

Community Engagement Policy – approved 19 Feb 2024

(Latest date for review 31 October 2024)

General Engagement Statement

Upton Parish Council – putting people first

The Parish Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents of all ages, businesses large and small, schools, Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Police & Fire services, Countess of Chester Hospital, voluntary groups and organisations, the media and any other relevant party.

Communications is a complex topic, but fundamentally it is about ensuring that good interaction is at the heart of everything the Parish Council does.

The Council uses the following forms of communication: newsletters, social media, press releases, websites, and noticeboards.

The Council website must contain statutory Council information such as the Annual Report and agendas/minutes of meetings in order to demonstrate transparency. But there is a greater aim. Working in conjunction with its social media channels, the Council aspires to be seen to be a principal source of both live and historic information about life in Upton (please refer to the Social Media section below for more information). To do so it has the option of operating additional channels that are closely aligned to the principal Parish Council sites.

The overall aim is for Council communication to be a two-way process; and give people information so they can understand accurately what the Council does. This should enable people to make informed opinions of the Council. At the same time the Council in collecting information from residents and stakeholders can develop a greater appreciation of their needs.

The Council will brand its communications consistently across all channels with a single brand identity using uniform font and Council logo.

If these aims are achieved it will have a marked impact of the Council's reputation and perception of it by the stakeholders of Upton.

To support these aims the Council will examine the use of Digital Engagement Technologies leading it to the most effective use of its media channels. This may include the rebranding the Parish Council.

Social media

Social networking is a credible communication channel used by organisations, as well as individuals, as a means of developing online communities for gathering and disseminating information of mutual interest.

This policy refers to all social media channels the Council may maintain including the main Parish Council website and any others it may operate. The word pages means postings across all channels

Our Council pages will provide an effective real time, two-way communication channel, to enable us to engage with community members and online groups that may not normally interact willingly with the Council.

It is our desire to provide more people with access what the Council can do for them and try to assess what members of the community want from the Council. Council pages will be designed to engage with new and existing audiences of all ages. It is a fast, efficient way of communicating as there are no lead-in production times as with print media, messages can be available for viewing by followers in minutes.

The aspiration is for the Council pages to be seen as the first place to go to when seeking information about Upton. For that reason, it is vital to populate the pages with relevant and up to date information. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

Regular monitoring of these pages is essential, for when specific questions or issues arise manpower must be available to address them without delay.

The policy regarding the use of Social Media will apply to Councillors and all staff members.

Most of what follows is common sense and decency but it is worth summarising some key points as a reminder.

- Members (Councillors)' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
- Councillors are expected to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.
- Councillors must be aware of their profile as a Councillor. When posting in a private capacity this cannot be ignored. Remember, communications on the internet are permanent.
- Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council.
- You are personally responsible for content you publish.
- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Don't cause embarrassment or compromise the reputation of the Council.
- Exercise great care with Language bear in mind postings may be deemed as offensive when relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion
- If uploading content make sure you have permission.
- If content includes children, seek prior advice from other Councillors/clerk

- The Data Protection Policy gives guidance on content which includes children under the age of 13, or adults at risk.

A full list will be provided by the clerk on request

Roles and responsibilities

The clerk will be responsible for maintaining its statutory noticeboards located at :-
The Pavilion, Upton Lane Bus Shelter, outside the Church Hall on Newhall Drive and outside the Spar shop on Long Lane.

The facilities manager has the responsibility for the Pavilion Community noticeboard and will refer to the Community Engagement Committee with regard to content. The Clerk has the responsibility to insert statutory notices on this board.

Community groups and organisations are permitted to display notices, which are in line with our policy – these will typically include those organisations and groups listed above. It is acknowledged that space and therefore additional notices will be limited.

The Parish Council will in the ordinary course of its business receive correspondence from various sources. The Clerk will either receive these directly or as passed on from individual Councillors – in this event they must be despatched to the clerk immediately.

In order to ensure a speedy turnaround, the clerk will immediately upon receipt refer all communications and proposed responses to the Chair who will seek input from individual Councillors before replying. (In the absence of the chair the referral can be made to any committee chair). An acknowledgement will be provided within 24 hours in the form of a holding communication if a full response cannot be given immediately. Unless exceptional circumstances prevail, all communications will be actioned as complete within 7 days.

The clerk will publish agendas of all forthcoming meetings within the statutory time limits on the Council's noticeboards, website and social media, making all documents with the exception of those where the press and public are excluded, available to the public. The agenda will make it very clear what is to be discussed and what decisions the Council will be required to make.

It is essential that the Council is transparent in all it does. Therefore, the clerk will publish, clearly marked as draft, the minutes of each meeting within 7 days of conclusion on the Council's website and social media channels. The minutes will be sufficiently detailed to represent what decisions were made by the Council and why. Outsiders should be able to easily understand what has been decided.

The Council will operate a website and social media channels which will contain statutory information as a minimum, this will be maintained by the clerk and moderated by named Councillors. These channels may also be used to actively

promote events and activities in Upton, encouraging feedback from stakeholders (see also *below)

*Alternatively, the Council may also operate a separate website and suite of social media channels. These channels will run alongside the main Council website and will be operated by the Community Engagement Committee. The main objective is to engage the community in discussion without the constraints of the main website.

Contributions from staff and Councillors are actively encouraged. Indeed, the staff are often seen as the “front line” of the Council and discourse with users of Council assets can provide a valuable insight as to how the Council can meet their needs of it.

Communications should be open and transparent. Councillors are encouraged to provide content about what they are made aware of in Upton without opining on same.

Small Grants

The Parish Council will endeavour to seek out opportunities to help and support local initiatives by making funds available within its annual budget. The award of any such grants will be conditional on the applicant being able to clearly demonstrate how the community will benefit. Applicants will also need to show how their schemes will be compliant with the Neighbourhood Plan.

Please refer to the Small Grants policy for more information.

The Committee will be responsible for considering the award of such grants. It has the power to award sums up to £1000. It will refer submissions received for sums in excess of this to the Parish Council. When the allocation for each year is exhausted a notice will be posted of the Council website.

IT Risk management

The committee has a responsibility to examine risks presented to the Council by the use of Information technology. Being aware is not the same as taking action.

Use of online systems and cloud services is a complex area and beyond the level of competence from within the Council’s resources. It will be necessary to procure systems and services from outside firms in order to ensure the Council is protected from cybersecurity risk.

The committee will investigate what such services may best suit the Council’s needs and the clerk will be responsible for ensuring the best value is obtained.

A policy setting out how councillors and staff should use Information Technology will be set out.