



Communications Strategy 2023-2026

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1 Our Communications Strategy

Communication is a vital part of running an organisation. Research shows that bodies who regularly communicate have a better reputation and satisfaction with service users than ones that don't. Communication allows the Council to both give out and receive information from a range of stakeholders that it regularly interacts with. Especially within the context of a local council, speaking to the public and hearing back their views is fundamental to its function and purpose as a democratic body. Such communication should operate to professional standards and be consistent in its production, quality, relevance and frequency.

This Communications Strategy contains information on how to achieve the above standards and outlines answers to the key questions of how we should communicate, when we should communicate and to whom we should communicate. It gives direction on the production of online, print, traditional news media, internal and any other communication activity.

This strategy also forms the function of a communications audit. Such audits establish a baseline and understanding of the current way communication is done, what resources are available, who does what, what branding is used, and the current reputation of the Council. Audits can include survey results, media content analysis and a SWOT analysis that looks at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

2 Communications Strategy in Context

This strategy outlines the Council's approach to communication with internal and external stakeholders, which is a crucial part of achieving the Council's objectives of transparency and accountability. Communication should be frequent, clear and disseminate relevant information to the right people, with the aim of informing residents and improving the reputation and image of the Council. It is designed to work within the relevant statutory requirements relating to local government publicity.

2.1 Vision

Our vision is that the people of Tibshelf have a clear understanding of Tibshelf Parish Council's priorities, operations and challenges and that they recognise the Council as a reputable and forward-looking council. It should be seen as an employer of choice and help to promote the village of Tibshelf as an excellent place to live and visit.

2.2 Commitments

We will achieve this vision by communicating with the public we serve, the people we employ and the local authorities, groups and businesses we work with. This will be done by regular two-way communication with relevant stakeholders so that we both send and receive information through the appropriate channels of communication we use.

Stakeholders include:

- Residents and service users
- Local community groups
- Employees
- Partner bodies/organisations/authorities locally and nationally
- Business community
- Opinion formers and key influencers
- External funders

Channels of Communication include:

- Website
- Facebook Pages
- Tibshelf News newsletter
- Partner authority newsletters
- Local media and newspapers
- Exhibitions
- Consultations and surveys
- Parish notice boards
- Public speaking at meetings

3 Communication Principles

All Council communication should be consistent and uphold high standards of writing, production and dissemination. This reflects the culture at the Council and the aims and ambitions it has. Communication should encourage and enable a two-way flow of information, which involves listening to stakeholder's views and informing them of ours.

All communication will comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011) 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 and 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 and evaluate.** Monitor all channels to see what is or is not successful. Seek to improve output, engagement and learn from poor practises 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.

4 Who We Communicate With

A stakeholder is a person, group or organisation that has an interest in the success of the Parish Council or can be affected by the organisation's actions, objectives and policies. Tibshelf Parish Council works with many employees, individuals, partner organisations and groups to achieve its vision for the local area. Stakeholders include:

4.1 Internal Stakeholders

- Tibshelf Parish Council Staff
 - Office staff
 - Parish Rangers
 - Cleaners
 - Caretakers
- Tibshelf Parish Council Councillors

4.2 External Stakeholders

- Residents who live in the parish of Tibshelf
- People or organisations that use the Parish Council's services
 - Non-resident users of the cemetery, playgrounds, rubbish bins etc
- Visitors to Tibshelf
- Emergency services
 - Staffa Health Surgery
 - Tibshelf Safer Neighbourhood Team
 - Derbyshire Fire and Rescue
- Schools in Tibshelf
 - Tibshelf Community School
 - Tibshelf Town End Junior School
 - Tibshelf Infant School
 - Tibshelf Nursery
- User groups in the Village Hall
- Local and voluntary groups in the Village, including
 - The Scouts
 - Tibshelf Community Association
 - St John the Baptist's Church, and many others
- The Parish Council's partner organisations
- County, District and other local parish councils
 - Derbyshire County Council and councillors
 - Bolsover District Council and councillors
- Constituency Member of Parliament
- Business suppliers and the business community in Tibshelf
- Regional and national media
- External funders that have given funds
- Opinion formers and important influencers
- External scrutineers

5 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.

5.1 Digital and Telecommunications

- Website
 - Tibshelf Parish Council's website: www.tibshelfparishcouncil.gov.uk
 - This is an easily accessible platform that covers most of the Council's documents, operations, important dates/times and contact information
 - It is for the giving of information and one-way communication
 - It is updated daily
- E-mail
 - Members of staff and the Parish Councillors are accessible via e-mail to discuss an issue or find information about a policy or service
 - This is a two-way channel allowing for direct interaction with the public
 - E-mails are viewed daily
- Telephone
 - Members of staff and Parish Councillors are accessible via landline and mobile phones to raise an issue or request information
 - This is a two-way channel allowing for direct conversation with the public
 - The office landline and staff mobiles are available within working hours. Out of hours enquiries should be left on the answering machine. Parish Councillor numbers can be contacted at appropriate hours during the week

5.2 Social Media

- Facebook
 - Parish Council Facebook page: www.facebook.com/TibshelfParishCouncil
 - Tibshelf Village Hall's Facebook page: www.facebook.com/TibshelfVillageHall
 - These are easily accessible platforms that communicate council and Village Hall information, office closures and opening times, council and local group events, meeting dates and times etc
 - These are two-way channels allowing for members of the public to post their opinions, like or share the posts. They can also direct message
 - Facebook is viewed daily, and posts are made as frequently as necessary

5.3 Printed Publications

- Tibshelf News Newsletter
 - The newsletter is printed and delivered to all homes every four months and contain relevant information from the Parish Council. This includes Village Hall user group calendar, local group information, promotion of sponsorships,

- policies of the Council, local events, meeting calendar, councillor and office contact details and advertisements from local businesses
- 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
- Newsletters are published three times a year, but the collection of information is happening continuously.
- Partner Authority Newsletters
 - Where requests are made for information from Tibshelf Parish Council
- Parish Notice Boards
 - These are located at various locations in Tibshelf and contain relevant information, such as public notice of meetings, local events and office hours
 - This is a one-way communication channel
 - It can be updated daily

5.4 Local Media and Newspapers

- Derbyshire Times
 - This is a weekly publication that also has daily articles on its website. It covers stories and events throughout the county of Derbyshire and surrounding areas
 - Press releases can be sent to journalists to cover an interesting story or event happening in the village, such as the opening of a new facility, the award of money, winning a competition etc
 - Journalists may contact the Council to cover a developing story, for example relating to an incident or disaster
- Bolsover TV
 - Weekly episodes are published that cover local stories and council information from Bolsover District Council.
 - Press releases can be sent to District Council staff to cover an interesting story or event happening in the village, such as the opening of a new facility, the award of money, winning a competition, village event etc

5.5 Face to Face

- Exhibitions
 - Often linked with consultations below, an exhibition allows the council to present ideas to interested members of the public and partners who attend the event. Often images, documents, plans and members of the Parish Council are available to provide information
 - This is a two-way channel that allows for direct communication and responses given in person
 - Exhibitions are ad hoc and infrequent
- Public Speaking at Meetings
 - Near the beginning of meetings, members of the public, the police and elected members of local authorities can raise matters to the Council
 - This is a two-way channel that allows for direct communication and responses given in person
 - Full Tibshelf Parish Council meetings are typically held on the third Tuesday of the month, with committee meetings less frequent

5.6 Surveys and Consultations

- Surveys
 - Surveys are taken to get a snapshot of public or user group opinion on a range of issues, such as their experiences, concerns, likes and dislikes, Parish Council reputation etc. This data then forms the basis of policy creation and action plans to ensure the proper running and functioning of the council. It is also an important, large-scale listening exercise.
 - This is a one-way channel that allows those surveyed to give information to the Parish Council.
 - They are held infrequently and help formulate documents such as the Parish Council Action Plan and Communications Strategy
- Consultations
 - Often held in conjunction with an exhibition, consultations allow for the public and partners to give their opinions, views and ideas to the Parish Council on a specific issue under consideration. They can also help to support a grant funding proposal.
 - This is a one-way channel that allows those consulted to give information to the Parish Council.
 - They are held infrequently to help formulate policy or provide evidence of community support for a grant funding application.

6 What We Communicate

One of the communication principles on page 5 of this document is the requirement of relevant information. Relevancy is determined by the needs of specific stakeholders. Information they may need to receive from us could include:

6.1 The Public and Local Groups

- Parish Council office opening hours and closures
- Staff changes and job opportunities
- How the Parish Council works
- Parish Council documents, such as completion of an audit
- Meeting times and dates
- Local events, groups and Village Hall user groups
- Who to contact about which service
- How to give feedback, such as raising an issue or complaint
- Contact information of the Parish Council, elected members and partner organisations
- What their roles and powers are
- Newly enacted Parish Council decisions
- Policy proposals
- Information on accessing and using Parish Council services and any changes to them
- Costs of using services where applicable
- How to access and apply for grants from the Parish Council

6.2 Partner Councils and Organisations

- Newly enacted Parish Council decisions
- Changes to services
- Contact information for the Parish Council office and councillors
- Planning application views and opinions
- Legally required notifications, such as Building Control Plan following a project
- Police reports and crime statistics
- School information

6.3 Regional and National Media

- Press releases of interesting and informative stories
- Advertise local events
- Interact with journalists on a breaking story affecting Tibshelf

6.4 The Decision to Communicate

Day to day Information arising from within Tibshelf Parish Council, such as office hours changes/closures, staff changes, meetings advertisements/cancellations, policy announcements, newsletter previews etc can be approved and uploaded at the discretion of the Clerk and Communications and Project Officer.

However, where an outside body asks to use our communications channels to distribute their own information or advertise an event to residents, this will need prior approval by Tibshelf Parish Council. Outside bodies include user groups, local groups, other councils or businesses. There is no immediate right for such information to be published and so prior permission is required. Any outside information should adhere to standards on clarity, usefulness and legality etc and should not disparage Tibshelf Parish Council.

In principle, approval for one channel will mean approval for all channels. However, a newsletter article must meet formatting requirements and so something approved for Facebook and the website may not necessarily be approved for the newsletter if those requirements aren't met.

6.5 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 future 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 need

7 Who Communicates?

Everyone communicates at the Parish Council in some form and so an understanding and application of the communication principles is necessary to improve the flow of information and the overall reputation of the Council. The key people communicating are:

The Communications and Project Officer

The Officer will identify opportunities to communicate relevant information to the public and will support other council staff and councillors in their planned communication activities to ensure consistent quality of information, publication and branding.

They have responsibility for the website, Facebook pages and newsletter, and will help others on the parish notice boards, regional and national media, exhibitions, surveys and consultations.

Office Staff

The Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, along with the Administrative Assistant, have access to the Facebook pages and can upload relevant information where speed is necessary or the Communication and Projects Officer is unavailable. They also have regular interactions with the public, such as through e-mail, face to face, parish notice boards, the public speaking section at meetings, consultations and surveys. They will also communicate with partner councils, organisations and local groups and businesses. They have a responsibility to uphold the communication principles and standards and work with the Communications and Project Officer on delivery where required.

Other Staff and Councillors

Other representatives of the Parish Council, when communicating with members of the public and other local groups through e-mail, phone calls or face to face, should uphold the communications principles and communicate in a clear, informative manner. They should help in so far as possible to resolve an issue or forward them on to the appropriate member of staff.

8 Evaluation

Evaluation of the communications strategy is a vital component in receiving feedback and driving improvement. This involves the monitoring and assessment of the overall strategy and individual channels of communication. They should comply with the Council’s key priorities and communication principles, as well as achieving key strategic outcomes such as giving clear information or changing reader behaviour.

8.1 Parish Survey 2020

Monitoring and assessment took place during the Parish Survey 2020 that included five questions on the reputation and quality of communication done by the Council.

Residents Survey Results 2020

	Total	Total as %	Yes/No Only	
43. Does the Parish Council have a good reputation among residents?				
Yes	27	40.91%	65.85%	
No	14	21.21%	34.15%	
Unsure	25	37.88%		
Total Responses	66		41	
47. Does the Council communicate enough with the public?				
Yes	19	30.16%	40.43%	
No	28	44.44%	59.57%	
Unsure	16	25.40%		
Total Responses	63		47	
49. Please Indicate if you have read the following:				
Website	35	53.85%		
Facebook Page	26	40.00%		
Newsletter	55	84.62%		
Notice board	29	44.62%		
Total Responses	65			
50. A. Do the following contain useful information: Website				
Yes	30	50.85%	81.08%	
No	7	11.86%	18.92%	
Unsure	22	37.29%		
Total Responses	59		37	
B. Facebook Page				
Yes	18	33.33%	81.82%	
No	4	7.41%	18.18%	
Unsure	32	59.26%		
Total Responses	54		22	
C. Newsletter				
Yes	48	77.42%	92.31%	
No	4	6.45%	7.69%	
Unsure	10	16.13%		
Total Responses	62		52	

D. Notice Board				
Yes	19	32.20%	73.08%	
No	7	11.86%	26.92%	
Unsure	33	55.93%		
Total Responses	59		26	
51. How would you prefer to receive Council information?				
Website	28	43.75%		
Facebook Page	21	32.81%		
Newsletter	50	78.13%		
Notice board	11	17.19%		
Total Responses	64			

Respondents who chose Yes or No felt the Parish Council does have a good reputation among residents. The ‘Unsure’s could relate to either people not knowing what their peers think of the council, or feel the reputation is somewhere in the middle.

Respondents thought the Parish Council could communicate more with the public. This could relate to the frequency of communication within a given channel or relate to having more channels of communication. Again, the ‘Unsure’s could relate to not knowing if the council communicates enough, or if they feel it is somewhere in the middle. This result could prompt the council to look into more channels of communication (such as Twitter, blogs), or increased frequency of communication (such as more notice board posts, more newsletters etc). With the latter, there was an 18-month gap between Issue 30 (Spring 2018) and Issue 31 (Winter 2019), as well no Facebook activity, which could have created a lingering negative view. Overall, how the council responds to the result will depend on how it is interpreted.

The newsletter was the most widely read channel of communication, followed by the website. The notice board was more read than the Facebook page.

All four channels of communication were judged to contain useful information, with the newsletter being the most useful. This could reflect its wide readership, as well as having tens of pages of information each time. Residents are therefore happy with the communication they receive, but, considering the response to question 47, they want to hear more.

The newsletter was the most preferred method of communication, with the notice board the least. As the notice board is quite widely read but not preferred, it could indicate the need to improve how it looks and what it displays.

Further Evaluation: The next evaluation survey should take place every four years. The next proposed date would be September 2024.

8.2 Channel Assessment

Some digital and social media channels provide regular visitor and engagement analytics. These can be useful to see if a specific channel is being viewed and performing its intended function. Channels showing areas of concern should be reassessed or removed from the communications strategy. This data should be monitored by the Communications and Project Officer and brought to the attention of the Clerk and Parish Council if problems emerge.

Appendix 1: Communications Action Plan

This action plan outlines changes going forward that will improve communication further at Tibshelf Parish Council. It identifies an area of focus and gives appropriate actions to achieve that outcome.

Action	Comment
Update the website	Continue to update the website on a daily basis Establish frequent communication between the Clerk and Communications and Project Officer to upload the latest documents as they are created
Ensure website is WCAG compliant	By December 2020, all important council documents should be in an accessible format.
Adjust Amount Printed	Work with those delivering the newsletter to ensure as few leftover copies as possible
Identify All Homes in Tibshelf	Work with those delivering the newsletter to ensure every home in Tibshelf is reached. Send newsletters to the outlier properties.
Facebook Content Review	Consider launching social media campaigns - or joining national campaigns - to help inform and change reader behaviour. Use the Village Hall Facebook page to promote the Hall and users.
Blog	Consider the creation of a blog to allow staff and councillors to explain policy and decisions in more detail than other channels allow for
Continuous Improvement	Always seek to improve the quality of output by learning new skills or studying best practice examples.
Explore adding new channels	Consider the creation of an Instagram account for the Parish Council as an extra channel. Assess its feasibility and the impact, looking at how other councils use it. Consider advertising boards and banners.
Publicise Local Groups	Establish contact and work with local groups to help advertise their events to a broader audience using our channels
Monitor Costs of Communication	Always monitor and evaluate the costs of communicating and ensure efficient use of resources. Consider new quotes for printing where necessary.

Appendix 2: Media Contact Form

Please fill in the clear boxes. Grey boxes are for the Parish Council Office

Name	
Company or Organisation	
Telephone Number	
E-mail Address	
Nature of Enquiry	
Deadline for Response	
Enquiry Received On:	
Date	
Time	
Message Taken By	
Response as follows	
Approved by	
Responded on:	
Date	
Time	

Appendix 3: Communications Framework

The communications framework outlines how new information and content should be created at Tibshelf Parish Council and what should be considered when making it.

Who are we talking to?

Consider who the relevant stakeholders are and what their specific requirements might be. Which channel will capture most of that audience and what information do they already know?

What are we saying?

Information should be written in plain English. Fonts should be clear and the layout of information logical and clear to follow. Ideally, it should contain an image to capture attention, especially on social media. It should also include key pieces of information such as date, time, location, contact information, cost etc.

Why are we saying it?

Part of planning is to consider why this information is being communicated. Is it designed just to inform the reader, to change their behaviour or to get feedback from them? Each option can require different considerations and be written differently.

What are the objectives of the message? It could be to 'help advertise and increase visitor numbers to event X' or 'get public opinion and feedback on policy Y'. Messages should be targeted to these aims and not contain unnecessary or irrelevant information.

Consider how it fits in with other activities at the Council as it could form part of a wider campaign.

What resources are available?

Consider what resources are available to deliver the message. Will it require money be spent and how much? How long will it take to create and then for how long should it be promoted? Which members of staff could help? What skills are needed?

Make sure to evaluate communications and read the feedback at all points. What risks are involved? How will we know if it's been successful? What did we learn and how do we improve this next time?