



# COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

**Recommended:** F & GP

**Approved:** Full Council 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022

## 1. Introduction

Billingham Town Council provides local leadership and a number of services. It has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders and to do this, it is vital that a communications strategy be developed.

Better communications lead to recognition and respect. Many councils fail to effectively communicate who they are and what they do. The less people know about an organisation, the less likely they are to rate it highly.

An important part of any organisation's role is to ensure that information provided by and to it is easily accessible, relevant and timely. The Council has to recognise the importance of communication and be committed to developing its own services to meet the expectations of the community it serves

The overall aim is that Council communications should be a two-way process; to give people the information to understand accurately what it does, so they can make informed decisions, and to get information from residents and stakeholders so it can understand their needs.

## 2. Communication Principles

All Council communication should be consistent and uphold high standards of writing, production and dissemination. Communication should encourage and enable a two-way flow of information, which involves listening to stakeholder's views and informing them of the council's.

All communication will comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity published by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Paragraph 4 states that communication should be:

- Lawful;
- Cost-effective;
- Objective;
- Even-handed;
- Appropriate;
- Have regard to equality & diversity;
- Issues be dealt with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

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 good 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 & 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. How We Communicate

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 different stakeholders may require different channels. Channels can be in the form of digital, social media, print and face to face.

#### Digital & Telecommunications

- **Website**
  - Billingham Town Council's website is [www.billinghamtowncouncil.co.uk](http://www.billinghamtowncouncil.co.uk)
  - This is an easily accessible platform that covers most of the council's document, operations, important dates/times and contact information;
  - It is for the giving of information and is updated on a regular basis.
- **E-mail**
  - Officers and members are accessible via e-mail to discuss an issue or find information about a service or policy;
  - This is a two-way channel allowing for direct interaction with the public. Emails are viewed daily during office hours.
- **Telephone**
  - Officers and members are accessible via landline and/or mobile phones to raise an issue or request information;

- The office landline is available during office hours. The Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk are available via mobile, out of hours. Members who provide a contact telephone number are available at appropriate hours.
- This is a two-way method of communication.

### Social Media

- Facebook
  - Billingham Town Council has three Facebook pages:  
<https://www.facebook.com/billingham.towncouncil/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/JWPHUB/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/BYCouncil/>
  - This is an easily accessible platform that communicates council information, events, meeting dates, policies etc;
  - It is viewed daily during office hours and posts are made as frequently as necessary;
  - This is a two-way channel allowing for members of the public to post their opinions, like or share posts or request information. They can also direct message the council;
  - The Council also has a twitter account: @BillinghamTC
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### Printed Publications

- Billingham Town Council provides a quarterly newsletter, delivered to every household in the parish. It contains relevant information in relation to the council. Information for inclusion in the newsletter is collected continuously however, only Town Council officers and current members may submit an article for inclusion;
- The Council provides flyers for specific events and services that are delivered to every household in the parish;
- The Council publishes information in outside body publications such as Stockton Billingham Life and The Clerk magazine;
- Press releases can be sent to journalists to cover an interesting story or event. Journalists may contact the Council to cover a developing story;
- Information is also displayed on Council noticeboards and local community centres;
- This is a one-way channel that provides information to all residents, whether they are online or not. It has the broadest scope of all channels.

### Face to Face

- **Public Speaking at Meetings**

- Every committee/sub-committee provides the public the opportunity to address the meeting to raise matters appertaining to the Council;
  - Members of the public can be invited to join a Working Group regarding a specific subject/event;
  - This is a two-way channel that allows for direct communication and responses given in person.
- **Exhibitions**
    - Often linked with consultations, and exhibition allows the Council to present ideas to interested members of the public, stakeholders and partners. Often images, documents, plans and members of the Council are available to provide information;
    - Exhibitions are ad-hoc and infrequent;
    - This is a two way channel that allows for direct communication and responses given in person.
- **Consultations**
    - Often held in conjunctions with exhibitions, consultations allow for the public, stakeholders and partners to give their opinions, views and ideas on a specific issue under consideration;
    - They are held infrequently to help formulate policy or provide evidence;
    - This is a two-way channel that allows those consulted to provide information.
- **Surveys**
    - Surveys are carried out to get a snapshot of public or user group opinion on a range of issues such as their experiences, concerns, needs, likes and dislikes. This data then forms the basis of policy creation. It is a important, large-scale listening exercise;
    - These are held infrequently and help formulate documents such as actions plans;
    - This is a one-way channel that allows those surveyed to give information to the Council.

#### **4. Accessibility**

From the 23rd of September 2020, all .gov.uk websites should provide reasonable adjustments and adhere to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.1. This involves making the website accessible for people with a range of disabilities, such as with visual and auditory impairments.

All content uploaded should:

- Have a clear and readable font and text colour;

- If an image, have descriptions for screen readers to read out;
- Use Word documents primarily, but include the option for a PDF if possible;
- Have statements directing users to contact the Council for versions they may need.

## 5. Action Plan

This Action plan outlines changes going forward that will improve communication further. It identifies areas of focus and gives appropriate actions to achieve that outcome.

ACTION	COMMENT
Update the website	Continue to update the website as and when required. In April 2022, a new accessible website to be produced.
Ensure website is WCAG compliant	All documents to be in an accessible format. Since 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2020, all public bodies need to comply with the Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1AA standard. New website in April 2022 being produced by a WCAG 2.1AA website provided.
Identify all homes in Billingham	Work with those delivering the newsletter to ensure every home in Billingham is reached and as fewer copies leftover as possible.
Facebook content	Consider launching social media campaigns, or joining national campaigns, to help inform and change reader behaviour.
Blog	Consider the creation of a blog to allow for the explanation of decisions etc in more details than other channels allow.
Explore new channels	A new Instagram account has been created. Look at producing videos and discussion forums.
Publicise local groups	Establish more contact with local groups and organisations to help advertise their events. New website to include a community page.

Communicating with partners	Ensure we update partner organisations on what we are doing e.g. events, services
Monitor costs of communication	Monitor and evaluate the costs of communicating and ensure efficient use of resources.