



WOMBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Introduction and purpose

Wombourne Parish Council recognises the importance of effective communication and engagement with residents, and strives, through the implementation of this policy to improve its current level of communication and engagement.

The purpose of this policy is to help Wombourne Parish Council communicate and consult more effectively with residents and all other relevant stakeholders. The policy should be used as a working guide for effective communication.

Aims

The Aim of this policy is to achieve our ambitions for Wombourne Parish Council to work closely with all stakeholders – residents, communities, businesses, voluntary organisations, other tiers of Government and Statutory Bodies and suppliers to engage and encourage participation in decision making, securing better services, being engaged in the local democratic process, and creating a more active and informed community.

The Council strives to undertake the following:

To communicate information to our community clearly, factually, and appropriately through:

- i) The provision of a website detailing all Council services and activities
- ii) A quarterly/seasonal newsletter published on the website and social media pages
- iii) An annual report published on the website and social media pages and presented at the Annual Parish Meeting
- iv) Active Facebook and Twitter pages
- v) Active engagement with the other Tiers of Government

To raise the image and reputation of the Council through:

- i) Inviting residents to be actively involved in public participation sessions
- ii) Publicising and improving the format of the Annual Parish Meeting
- iii) Encouraging usage of the Council's website
- iv) Issuing press releases covering activities of the Council
- v) Appointing a Chairman who can actively represent the Council and community
- vi) Being involved in events within the Parish (e.g., annual Carnival and Christmas Tree Festival)

To enable every Councillor to maximise their role as an elected Member representing their community by:

- i) The preparation of a comprehensive New Members Pack
- ii) Ensuring all new Members attend an introductory SPCA New Councillor Course

- iii) Maintaining a Training Log and ensuring Members are frequently trained, no matter what their length of service with the Council is
- iv) Uploading agendas and minutes to the website
- v) Encouraging Members to attend meetings of Community Groups
- vi) Encouraging Members to take up places on Community Groups, and to be active members of the group

To ensure every member of staff understands the Council's priorities through:

- i) Having regular appraisals
- ii) Encouraging staff to provide input into decision making
- iii) Encouraging staff to actively represent the interest of the Council at community events

To improve our communication with our partners and stakeholders and co-ordinate our community engagement efforts through:

- i) Supporting the role and functioning of local groups, organisations, and partnerships
- ii) Actively being involved in various networking organisations (for example SPCA, NALC, SLCC)

Community engagement

The Parish Council engages with the community by understanding their needs and views, and in this way aims to build local trust.

Wombourne Parish Council recognises that communication and engagement is a two-way process and promotes community feedback and involvement in its activities.

The Parish Council consults the community through the following means:

- Annual Parish Meeting
- Public Participation session during Full Council Meetings

There are also several other informal ways that communication from parishioners is encouraged –

- The Parish Council Office is open Monday to Friday at advertised times or by appointment at others
- Parish Councillors are available to talk to residents and their names and phone numbers are published on the noticeboards, website and in the newsletter.
- The Parish Council also engages with the local community through public events such as the Christmas Light Switch on.

Methods of engagement

1. Newsletter

The introduction of a newsletter will become one of the Parish Council's most important lines of communication with residents.

The key aims of the newsletter are to promote the work of the Parish Council positively (including news and forthcoming events) and to engage with the local community.

The publication will also seek to support the work of local voluntary groups and provide relevant information of interest to parishioners, stakeholders, and visitors to the Parish. The newsletter does not aim to duplicate other local publications such as Grapevine.

The Parish Council aims to produce an engaging and informative quality publication, with a wide-ranging appeal and relevance.

To reach as wide an audience as possible, the Parish Council will seek to explore printing and delivering costs, perhaps in line with the District Council's Review magazine, to be considered at the next Budget and Precept meeting. In the mean time however, the newsletter will be published for the website and social media pages.

i) Frequency of editions

The Parish Council will produce quarterly newsletters, and will aim to issue them as follows:

Spring – April

Summer – July

Autumn – October

Winter – January

ii) Contents and style

This is the Parish Council's opportunity to grab parishioner's attention, so the design must be instantly attractive, clean, and simple.

Articles should be kept short, uncomplicated, and punchy with the main point stated at the beginning. Any lengthy text should be broken up into short paragraphs.

Colour photos are vital to bringing contents to life and should be included with all features if possible. Images need to be large enough to review, complement the text and have captions to describe them where possible. Where appropriate, the photographer or source should be credited. It is essential that any photos showing children's faces have the permission of the parents before being published.

Priority should be given to Wombourne Parish Council's news, covering updates since the last edition, current reports, and forthcoming events.

The back page should include fixed information in each edition, including Councillors details, Parish Council Office details, and contact information for general enquiries.

iii) Format

The font size must be consistent and large enough for most people to read. Likewise, the font type should be standardised, and any printed copies published on A4.

A consistent header should be used, incorporating the heading – Wombourne Parish Council's Newsletter and the logo should be clearly displayed. Likewise, the edition and date should be clearly displayed. A harmonious colour scheme should be adopted – ideally compatible to that used for the website and social media pages.

CANVA free edition has been used to produce posters and flyers to date, however, the Council should consider signing up to the pro version at a cost of £107.88 per annum which allows brand kits, 420,000 free templates, 75 million premium stock images, videos audio and graphics to be used as well as scheduling social media content to 7 platforms.

iv) Editorial responsibilities

The responsibility for the newsletters will lie with the Finance and General Purposes Committee, with delegated authority being given to the Clerk to the Council to produce the newsletter. Together with the Committee, the Clerk will determine the topics, themes, and design for each edition. Features should be produced by Members at the request of the Clerk and deadlines should be strictly adhered to.

The Committee Chairman and Vice Chairman will have the final say on the edition being published, and for speed, this will be done via email rather than at a formal Committee meeting.

2. Website

The Parish Council's website is an increasingly important and flexible form of communication for the Parish Council.

Wombourne Parish Council should ensure its website address is promoted as widely as possible and users can easily find the site on all major search engines / browsers.

The Parish Council should prioritise how best its website can be used to provide access to information and aid the delivery of information. A website is only as good as the information uploaded on it and the attention afforded to ongoing maintenance.

An effective website will require appropriate provision of resources – especially staff and Councillors with necessary skills and time.

i) Format

A successful website is one where the format meets the needs of Wombourne Parish Council and the site's targeted users. This will mean displaying content and updates in a user-friendly format that are easy to navigate. If the site does not meet the user's expectations, it is likely they will not visit again. The homepage should be simple, so that navigation is clear and logical. The format should be reviewed on a regular basis.

ii) Contents

It is imperative that information is up to date, accurate and relevant. Wombourne Parish Council should ensure it regularly evaluates and responds to user's satisfaction with the website.

iii) Maintenance

The Clerk currently has responsibility for the day to day uploading of information. Ongoing technical support is required from Kalidescope to implement maintenance, changes, and updates. Members of the Parish Council should ensure they regularly review the website to ensure they are aware of its contents and can answer questions from parishioners if required.

3. Social media

Social media is transforming the way Local Government and many Parish Council's interact with local people. Networking sites use online methods to build and link communities to share information about its services or events with a range of interested individuals.

The use of social media is not just about sharing updates but is also being used to spark innovation and engage in conversations with local people. Social media is free and easy to use – a powerful tool often requiring no more skill than adding an attachment to an email or creating a Word document. This means there are few barriers to entry for sharing information with a potentially wide audience.

The Parish Council can use social media to:

- Provide and exchange information about services
- Support local democracy
- Gather parishioner insight and manage parishioner interaction
- Support community cohesion, neighbourliness, and resilience

Currently, the Clerk has responsibility for updating the Parish Council's Facebook page and the Chairman the Twitter page. Members should keep up to date with these pages so that they can answer any questions from members of the public about them.

The Parish Council have a separate Social Media Policy which can be referred to if required.

4. The Media

Communicating positively with local and regional media is a vital function of any Parish Council.

Engaging with the media is a way of explaining and highlighting the work undertaken on behalf of parishioners. This promotes and raises the profile of Wombourne Parish Council and can also defend the Parish Council's interests.

The Parish Council have a separate Media Policy which can be referred to if required.

5. Posters / leaflets

These provide a cost-effective way of communicating to a particular target audience. When placed correctly, attractive posters can draw viewers to a specific event or alert them of an upcoming activity. A simple message, eye-catching image or catchy slogan can be extremely effective. They can be strategically located / distributed and seen by most people.

i) Objective

To be most effective, it is essential to identify the objective of the flyer and the target audience.

ii) Graphics

Illustration, photographs, or artwork help to grab people's attention, particularly for posters. Any image should be of a high quality and fit the message, a cheap or shoddy poster / flyer will reflect badly on the Parish Council.

iii) Headline and text

The headline should be short, snappy, and relevant. It is better to have one or two very long statements than a long list of text that might dilute the message.

A poster needs to be easily read from a distance, whenever possible consistency with fonts is best.

iv) Layout

Always ensure the Parish Council' logo, name and contact number is included. This should be prominent enough for people to remember who it was that produced the poster/flyer.

6. Noticeboards

The Parish Council currently has 2 noticeboards at the following locations:

- Outside the Civic Centre on Gravel Hill
- On Windmill Bank opposite the Spar

The purpose of the noticeboards is to display notification of Parish Council meetings, events, and news. Where appropriate, they are also available to publicise items and event of other relevant community activities. Commercial notices are not normally advertised unless of specific benefit to the community or the Parish Council, for example, events at Wombourne Civic Centre.

Space within noticeboards is limited, so it is important out of date information is removed and replaced. Noticeboards should be kept locked to members of the public.

7. Annual Report

The Parish Council should consider introducing an Annual Report which would be prepared for presentation to the public at the Annual Parish Meeting, usually held in April.

It would be presented in the form of a colour printed folded booklet and is headed with the Parish Council name, logo, and any Quality symbol (if applicable).

It should contain the following information:

- An introduction from the Chairman
- Details of what the Parish Council do/cover, details of meetings and how to find information about them and when the Parish Council Office is open
- Report from the Chairman
- Reports from Chairman of Committees which details the work of the respective committees throughout the year
- Reports from District/ County Councillor of what they are doing to support the local area
- Details of how to access the unaudited accounts for the year
- Details of the precept for the forthcoming year
- Names and phone numbers of Parish Councillors

8. Annual Parish Meeting

It is recognised that the Annual Parish Meeting should be an opportunity for the Parish Council to engage with residents and receive their suggestions for what they would like to see their Parish Council achieve for the forthcoming year and to receive feedback on previous projects.

To achieve this kind of engagement and interaction with the public, the Parish Council should consider changing the format of their current meeting to make it more informal and aimed at being a community interaction engagement session rather than just another Council meeting.

A role model example, as shown in a recent SPCA training session is that of Cleobury Mortimer Town Council who have turned their Annual Parish Meeting into an 'Expo' giving local community groups an opportunity to set up stalls to promote their groups to entice residents to attend.

Engagement at their meetings has been consistently high since adopting this kind of 'meeting' and they have received excellent feedback from the local community.

See the image below, for more information.

Should the Parish Council wish to adopt this type of Annual Meeting, it is suggested a small Working Group is formed who will organise it, in conjunction with the Clerk.



Action Plan

What	How	Who	When
Chairman and Vice Chairman	Encourage the Council to appoint a Chairman and Vice Chairman who can fulfil their civic role and encourage community organisations to invite the Chairman to events	Council Chairman Vice Chairman	Ongoing
Minutes	Ensure copies of minutes are available in both hard copies (when requested) and electronically via the	Clerk	Ongoing

	website for residents and community groups		
Annual Report	Produce Annual Report and ensure it is available in time for the Annual Parish Meeting	Members Clerk	Annually
Office Opening Hours	Publicise office opening hours in any publications and on website and noticeboards	Clerk	Ongoing
Annual Parish Meeting	Decide whether to change the format of the Annual Parish Meeting Set up a Working Group to organise the event Publicise the event widely	Finance and General Purposes Committee Clerk	Annually
Public Participation	Encourage residents to raise any matters of interest or concern via public participation at Full Council meetings, which will improve engagement with parishioners	Members Clerk	Ongoing
Noticeboards	Regularly update the noticeboards	Clerk	Ongoing
Website	Maintain the website with all relevant information on Council services and activities	Clerk	Ongoing
Newsletter	Look at producing a regular newsletter Look into upgrading CANVA to pro subscription	Finance and General Purposes Committee Clerk	ASAP
Businesses	Engage with local businesses and organisations on a regular basis	Chairman Vice Chairman Members	Ongoing
Community organisations	Encourage Members to attend local community organisation meetings and events	Members	Ongoing
Press	Liaise regularly with the press by sending details of meetings and success stories	Clerk	Ongoing
District and County Council	Maintain contact with both Councils to ensure information is shared	Clerk Members	Ongoing
Emergency Services	Maintain regular contact with local emergency services (Police, Fire, First Responders)	Members Clerk	Ongoing
Local Democracy	Encourage residents to both vote and stand for elections by advertising both positively	Members Clerk	Ongoing, but high priority in the six months prior to an election

