taken into developing a draft communications strategy, other parish councils' communication strategies were looked at as well as speaking to the editor of the Abbots Ann Parish Magazine and the Village Correspondent.*

## **Introduction**

Abbots Ann Parish Council wishes to engage, communicate and consult with the parish of Abbots Ann to make sure its residents enjoy living in the Parish and have a positive experience of the Parish Council. Communications are a two-way process - to give people the information to understand accurately what we do and enabling the Council to make informed decisions using information received from the Parish.

### **1. Communication - why it is important**

Good communication leads to mutual recognition and respect. The Parish Council will understand and better meet the needs of the community as well as raising the profile of the Parish and the Parish Council.

Research done by MORI (an independent research organisation) and the Local Government Association, suggested that the most important drivers of council reputation amongst local residents were:

- perceived quality of services overall
- perceived value for money
- media coverage
- direct communications
- council performance
- a clean, green and safe environment
- positive experiences of contact with council employees

These drivers perhaps must form the basis of Abbots Ann Parish Council's proactive and reactive communications with residents. If implemented correctly then the Council's reputation could become better and residents' satisfaction would improve.

Good communications will allow the Council to:

- better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities
- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about services provided by the Council
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the perception of the Council.

### **2.2 Who we should communicate with**

The Council's audiences are wide and varied, including:

- Residents
- Test Valley Borough Council- both councillors and officers
- Hampshire County Council- both councillors and officers

- Hard-to-reach groups, including young people
- The media (Andover Advertiser and Abbotts Ann Parish Magazine)
- Voluntary groups and village organisations
- Abbotts Ann Church of England Primary School
- The Church of St Mary
- Abbotts Ann Village Shop and Post Office
- The business community (within the parish, neighbouring parishes and Andover)
- The local MP
- Other public sector organisations (police, health, fire)
- Visitors and those who work in the area

### 2.3 What we should communicate

There are two methods of communicating – proactive and reactive. Being proactive helps to inform others, which may help to influence the purpose and role of the council. Being reactive is being responsive to requests from residents for information.

#### **Proactively, we will:**

**Publish** Council agenda, minutes, other papers and correspondence, register of interests, list of representatives to bodies, accounts, contact details for each councilor and the clerk.

**Publish and distribute** a quarterly newsletter to update residents and provide timely notices of events, including council and annual meetings. This should include an annual survey.

**Publish**, through the Parish Magazine and our social media, a Chairman's monthly update.

#### **Reactively, we will:**

**Through the Clerk**, respond to questions from residents within 14 working days.

**Through the Chairman and the Clerk** respond to questions from the media as appropriate.

### 2.4 How we should communicate

Different forms of communication will appeal to different ages, social groups and demographics. It is therefore important to ensure that all options for increasing communication and participation should be considered in order to communicate effectively with everyone. The council also must ensure that information is easily accessible, relevant, timely and that communication must meet the expectations of the community it serves.

Currently the Council communicates to the parish through:

- The Parish Council's website standalone and a link on the Abbotts Ann Village Website
- Abbotts Ann Parish Magazine
- The Council's five noticeboards
- Councillor interaction with one another and village organisations

Future forms of communications (see also proactive/reactive section):

- Establish a Facebook page which would be updated monthly for all communications as above; additionally, this can be used to communicate important matters quickly. All Councillors can be given administration or editing rights.
- Have an annual presence at the Abbotts Ann Fete and the Apple Day.
- Liaise with the local media more- send press releases to the Andover Advertiser about the Council's monthly meetings/ any important issues/ local initiatives. We will also inform the Village Correspondent, though we are conscious their role is independent of the council.
- Public consultation via occasional questionnaires on specific subjects that are relevant to the parish (this would help towards the Parish Council action plan and priorities)

- An annual consultation to be undertaken by the Council to obtain the parish's opinion on perception and satisfaction of the Council and its work.

## **2.5 Who (from the council) should be communicating?**

It is important that:

- all communication from the Council is polite, timely, professional, appropriate and reflects the Council's decisions and policies
- all individuals communicating on behalf of the Council are aware that every piece of communication reflects on the reputation of the Council in the parish and wider community
- Staff and Councillors are ambassadors of the Council and this should be paramount in all communications.

### **2.5.1 Parish Clerk**

The Parish Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies. Therefore, it is important that the Clerk has a council email address with a signature that contains their name, position and contact information.

### **2.5.2 Councillors**

Councillors may be approached by members of the parish and it is important that no promises should be made about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter. All Councillors should have a dedicated Council email address, preferably with a signature that contains their title, area of liaison and up to date contact details. All communication should be responded to and the correspondent kept informed of progress. A possible protocol/procedure for this could be as below:

- having received an enquiry/complaint, the Councillor should acknowledge receipt (if in writing) and advise of what action is intended to be taken
- advise when that action has been taken and what to expect next (ie a response is now awaited from (a third party)
- report back on the outcome of the enquiry or ensure that either the third party or the parish clerk will/has report(ed) back on the matter.

## **3.0 Evaluation**

It is 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.

What communication improvements can we measure?

- Media's assessment of Abbotts Ann Parish Council's communication coverage
- Raised awareness of the Parish Council and the services it provides
- Attitudes of all stakeholders towards Abbotts Ann Parish Council
- Participation and engagement with Council projects, initiatives and consultation processes
- Increased attendance at Public meeting and organised events.

How will we do this?

- Consultation with residents and village organisations – perception and satisfaction surveys
- Measure press coverage for saturation and against press releases for content usage
- Hits on the Parish Council website
- Number of Likes, Followers and Comments on the Facebook Page of the Parish Council (if adopted)

### **Conclusion and acknowledgements**

To conclude, this strategy should be reviewed annually or every two years to make sure that the Parish Council is communicating effectively so that the members of the Parish are aware of our services that we provide for the enrichment of the parish of Abbots Ann. I would like to acknowledge Judeth Dashwood (Editor of the Abbots Ann Parish Magazine) and Rosemary Griffiths (Village Correspondent) and thank them for their time in answering my questions.