DOWNTON PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

The purpose of this Communications Policy is to set-out Downton Parish Council's general principles and standards which underpin its communications.

Approved and adopted by a Meeting of the Council held on 09 June 2025.

Signed:	Melanie Camilleri (Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer)
Signed:	Cllr Jane Brentor (Chair)
Date:	09 June 2025

Aims and Introduction

Downton Parish Council (the Council) is accountable to the local community for its actions and aims to be open and transparent about the way it operates.

This Communications Policy includes the general principles which underpin our communications and explains how we will provide effective two-way communication in order to: -

- raise awareness of the Council's work, events, and activities, in such a way that is open, accessible, easy to understand, and accurate; and
- seek information from residents and stakeholders so that the Council can better understand their wishes.

The Council's aim is to create engaging communication, using a tone, style, and content which nurtures connection with the target audience and aligns with the Council's brand values: professional, sincere, friendly, approachable, authoritative, and innovative.

At the same time, the Council must observe the legal framework upon which decisions on publicity are made.

The Legal Framework

Under section 4(1) of the Local Government Act 1986, the Secretary of State issued the 'Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (31 March 2011)'; a code by which Local Authorities in England are required to have regard in coming to any decision on publicity.

Section 6(4) of the 1986 Act defines publicity as '*any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public*'.

The Publicity Code sets out seven principles of communication, in that it should: -

- be lawful
- be cost-effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Section 142 of the Local Government Act 1972 grants the power to provide information etc relating to matters affecting local government, potentially through newsletters.

The Council has adopted an Equality & Diversity Policy in compliance with The Equality Act 2010.

Following the amendment by the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Council has adopted a policy on the Filming, Photographing, Audio Recording & Social Media Reporting of Public Parish Council and Committee Meetings. This policy identifies the Council's position with the regard to the filming, photographing, audio recording, and social media reporting of public Council and Committee meetings.

The media through which we communicate

- Public face to face meetings
- The Council's website
- Council Social Media and Village Social Media (with Rules of Participation)
- Noticeboards – Council and other public places
- Local News
- Press Releases
- Email
- Letter
- Telephone
- QR Codes

Types of communication

1. Business communication

   Public face to face meetings.

   Agendas for public meetings are posted on the Council's Noticeboards and Social Media. Both Agendas and Minutes of Council meetings are published on the Council's website.

   The Council's adopted policies and financial documents are published on the Council's website.

   All Councillors and Officers have *.gov.uk* email addresses with a Council branded 'footer'. These email addresses are displayed on the Council's website.

   Letters from the Clerk display the Council's logo.

   Formal comms should be dated unless the media used automatically dates the communication.

   Officers' phone numbers (with dates and times they are available for phone contact) are displayed on the Council's website.

2. Information sharing

   When the Council wishes to share general news and information about the Council it will be posted on the Council's Noticeboards and Social Media (Council and Village), published on the Council's website, and made available, as appropriate, in other public places such as the library, doctor's surgery, churches, the Memorial Centre, and via the local schools' newsletters.

   The Council will use an agreed format aligning to the Council's brand.

   Photographs taken by the Council, if used, must have the individual's permission or that of their parent or guardian/carer.

3. Councillor communication

   If an individual Councillor is contacted by a member of the public or press for comment on Council matters, they will make it clear that any comment they make is their own personal view and not necessarily one held by other Councillors or the Council as a whole.

   There may be occasions an individual Councillor can refer the member of the public or press to a decision made by the Council where it has been recorded in Council Meeting Minutes.

   In the case of matters which require a course of action to be taken without delay, they may be

handled by a duly authorised Officer in consultation with the Chair. Where it is undesirable for a single officer to take sole responsibility, consultation wider than solely the Chair may be appropriate[1]

The Council has adopted a Social Media Policy which provides guidance to Councillors and Members of Staff on the use of Social Media, both for business and personal purposes and sets clear expectations of conduct.

4. Relations with the Press/Media

   The Clerk and/or Chair will be accountable for responding to requests from the press or other media for an oral or written comment or statement from the Council for a response to specific local issues to be published in formal local media.

   If an account is to be proactively sent to local media, this will be agreed either at a Council meeting or, if time does not allow, content will be created by the Clerk and/or Chair and agreed with as many Councillors as can be contacted within the time scale available.

   Letters to the editor of a local publication written by an individual councillor must consider point 3 above.

5. Public Consultation

   The Council considers that, where decisions about major projects or the expenditure of large sums of public money are involved, the Council will seek the opinion of its residents.

   Opinion may be gathered in a number of ways –

   - Face to face open events at a venue which is accessible and at a range of times which suit the various needs of the community.
   - Online and paper questionnaires
   - Voting using formal (paper) as well as informal (such as beans in jars) ways

6. Communication between Councillors and Officers

   All communication will be respectful and considerate of impact, even when informal. All emails, WhatsApp and text messages are subject to Freedom of Information requests. Once the exchange is considered complete, it should be deleted.

7. Communication during an election period

   In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, the Council is subject to rules which impact on how it can communicate with the public.

   During this period, Council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals, or recommendations in a way which identifies them with individual councillors or groups of councillors to ensure that no individual councillor gains an unfair advantage by appearing in an official publicity.

[1] - the Hillingdon Judge's comments on responses to urgent matters such as media queries (NALC Legal Topic Note 1).