



# ALSTON MOOR PARISH COUNCIL

## COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

### 1. Introduction

Alston Moor Parish has undertaken to 'communicate, consult and engage'. This strategy will guide the Council's communications with everyone who comes into contact with it. It is based on the guiding principles that communication must be effective and that protocols should be followed to ensure clarity and professionalism. It should enable the Council to tell people about what it can and does do, as well as actively listen to what people think will enhance life in the parish, so that we can better respond to people's needs and priorities. The strategy covers both internal and external communications made by any means.

### 2. Aim

The aim is to make Council communications a two-way process: to give people the information to understand accurately what we do, while enabling the council to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

### 3. Objectives

- To be transparent in its dealings and to ensure that all who have dealings with it are able to communicate with the Councillors and the Clerk in a timely and effective manner.
- To better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities.
- To raise the profile of Alston Moor as a destination.
- To attract businesses/employment to the area.
- To make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people.
- To proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the integrity of the council.

### 4. Stakeholders

We aim to reach everyone who has an interest in the parish, be it that they live, work or visit the area. It is important that we are able to effectively communicate with anyone who is interested and may want to become involved in influencing the future of the parish. These people include:

- Residents from Alston Moor and neighbouring parishes
- Community groups and organisations
- Agencies and partners (including the local police)
- Local schools
- Sport clubs
- County and District Councillors
- The local MP
- Local businesses and employers
- Voluntary groups
- Local media

## 5. The Role of Councillors Chairman and Clerk

Councillors represent the community in which they live and are governed by a Code of Conduct which encourages open, informed, timely and courteous communication at all times. Our aim is to keep all of those we come into contact with informed of our actions and to encourage stakeholders to actively participate in influencing the future of the parish.

The Clerk is the executive of the Council. As such, the Clerk should receive all communications which ought to be formally brought to the attention of the Council and should issue all formal communications made by the Council. Councillors should refer any complaints or concerns relating to the Council received from residents to the Clerk to deal with.

Councillors should make it clear in all interactions with residents the press or third parties that they have no authority to represent the Council's view unless the matter has been agreed at a Council meeting or they have been given specific mandate to do so at a council meeting.

It is important not to raise the expectations of the residents before a matter has been debated and agreed at a Council meeting.

Unless otherwise specified the Chairman will comply with this protocol in the same way as other councillors.

## 6. General Rules of Communication

It is important that all Council communications are effective and in so doing must be:

- Short and to the point
- Courteous
- In plain English
- Based on facts and information
- In a consistent format and style
- Clear about the action required or information provided

### Methods of Communication

The Council will use a variety of methods of communication based on what reaches its intended audience most effectively and efficiently. Nearly 90% of the population use electronic communication now (*Office for National Statistics*), so this is the Council's preferred and primary method of communication.

However, we recognise that not all people are able to or wish to use electronic methods of communication, so we will continue to utilise different media and approaches in order to reach our audiences.

The table below shows our main means of communication and areas for improvement.

<b>Council Website</b>	The Council website is our primary method for general communication with our stakeholders. It was set up in 2016, and will need to comply with the most recent website accessibility requirements by 23 September 2020. The website needs to be simple to operate to enable information to be updated regularly. The website must be kept up to date and we want to include information on activities and news on an ongoing basis, as well as provide details of the Council's policies and procedures. We
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	also need more links to other websites offering information considered to be of interest to our stakeholders.
<b>Councillors' and Clerk's contact details</b>	Contact details are published on the website. Councillors will be provided with an e-mail address for council business. A noticeboard has been put up in the Town Hall to publish contact details and photographs of councillors and staff. Contact details are also published in the Alston Moor Newsletter, which receives a small annual grant.
<b>Council notice boards</b>	The noticeboards are located in a key place in each community and updated regularly with important information about the Council's activities and local community events.
<b>Council meetings</b>	All Council meetings are publicised and are open to the public to attend. There is a short period at the start of each Council meeting where the Council are able hear issues raised by members of the public. This is a very important part of our communication strategy. Members of the public are then welcome to stay and hear the rest of the meeting.
<b>Council Agendas and Minutes</b>	Agendas and minutes of Council meetings are available to all on the website and on the council notice boards (weather permitting).
<b>Annual Parish Meeting</b>	The annual parish meeting is held in April every year and provides an opportunity to communicate and discuss Council activities over the past year and objectives for the following year. There is usually a guest speaker and reports from local organisations to encourage attendance.
<b>Annual Report</b>	The Annual Report is produced in April each year, and includes a frontispiece from the chair, as well as information on council finances and activities.

<b>Press Releases</b>	Press releases are given to local media on significant points of interest or achievement.
<b>Councillor's Representation and Networking</b>	We are committed to regular involvement with local groups and organisations and charities through representation. We send representatives when invited to County and District working groups.
<b>Twitter and Facebook</b>	The Council has set up a Facebook page, and will encourage users to use this to enable the original Facebook account to close in time. Short notices and reports are published. The Council has no plans to use Twitter.
<b>External Correspondence</b>	We will reply to external correspondence in a timely manner which is both courteous and compliant with the General Rules of Communication (see above).
<b>Internal Correspondence</b>	Internal communication is to be simple, courteous and kept to a minimum, in accordance with the General Rules of Communication (see above).

## 8. Responsibilities

(a) The Clerk has overall responsibility for all issues in this strategy unless specified otherwise. The Publicity Officer is responsible for press releases, and may post to Facebook and the Council website.

(b) In the event of any media enquiry, the Clerk or Publicity Officer in consultation with the Chair, is responsible for issuing a response from the Council. Individual members of the Council must make clear, if they are approached for comment directly, whether they are giving an **individual or personal opinion** or referring the matter to the Council for a formal response. In the former case, Councillors should be mindful of the policies and decisions of the Council and respect the integrity of fellow Councillors and the

Clerk. It must be made clear that the response is from the individual concerned and NOT from the Council. In any event, the Clerk and the Chair must be notified of any contact with the media as soon as possible.

(c) The Publicity Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Clerk, shall issue a press release on behalf of the Council where it is considered necessary to publicise an activity of the Council.

(d) The content of the Council's website is managed by the Clerk assisted by the Publicity Officer. However it is the responsibility of all Councillors to check it regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and inform the Clerk if issues arise.

(e) The Clerk is responsible for receiving correspondence and documents on behalf of the Council and dealing with them, bringing such items to the attention of the Council. The Clerk issues correspondence on the Council's behalf as instructed by the Council or in accordance with known policy. A Councillor corresponding with a third party does so as an individual and the rules relevant to media contact (see above) apply.

## **9. Involvement of the Community**

Wherever possible the Council and its Working Groups must actively seek to consult a wider audience and encourage and support the involvement of residents and other interested parties in its work. Where this involvement is not possible, the reasons for this should be communicated as soon as possible, in an open and transparent manner.