



Cullompton

Town Council

Policy Title	Community and Media Communication Strategy
Policy No.	S5
Policy Aim	To guide how the Council engages with the Parishioners of Cullompton and the Media.
Adoption Date	April 2025
Last Revision Date	New Policy/ V1
Review Date	May 2027
Responsible Officer	Town Clerk
Approving Body	Full Council
Minute Reference	C24/228

Version History

Date	Version	Author / Editor	Comments

Review Record

[illegible]

INTRODUCTION

1. This document forms the Council's Community and Media Communication Strategy. It sets out:
 - 1.1. The role of community engagement and its importance.
 - 1.2. How Cullompton Town Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community.
 - 1.3. How the Council can improve community engagement.
2. The objectives of this strategy are to:
 - 2.1. Encourage effective local community engagement.
 - 2.2. Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them.
 - 2.3. Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are being delivered.
 - 2.4. Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard-to-reach groups).

THE COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

3. Cullompton Town Council is committed to providing a democratic representational voice for the people of Cullompton; central to this ethos is engagement with the local community in a proactive and meaningful way.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – AN OVERVIEW

4. Community engagement is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies.
5. It provides an opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about their aspirations and/or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the Council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how its priorities and policies are determined and how well it is performing.
6. Without consultation, addressing a particular need is a “hit and miss affair” as there is no way of establishing what is required to address the problem. There are a wide range of consultation methods such as surveys, neighbourhood meetings, questionnaires, public enquiries and “planning for real” exercises.
7. The term “stakeholder” refers to a wide range of people and groups (these might include residents, visitors, businesses, government, voluntary organisations, public service organisations etc) all of which have an interest in the Council’s services and projects.
8. “Hard-to-reach groups” refers to those who experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly people, or those with physical disability, language, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. Sometimes organisations do not put enough effort into seeking their views, but it is important to note that sometimes they have excluded themselves through personal choice; it is recognised that approximately 80% of residents (anywhere) choose to close their doors and not become involved in the “outside world” thereafter.
9. The key aspects of community engagement include:
 - 9.1. Development of a network of relationships between Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
 - 9.2. Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups.
 - 9.3. Listening to, and achieving an understanding of, a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.
 - 9.4. Effective and meaningful community engagement can provide a number of benefits:
 - 12.8. The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified in order that appropriate new or improved facilities/services can be provided.
 - 12.9. Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their community and experience a sense of ownership and pride in the new facilities/initiatives.
 - 12.10. It may result in a renewed respect for the Council, enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections or standing for Council.

CULLOMPTON TOWN COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

13. The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:
 - 13.1. Allocation of a “Public Question Time” session at the beginning of all Council meetings (including Committees); this provides an opportunity for residents to

make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda. If requested a written response will be provided. The Town Council's Standing Orders set the overarching principles for public participation at Town Council and Committee meetings, namely:

- 13.1.1. Items raised at a full Town Council meeting may be on any topic relevant to Cullompton
- 13.1.2. Items raised at a Committee meeting must be relevant to items on the agenda for that meeting
- 13.1.3. Each member of the public may speak for a maximum of 3 continuous minutes
- 13.1.4. The overall length of time for the public participation on an agenda is generally limited to 15 minutes – this includes the time for the members of the public to speak as well as for the responses to be given. The meeting Chairman may extend the time available for the public participation item but this is at their discretion and their decision is final.
- 13.1.5. At a meeting of the full Town Council the Chairman (usually the Mayor) will decide whether the matter is to be referred to a Committee or if an oral or written response is to be given at a Town Council meeting.
- 13.1.6. At a committee meeting the Chairman will decide whether an oral or written response is to be given
- 13.1.7. The Chairman may direct that a response is not given if, in their opinion, the question/statement is defamatory, frivolous, abusive or has been previously raised at a meeting within the previous 6 months or requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information. The Chairman's ruling on this matter is final.
- 13.1.8. Neither questions/statements etc. made by members of the public nor responses given will be the subject of further debate or discussion at the meeting.
- 13.1.9. The Chairman, or any Committee Member may propose a motion under Standing Order 10 (xii) to not hear further from a member of the public, (xiii) to exclude a member of the public for disorderly conduct or any use any other appropriate Standing Order.
- 13.2. Public participation is not an appropriate time to:
 - 13.2.1. complain about general problems such as routine maintenance of facilities.
 - 13.2.2. demand information that is already publicly available.
 - 13.2.3. make complaints about individual members of staff (Please send the details of these direct to the Town Clerk).
- 13.3. At the meeting at which a member of the public wishes to speak:
- 13.4. Members of the public should sign in - an attendance sheet will be provided for this purpose

- 13.5. Public Participation will usually be an agenda item listed towards the start of the meeting
- 13.6. The meeting Chairman will decide the speaker order and call people to speak; Priority will usually be given to questions / statements submitted in advance and they will usually be taken in the order in which they were received.
- 13.7. Members of the public may speak for a maximum of 3 minutes during the public participation agenda item
- 13.8. The overall length of time for the public participation item on an agenda is generally limited to 15 minutes – this includes the time for the members of the public to speak as well as for the responses to be given. The meeting Chairman may extend the time available for the public participation item but this is at their discretion and their decision is final.
- 13.9. A member of the public speaking at a meeting must ask their question / address their comments to the meeting Chair.
- 13.10. The Chairman of the meeting may:
 - 13.10.1. Direct that no response is required and that there will be no further communication on the matter
 - 13.10.2. Provide a response or ask another present Councillor to do so
 - 13.10.3. Direct that an oral or written response is to be given
- 13.11. An oral response will usually be given by an appropriate Town Councillor at the next appropriate meeting. A written response will usually be provided within 20 working days and a summary provided in the supporting papers for the next appropriate meeting
- 13.12. At a Town Council meeting the Chairman may refer the question to an appropriate committee. During a meeting members of the public are asked to:
 - 13.12.1. Behave in an orderly and respectful manner and not heckle or otherwise disrupt the meeting
 - 13.12.2. Respect the rulings of the meeting Chair
- 13.13. During a meeting members of the public cannot:
 - 13.13.1. speak during Councillors debate or at any time other than during public participation unless expressly asked to do so by the meeting Chair
 - 13.13.2. vote on any proposals
- 13.14. Publishing contact details of all Council members and officers on the Town Council website and notice board.
- 13.15. Production of social media posts highlighting the latest developments within the Council and the wider community.
- 13.16. Ensuring that the dates and agendas of all Council and Committee meetings are available on the website, plus the Minutes of all Council meetings.
- 13.17. Uploading the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts onto the Town Council website.

- 13.18. Consultation exercises with local residents to make provision for their needs such as the research that can provide the basis for a Neighbourhood Plan or Council Strategic Plan.
- 13.19. Involvement in partnerships and consultation work with other authorities to provide improved community facilities e.g. extreme sports facility.
- 13.20. Use of e/mail groups (eg of town businesses, community groups) to help publicise Town Council events and initiatives, and to seek views on current issues.
- 13.21. Council press releases are featured in local newspapers to keep the public informed of community events, Town Council projects and other matters.
- 13.22. The Council enjoys an excellent working relationship with local community groups providing representation on many and in the process obtaining the views and opinions of a good cross-section of the local community.
- 13.23. Councillors and officers meet regularly with Mid Devon District Council & Devon County Council, officers and members. As well as meeting with other relevant agencies and stakeholders.
- 13.24. Councillors and officers meet regularly with Devon and Cornwall Constabulary to discuss crime and anti-social behaviour issues in the local area.
- 13.25. The Council has an office and provides access for the public Monday-Friday 9.30am to 1.30pm.
- 13.26. Links with local schools and attendance at school events, including talking to school children about the work of the Council and obtaining feedback.
14. Unlike other tiers of local government, Town Councillors always live or work within or close to the communities they serve and therefore have close ties to their Parishioners and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis; this makes them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

COMMUNICATION

15. Cullompton Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by:
 - 15.1. Continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups including developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
 - 15.2. Ensuring that any information published is clear, concise and widely available.
 - 15.3. Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
 - 15.4. Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
 - 15.5. Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups, in order to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and raise community spirit.
 - 15.6. Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment made of how effective/useful the consultation was.

MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

16. In all communications from Town Council sources and platforms, It is important that all Members and Officers who might come into contact with the media understand the implications the [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) which this policy explains within a local context.
17. Without proper co-ordination it is difficult to ensure that the messages put out by the Council are consistent and accurate. However, if communication is managed effectively, the Council will be able to create opportunities to communicate with partners and the public and build an accurate and positive reputation.
18. Cullompton Town Council throughout the year:
 - 18.1. Receives enquiries from the media.
 - 18.2. Issues news releases.
 - 18.3. Organises photo opportunities.
 - 18.4. Arranges interviews.
 - 18.5. Utilises social media for communications.
19. The purpose of this policy is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all Officers and Members involved in dealing with the media and to provide guidance on how to handle media interest. It is further to ensure that the Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner. In all cases, the Council's approach to the media should be:
 - 19.1. Open and honest.
 - 19.2. Proactive.
 - 19.3. Responsive and timely.
 - 19.4. In line with the Council's Equal Opportunities policy.

THE TOWN COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO PUBLICITY

20. The media plays a large role in informing residents about what the Council does and how it spends their money. It is therefore vital that the Council communicates effectively with the media and wherever possible takes a positive approach to meeting media requests for information and interviews so that:
 - 20.1. The Council is recognised as one which is open, accountable, accessible, and willing to listen.
 - 20.2. There are opportunities to share and celebrate the Council's successes.
 - 20.3. Information is provided about policies and services as well as the democratic process so that people feel more informed about the Council and its work.
 - 20.4. Negative issues are handled clearly and decisively.
21. The main media is the local and regional press together with local radio and television stations but with the rise of social media this gives rise to opportunity for Council to speak directly with residents without the use of a 3rd party. It is unlikely that Cullompton would be involved in media communications at a national, international or specialist level, but this policy is written to ensure that it is relevant to

these cases should they occur. It is also recognised that the internet is the fastest growing area of the media and that many broadcasters and newspapers include information on Cullompton and Cullompton Town Council.

IDENTIFYING NEWSWORTHY ITEMS

22. It is the responsibility of everyone working within the Council to identify newsworthy items; these will include a range of Council activities and decisions, and it is the responsibility of the Town Clerk to make the decision as to whether or not a formal, written, media release to media outlets should be issued or a post made to the Council official social media news feed.

HANDLING MEDIA ENQUIRIES

23. The Town Clerk will co-ordinate all media enquiries into the Town Council office. In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the Town Mayor to respond to the enquiry.
24. Members of the Town Council's staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves and should refer the enquirer to the Town Clerk.
25. Members of the Council who are directly approached by the media may respond in accordance with the guidance contained in this policy.
26. The Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members, and the enquiry should be signposted to the Town Clerk. The Council is open and accountable and should always explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

MEDIA RELEASES

27. The use of media releases is a key technique for publicising Council activities, decisions and achievements. There are two types of media release:
 - 27.1. **Council Media Releases.** An official Council release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole; it will be written by the Town Clerk or an officer delegated to do so, and approved and issued by the Town Clerk. Official Council releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Council, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Councillor. Releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Councillors, identify a Member's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view. All official Council releases will be placed on the Council's website and/or social media.
 - 27.2. **Councillor Media Releases.** Councillor press releases are personal and are written and issued by the Councillor responsible. This type of release may or may not be political and should not include the name of any Officer, use the Council logo or the Council telephone number as a point of contact. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases to be provided to the Clerk. Councillors seeking advice can contact the Clerk.
 - 27.3. **Artificial Intelligence.** Increasingly, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used to create reports, media releases and social media posts. Whilst this is

encouraged, as it saves time, it is vitally important that the resultant release is properly scrutinised for accuracy before release to the media or posting to social media channels.

28. Members should be aware that case law states that the role of Councillor overrides the right to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful when expressing individual views to the news media. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made, while it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make it clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the news media.

INTERVIEWS

29. Any member of staff contacted by a journalist requesting an interview should refer the matter to the Clerk. The person put forward for interview will depend on the situation and the information required by the journalist. Officers should never give their opinion on specific Council policy but must keep to the corporate line and key messages, their role being to provide expertise and factual knowledge only in support of the Council's approved and agreed policies.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF MEETINGS

30. Provision is made for members of the media to attend Council and committee meetings. During meetings Members should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue.

PUBLICITY DURING ELECTIONS

31. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself (known as the Pre-Election Period), all proactive publicity about candidates and other politicians is halted. This applies to scheduled local or national elections. During this period Council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual Members or groups of Members. This is to make sure that no individual Councillor or political party gains an unfair advantage by appearing in corporate publicity. In these circumstances, where a quote is required, the relevant Officer may be quoted in accordance with the guidelines in this policy.

NON-COUNCIL RELATED MEDIA

32. Officers and Members of the Council who have contact with the media in a personal capacity or as members of non-Council related organisations must not refer to their Council position or Council business and must make it clear to the journalist concerned that they are speaking in a personal capacity or on behalf of the non-Council related organisation.

MANAGING NEGATIVE ISSUES

33. From time to time the Council must respond to negative issues. It is important that these situations are managed carefully to limit the potential for negative publicity.
34. Members must alert the Clerk as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media.

35. Members and Officers must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted the Council about an issue.

CORRECTING INACCURATE REPORTING

36. Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about the Council, a quick decision needs to be taken on any action necessary to correct it. The issue should be discussed with the Clerk to decide what action is appropriate. This could be a letter or news release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, a personal letter to the editor or legal advice. It will also be necessary to decide who is the most appropriate person to take the agreed action.
37. It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain; each case should be judged individually.
38. There may be instances where the Council is at fault for a matter. In these instances, Council will always admit the mistake, apologise and state how the Council will rectify the issue or where this is not possible, learn from the error.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

39. The Council office will continually monitor the media coverage and will report any findings to the Council.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND DATA PROTECTION

40. Council Members are reminded that they must not misuse Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes.
41. Should the Council receive a request for information under the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#) on a topic on which there is correspondence (written or email), that correspondence will normally have to be disclosed unless it is exempt. The fact that the disclosure may prove embarrassing would not prevent disclosure.
42. In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data. [The Data Protection Act 1998](#) prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents.

INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

43. The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Town Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.
44. The Council has a website Facebook page and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.
45. The Council social media pages intend to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Town and promote our community positively. Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- 45.1. Be civil, tasteful and relevant.
- 45.2. Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive.
- 45.3. Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which it does not own the copyright. Generic supporting images will be generated using AI.
- 45.4. Not contain any personal information.
- 45.5. If it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council.
- 45.6. Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising. In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines.
- 45.7. Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abusive language will not be tolerated.
- 45.8. Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- 45.9. Share freely and be generous with official Council posts but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- 45.10. Stay on topic.
- 45.11. Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.
- 46. The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.
- 47. Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing, speaking in person or via post.
- 48. We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:
 - 48.1. Obscene or racist content.
 - 48.2. Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language.
 - 48.3. Potentially libellous statements.
 - 48.4. Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright.
 - 48.5. Private, personal information published without consent.
 - 48.6. Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum.

- 48.7. Commercial promotions or spam.
- 48.8. Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law.
49. The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the social media pages not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the social media page(s). The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.
50. **Town Council Website.** Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.
51. **Town Council email.** Officers of the council have their own council email addresses, and these email accounts are monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. The following is the Policy regarding official email accounts:
- 51.1. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.
- 51.2. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action.
- 51.3. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk or another Officer delegated by the Clerk.
- 51.4. All new Emails requiring data to be passed on will be followed up with a Data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.
- 51.5. Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with Parishioners in relation to their own personal views with, if appropriate, a copy to the Clerk. It should be noted that any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept. Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.
52. Members have been issued with an official email address owned by the Council, together with credentials to access it. Each of these email address will be used to receive correspondence including Agendas and supporting papers for meetings. It should be noted that these email addresses are for official use only and are subject to search in the event of a Freedom of Information request.
53. **Video Conferencing and Live Streaming.** It is the Policy of the Council to use video conferencing software and Facebook to live stream its meetings and it should be noted that this Policy also applies to these video conferences and live streams.

54. **Internal communication and access to information within the Council.** The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.
55. **Data Protection Act and Code of Conduct.** As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation). Members should also be careful only to copy essential recipients on emails; it is best to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' if possible but, instead, copying in all who need to know and ensuring that lengthy email trails that may contain confidential or sensitive information have been removed.

REVIEW

56. This strategy will be reviewed each Council term and amended as necessary based on good practice or evidence taken forward.

CONCLUSION

57. The adoption of this Community and Media Communication Strategy will assist in improving communication between the Council and the wider community. This will enable the Council to better understand the needs and aspirations of residents/groups, and in turn, facilitate appropriate projects to meet those needs and create an enhanced community spirit.