



ABERGAVENTNY TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1. Introduction

Abergavenny Town Council (ATC) has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders.

It will do this in a variety of ways, including the use of press releases, the council's website, customer service, marketing material, consultation, the Annual Report, how councillors interact as ward members and council documents such as agendas and letters.

This strategy will look at how the council can develop and improve its communications with residents and other stakeholders.

The overall aim is that council communications should be a two-way process; to give people the information to understand accurately what we do, so they can make informed decisions, and to get information from residents and stakeholders so we can understand their needs.

1.1 What will be communicated?

The most important drivers of council reputation among local residents are:

- perceived quality of services overall
- perceived value for money
- media coverage
- direct communications
- council performance
- clean, green and safe environment

If the council is to build a strong reputation, effectively inform residents, engage and improve customer satisfaction then these drivers must form the basis of its communications policy.

1.2 Who will communication be with?

The council's audiences are wide and varied but will typically include:

- Residents

- Town Council staff
- Hard-to-reach groups, including young people and Black and Minority Ethnic audiences
- The media
- Monmouthshire County Council (as the unitary authority)
- Voluntary groups and organizations
- The business community
- MPs, AMs and Welsh Government
- Other public sector organisations (police, health, fire)
- Visitors and those who work in the county

1.3 Aims and vision:

The council's communications will:

- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence levels
- raise awareness of services provided by the council
- raise the profile of Abergavenny as a hub for business and tourism
- support councillors in their role as community representatives
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) audiences
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the public standing or integrity of the council

Our vision is that our residents will:

- 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. Existing communication methods

- Website
- Council agenda papers/letters
- Press releases
- Limited PR and marketing activity
- Engagement of councillors with constituents
- General engagement by the public with the Town Clerk and staff.

The advances made in information technology offer exciting new ways of communicating. At the same time, for many people, traditional methods – newspapers, telephone, leaflets – still play a fundamental role that must not be undervalued.

3. Planned communication

3.1 The Town Council will aim to deliver core actions which, if achieved, would have a marked impact on the organisation's reputation and the perceptions of residents.

These are:

- Work harmoniously and effectively with the media to promote the council
- Publish an Annual Report to inform residents
- Ensure the council logo is consistently linked to services, or anything else provided or sponsored by the Town Council
- Carry out regular consultations on specific matters
- Maintain and redesign the Abergavenny Town Council website including details of the services provided by the Town Council
- Use social media to promote the work of the council

3.2 Effective communication with the media to promote and defend the council

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

- Respond to journalists in full within a 48 hours timescale
- Be helpful, polite and positive
- Always try to respond, providing there is a factual basis on which to provide an answer.
- Ensure any responses to hostile enquiries are cleared by the most appropriate person and keep written records of responses to journalists
- Evaluate media coverage
- Ensure the appropriate council spokesman is fully briefed and available for interview if required
- Issue timely and relevant press releases on documentation that contains the town logo
- Pre-empt potential stories arising from council agendas/minutes by issuing proactive media releases
- Organise media training for key speakers (eg the Mayor or Town Clerk)

Keep councillors and officers up-to-date with press coverage, via email.

4. Council Press Releases

- 4.1 Official council press releases and statements will be prepared by the Town Clerk in consultation with other members as required and issued in the name of the Mayor;
- 4.2 The Town Clerk will, where possible, act as the council's Press Officer. Any official contact with the media concerning the council's policies, the decisions it makes and services it provides are to be initiated through the Town Clerk.

- 4.3 Members who identify a media opportunity pertaining to the Town Council should discuss this with the Town Clerk who will, in consultation with other councillors as appropriate, decide how this will be followed up.

5. Councillor Press Releases

- 5.1 Individual councillors can make their own statements relating to local issues and this policy is not designed to prevent any of them expressing a personal opinion through the media. Members must make it clear however, that any view expressed which differs from Council policy are their own personal views and should be recorded as such;
- 5.2 Such releases may or may not be political and should bear no reference whatsoever to the council or any officer and must not use the Abergavenny Town Council logo. Neither the council address, telephone number or website should be included as a point of personal contact.

6. Publication of the annual report

The Abergavenny Town Council Annual Report will be both hard copy and electronic and will inform residents on the role of the Town Council.

7. Ensuring the council identity is consistently linked to services

The council will look to brand its communications consistently, ensuring a consistency of style by:

- Making sure all staff and councillors have access to electronic logos and templates (press releases, letters, etc).
- Using a uniform font type – all printed communication should display the council logo and should use Arial 12 font
- Developing a photographic library which promotes the Council and is available to staff, ~~journalists and partners online.~~

8. The duty to carry out regular consultation

Consultation is a key part in the communications policy as it is a two-way exchange of views between local people and the council. We are keen to get people's opinions about both the future of Abergavenny and the services we deliver. This will help us to make decisions and allow us to tell people about why we provide services in the way we do.

9. Maintenance and development of the website

It is a responsibility of the Town Clerk to ensure that the council's website is updated regularly and checked for accuracy. It will contain key information about the council and important events. This will include the names and contact details for all councillors.

10. Use social media to promote the work of Abergavenny Town Council

The council will use social media as a means of communicating with residents, visitors, local business and with other online groups. It will seek to engage with groups and individuals who regularly use social media and with new audiences to provide access to council services, such as the under-25s.

It is the responsibility of the Town Clerk, in conjunction with councillors, to ensure that the use of social media is managed effectively.

The council has a specific Social Media Policy to ensure the correct use of social media.

Policy Review Date 12 May 2024