

+



West Monkton Parish Council

Communications and Engagement Policy

Distribution:

Internal: All WMPC Staff

External: Website / Councillors

Approved: 24th June 2025

Reviewed: 12th May 2026.

Contents

1.0	Introduction	4
2.0	Key Aims and Objectives	5
3.0	The Legal Framework.....	6
4.0	Community Engagement	7
5.0	Contact with the Media	8
6.0	Media attendance at Council or Committee Meetings	9
7.0	Elections.....	9
8.0	Press Releases	10
9.0	Social Media.....	11
10.0	Website	13
11.0	Newsletters	13
12.0	Noticeboards	14
13.0	Internal Communications	14
14.0	Evaluation	14
15.0	Useful Links.....	15
	Appendix A – Universal principles when using social media	16
	Appendix B – Social Media Do's and Don'ts from the Local Government Association (LGA)	17
	Appendix C – Communications Operational Framework	19

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 West Monkton Parish Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, volunteers, employees, and stakeholders. It is vital that a communications and engagement policy is developed to enable us to do this.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for communicating with the media and with the public.
- 1.3 It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with both the public and the media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk with the media and provide information on Council services.
- 1.4 The West Monkton Parish Council (the Council) Communication and Engagement Policy is based upon three key principles which enable the council to work more effectively. These are:

Communication – directly communicate important and timely messages, news, and information, promote events, and improve awareness of services by providing direct digital access to them.

Engagement – seek opinions, share conversations, and better engage with residents. We can help to improve residents' knowledge and correct misconceptions. Encourage local community participation with all Council activity demonstrating the Council's commitment to two-way communication.

Collaboration – find more efficient ways of working together and sharing information which can change or enhance the perception of the council and that of specific service areas or projects. The Council's audiences are wide and varied and will typically be included but will not be limited to:

- Residents
- Businesses
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- Parish Council staff
- Volunteers
- Councillors
- Hard-to-reach groups, including young people and BME audiences
- The media
- Somerset Council (unitary authority)
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- MPs
- Other public sector organisations (local councils, police, health, fire)
- Visitors and those who work in the county

- 1.5 The Council seeks to engage with all sections of the community regardless of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, faith, or sexual orientation i.e. residents (particularly hard to reach groups such as the young, disenfranchised, disaffected and the elderly), the local business community, the many clubs, organisations, and societies which are active in the Parish, its partners such as Somerset Council and the neighbourhood policing team, and our elected councillors.
- 1.6 The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications and target audience.
- 1.7 This policy will be a living document and will be able to be altered by the Parish Clerk to allow immediate action should the unexpected arise. This will be key to overcoming teething problems that have not already been identified. Changes to the policy will be highlighted at the next Council meeting to keep Councillors abreast of the changes.

2.0 Key Aims and Objectives

- 2.1 The Council's Strategic Plan confirms its vision 'for West Monkton Parish Council and the local community to work together to protect and improve the social, recreational and environmental well-being of West Monkton and the lives of all who live, visit and work here' and key priorities:

- Your local environment
- Your local community
- Your Parish Council
- Delivering our projects
- Delivering our vision for our assets
- Delivering the Neighbourhood Plan vision

The Council's ability to achieve the vision and priorities relies on its being able to successfully communicate and engage with residents, partners, employees, volunteers, councillors, local businesses, stakeholders and visitors.

- 2.2 The Council's communications work will:

- raise residents' satisfaction, trust, and confidence levels
- raise awareness of services provided by the Council
- raise the profile of the Council and the parish
- support elected councillors in their role as community leaders
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people and BME audiences
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of the Council
- develop a greater sense of pride in the Parish
- ensure our community's voice is heard throughout everything we do

- 2.3 To ensure our residents:

- know what services the Council provides and the quality of service they can expect from us

- feel confident and satisfied with our services, and their costs
- understand how to get involved with, or influence, our work

2.4 In addition, visitors will see the parish as a top destination to live, work and play.

3.0 The Legal Framework

3.1 The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Some aspects of the Code are relevant to this policy: -

“Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims (and the provision of services) should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.”

“Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council... should be managed with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly, and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimplify facts, issues, or arguments.”

“Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.”

“... local authorities... should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.”

3.2 Officers and councillors should have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

3.3 Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers, and private correspondence should not be leaked to media channels. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action will be taken.

3.4 There are several personal privacy issues for officers and councillors that must be managed carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address, private e-mail address and telephone numbers (although councillor contact details are in the public domain), annual leave, disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

3.5 It is illegal to use graphics or photographs without permission. Ensure that anyone giving permission to use an image is the original copyright owner and check the licensing agreement of photographs in any existing archives before use. Do not take or use any photographs of children who

appear to be under the age of 18 without permission from a parent or guardian. Permission is non-transferable from a third party, such as a school.

- 3.6 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Clerk before any response is made.

4.0 Community Engagement

- 4.1 The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of public participation at the beginning of each Council meeting. This provides an opportunity for residents to talk to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
- The publishing of agendas, minutes (including summaries) and supporting documents for all Council meetings on the website and on various notice boards around the parish.
- The publication of the Strategic Plan and Annual Report, detailing the vision and priorities for the Council and reporting progress on the achievement of these.
- Active involvement in the Annual Parish Meeting.
- The facilitation of public meetings and consultation events on particular matters like large planning applications or projects.
- The annual External Audit provides the opportunity for questions to be asked about the latest Statement of Accounts and Balance Sheet. A synopsis of the financial accounts is published within the Annual Report.
- The ability to provide West Monkton Parish Council information, when requested, to those with a need for alternative formats or languages.
- Making the Cllrs' contact details available on the website
- News and events are publicised through the West Monkton Parish website, Monkton Matters website and social media.
- Meet the team Mondays, providing an overview of the roles of Councillors and Officers.
- The Annual Return and Statement of Accounts made available as printed copies and on the website.
- Consultation exercises e.g. surveys and questionnaires are undertaken with residents, young people and local user groups and organisations for specific projects and tasks. These are conducted via a range of methods such as paper forms, social media, website or drop-Ins.

- Recruiting volunteers to support Council projects.
- Co-opting volunteers onto Committees like the Brittons Ash Community Hall Committee.
- Inviting members of the public to working groups and panels when appropriate like the Events Working Group
- Regular press releases featured in local media keep the general public informed of community events, projects and other Parish Council items of interest.
- Where and when appropriate, external resource maybe utilised for a large and time-consuming consultation or engagement exercise.

4.2 Unlike other tiers of local government, Parish Councillors always live within 3 miles of the parish they serve and therefore have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day- to-day basis, making them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation

5.0 Contact with the Media

5.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions, this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media (press, radio, TV, internet) are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

5.2 The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to officers and councillors and to background information to assist them in this role. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

5.3 Our key points for effective management of media relations are to:

- Acknowledge media enquiries upon receipt
- Respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time
- Be helpful, polite, and positive
- Never say “no comment”
- Ensure any statements to hostile enquiries are cleared by the most appropriate person and keep written records of responses to journalists
- Monitor response times to media enquiries and evaluate media coverage
- Ensure the appropriate council spokesperson is fully briefed and available for interview if required
- Issue timely and relevant press releases.

- Pre-empt potential stories arising from council agendas/minutes by issuing proactive PR
- 5.4 When responding to approaches from the media, the Parish Clerk is the main contact with permission to speak to the media.
- 5.5 Any statements made under this policy should reflect the Council's resolved opinion and set policies.
- 5.6 If Councillors are contacted directly by the media for comment on behalf of the council, they should consult with the Clerk before responding to the request. If requested to comment in a personal capacity, Councillors must ensure that it is clear that opinions given are their own.
- 5.7 Caution should be exercised when submitting letters to the editor for publication in newspapers. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. However, such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks.
- 5.8 Letters representing the resolved views of the Council should only be submitted by the Clerk (in consultation with the Chair). If a member sends a letter to the press as an individual, they should make it clear that the views expressed are their personal views and not those of the Council (unless such views have been adopted by Council).
- 5.9 At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of the Council.

6.0 Media attendance at Council or Committee Meetings

- 6.1 The media are encouraged to attend Council and Committee meetings; seating and workspace will be made available. Meeting dates, agendas, reports, and minutes are available via our website.
- 6.2 Filming or taping of Council or Committee proceedings by the media is permitted in accordance with Standing Orders and the Filming and Recordings of Meetings Policy.

7.0 Elections

- 7.1 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for councillors and for publicity around elections. The code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used on publicising individual councillors unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council.
- 7.2 These extracts from the Code illustrate the main points: -
 "Publicity about individual councillors may include the contact details, the

positions they hold in the council (for example, Chair, Vice-Chair), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors' proposals, decisions, and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and ... personalisation of issues or personal images making should be avoided."

"Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual councillor which are relevant to their position and responsibilities within the council, and to put forward their justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of those of a particular party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups, or individuals."

"The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election."

- 7.3 In line with relevant guidance, the Council will not quote any Councillor in a news release or involve them in proactive publicity events during the election period, regardless of whether they are standing for election.
- 7.4 The only exception to this (as laid down in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity) is during an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the control of the Council.

8.0 Press Releases

- 8.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of all officers and councillors to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
- 8.2 All press releases are to be factual, non-political, not written to cause offence and must be in accordance with Council policy.
- 8.3 All press releases are to be issued by the Clerk (but may be drafted by other officers, subject to approval) to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored. The Chair will be consulted on all press releases and the Clerk may consult other councillors, following the Operational Framework at 4.0 above.

9.0 Social Media

- 9.1 Social Networking is an important, credible communication channel increasingly utilised by organisations, as well as individuals, as a means of developing online communities for gathering and disseminating information that is of mutual interest.
- 9.2 The Council has a presence on Facebook which is used to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.
- 9.3 The Clerk has corporate oversight of the Council's social media channels and has a designated Communications Lead, who will be responsible for creating, scheduling, and publishing content. Councillors will not have administrative access to the Council's social media accounts.
- 9.4 The Council's Social Media Channels are not monitored 24/7. We will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, the Council would not want to be seen to be endorsing comments which are defamatory, false, or misleading; insulting, threatening or abusive; obscene or of a sexual nature; offensive, racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory against religions or other groups; promoting illegal activity; or intended to deceive. Such posts to the Council social media pages will be removed.
- 9.5 Occasional negative posts cannot be avoided, but how they are dealt with has implications for the Council's reputation. They should not be ignored, although sometimes no answer is required if it is a rhetorical question, a repetition of an earlier posting, or a post designed to provoke. Individual Councillors should resist from responding directly to these types of comments. The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair, will agree a formal response when required.
- 9.6 As posts are public it is better to answer them in public, although occasionally it may help to take them into a formal channel of communications such as email, telephone call or letter.
- 9.7 While the private accounts of employees and Councillors are their own business, the content posted on them must not affect their professional standing and/or that of the Council.
- 9.8 If, however references to your employment or connection with the council are made on a personal social media profile, Councillors and Officers should ensure the following actions are followed:
 - Declare somewhere on your page or biography that the views expressed are yours alone

- Do not bring the authority into disrepute
- Do not reveal any potentially confidential or sensitive information about the Parish Council that you may have come across in your work or role for the Council.
- Do not use any council-owned images or logos
- Do not include contact details or photographs of service users or staff.
- Do not make offensive comments about the authority, councillors, officers, colleagues, or members of the public as this is a disciplinary offence

9.9 Communications from the Council's social media channels will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful, and relevant
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, or racially offensive
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright.
- Not contain any personal information
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising
- Be accessible - written in plain English, include alternative text for images and add closed captions to video content

9.10 The Council may 'like', comment and share social media posts from other third-party organisations, subject to ensuring that they are appropriate to support the positive image of the Council. Any 'like', comment or share must not contravene Parish Council resolved policy or imply policy that is not formally resolved. If the Clerk (or a designated administrator appointed by the Clerk under clause 9.3) is in any doubt as to whether a 'like', comment or share is inappropriate, they should consult the Chair in the first instance. This clause allows the Council to strive to be a useful key communicator between third party organisations and residents.

9.11 If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised at either the Public Question Time or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

9.12 Private messages will only be sent in response to anyone sending an initial private message to the Parish Council encouraging formal contact by email or via our website.

10.0 Website

- 10.1 The Parish Council has a website which is regularly updated and contains key information about the Council and notable events.
- 10.2 The Clerk supported by officers maintain and update the Council and Monkton Matters website. These websites may be used to:
- Post notices, agendas, and minutes of meetings
 - Advertise events and activities
 - Publish press releases
 - Post good news stories
 - Link to appropriate websites or press pages - if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct provided that their terms and conditions of that website permit it
 - Advertise job vacancies
 - Promote grants and sponsorship opportunities
 - 'Share' information from partners i.e., Police, Library, other local councils, etc. if permitted to do so
 - Announce latest information appropriate to the Council
 - Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs, and community groups
 - Post other items as the Council see fit

11.0 Newsletters

- 11.1 The Clerk and Assistant Clerk are responsible for producing articles for the Village News, which is sent to the editor. The Village News is published every other month and is either hand delivered to properties, emailed or is available on the Parish Council website to download.
- 11.2 Twice yearly, the Assistant Clerk produces an Events Calendar which is delivered to with all houses in the parish
- 11.3 A regular update by email to those that have subscribed about events and activities that the Parish Council organises.

12.0 Noticeboards

- 12.1 The Parish Council owns and is responsible for a range of noticeboards across the area.
- 12.2 The noticeboards display agendas, newsletters, notices, and details of upcoming events. The noticeboards are updated as needed by Officers.
- 12.3 The noticeboards are primarily not lockable units and therefore accessible to the community to use freely. The Parish Council takes no responsibility or liability for any of the content posted in this manner. We

reserve the right to remove any material deemed inappropriate.

13.0 Internal Communications

13.1 We aim to ensure that Officers and Councillors are informed, involved and engaged in achieving the Council's objectives.

13.2 We use a variety of mechanisms to deliver our internal communications;

Electronic: Email to communicate information and briefings to both staff and councillors.

Face-to-Face: Staff meetings are held by the Clerk and take place usually on a weekly basis with ad-hoc gatherings scheduled as part of specific projects.

14.0 Evaluation

14.1 It is extremely important that the Council measures the success of this policy so that it may inform any future plan.

14.2 What can we measure?

- Raised awareness of the Parish Council and the services it provides
- Attitudes towards West Monkton Parish Council
- Participation and engagement with Council projects, initiatives, and consultation processes
- Social media engagement

14.3 How will we do this?

- Consultation with residents – perception and satisfaction surveys
- Measure press coverage for saturation and against press releases for content usage
- Hits on website
- Regular review of social media analytics
- Regularly monitoring the progress of our number of 'Friends' and 'Followers' on social networking sites
- Staff survey

15.0 Useful Links

[Targeting your internal communications | Local Government Association](#)

[Guide to creating accessible social media content | Local Government Association](#)

[Social media guidance for councillors | Local Government Association](#)

Communications and Engagement Policy

Appendix A – Universal principles when using social media

- 1. Be human.** Be approachable in your language and tone.
- 2. Be engaging.** Respond to questions and talk back when you can move the conversation on or help.
- 3. Be professional.** Remember that you are representing the Council.
- 4. Share and say where it came from.** You can share what others have posted but it is polite to acknowledge and attribute where this has come from.
- 5. You cannot control, only contribute.** You cannot stop conversation amongst residents. You can only contribute to it.
- 6. Content is king.** By creating sharable and engaging content you can contribute to the conversation and be heard.
- 7. Be authentic.** Do not try and pretend to be something you are not. Ghosted accounts are not authentic.
- 8. Be trusting.** We cannot monitor every conversation, letter, phone call or email. Trust your staff and you will gain far more than you will lose.
- 9. Be strategic.** Plan ahead – who do you want to engage with, why and how? What do you want to achieve?

Appendix B – Social Media Do's and Don'ts from the Local Government Association (LGA)

Do not post any message on social media that you would not happily say in a public meeting.

Do

- talk to residents, staff, and others. And do answer their questions (quickly and honestly)
- trust your teams and staff to use social media
- be responsible at all times
- be respectful at all times, too
- innovate – different approaches work for different people
- have a personality – corporate speak or just issuing press releases will not work well on social media
- share other people's helpful content and links
- credit other people's work, ideas, and links
- listen (social media is designed to be a two-way channel, just like any good conversation)
- ask your own questions. Seek feedback from your residents (but make sure you share the results with them)
- have a rota where appropriate – share the load and you will get more from your accounts
- adhere to your existing HR policies – you do not need a separate HR policy especially for social media
- talk to your communications team – they are there to help you
- and more than anything, do use social media in the spirit in which it was intended – to engage, openly and honestly.

Do not

- broadcast or talk at people. Your residents will soon spot broadcasts and respond accordingly
- block social media – social media is not a risk, blocking its use is a risk
- try to cover up mistakes, be honest and you will get more respect for it in the long run
- build accounts and just hope people will come – sometimes it is best to go to the places where your audiences are already having conversations
- assume that social media will look after itself – you will need to invest time, enthusiasm, and energy to make it work. And do not leave your accounts unattended for long spells
- post content which will embarrass your council or yourself
- ignore legal advice, it is there to help you

- think that a disclaimer in your bio will save you from potential legal action, it will not
- expect your staff to make do with old technology which can be a barrier to effective working
- share your passwords with anyone other than your communications lead
- forget that social media is 24/7 – just because you leave at 5.00pm does not mean the world stops or that residents will not be active. If your account is only staffed 9-5 then you should say so on your profile