

ONGAR TOWN COUNCIL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The strategy ensures that the Council has a robust structure for communicating internally and externally and addresses a mandatory requirement for Quality Council status.

INTERNAL

Good communication facilitates co-ordinated working and builds trust between members and officers. Keeping everyone informed of current developments is important and the provision of defined processes builds trust and alleviates friction.

The Clerk

The Clerk to the Council is the “Proper Officer” to manage the internal and external communication of the Council. All staff and councillors share in the responsibility to maintain effective communication.

Councillors should expect -

- The Council office to be open during core hours and if not an answer-phone message needs to reflect any temporary change in times
- The Clerk or Deputy to be contactable during office hours
- Councillors should be able to visit the Clerk during office hours by prior arrangement
- A response from the Clerk within an agreed period of time.

The Clerk should expect –

- To be kept informed of any ongoing work, arrangements or invitations that Councillors undertake or receive on behalf of the council.
- Councillors to respond to the Clerk or other officers within the requested timescale

Office hours

The Council should set out times when the office is open.

When appropriate the Council may offer additional opportunities for the public to meet officers or staff.

District and County Councils

It is advisable to have regular meetings with officers or members at District or County level and this is important in pursuit of this policy by building good working relationships and procedures. The Clerk should keep the Council informed of any such meetings and any issues that may arise. Ideally, meetings with elected members at District or County level should also be attended by elected members of the Town Council to assist in the working of the Council.

A copy of each letter sent to District and County councillors about matters in a particular ward shall be sent to the relevant ward councillors.

In order to keep District and County Councillors informed. The Council will:-

- Send them copies of annual reports
- Send them agendas and minutes
- Will include on all Council agendas the opportunity for a District or County Councillor to address the meeting.
- Give them an opportunity to address the Council or public at Council meetings. It is helpful if prior notification of attendance be given in order to facilitate this.
- Request a written contribution from them if attendance is not possible.

EXTERNAL Consultations

It is essential that every effort is made to ensure that timely and effective communication occur so that the public are aware of the Council's actions and know how to communicate their concerns effectively.

Consultations with the public are often necessary and sometimes need to be completed very quickly. It is essential that the Council allocates adequate resources to ensure that public engagement is as effective as possible.

Responses to formal consultations should be properly recorded and good practise observed in determining outcomes. All residents who take part should be given the opportunity to have detailed responses in addition to the publically advertised headline results.

When dealing with members of the public, staff should ensure that as full and appropriate communication takes place as possible but should refer to senior staff if uncertain about the propriety of entering into discussion

Ideally the public should be able to communicate with individual councillors via an OTC email address.

Press

The Clerk will produce or authorise the production of press releases on behalf of the Council.

- All press releases to be reviewed by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Council and the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the relevant committee before publication
- Public events must be held with the authority of the Council. Any public events arranged by the Council should have elected members present unless exceptionally the Council decides otherwise.
- Consent for photographs or video filming should be obtained whenever specified by the requirement of the Council's Safeguarding policy.
- Press releases use a standard format (Appendix 2)
- Press releases are distributed to all local publications.
- Agendas only are sent to local press.

APPENDIX 1

Activity		Timetable
Annual Report	Delivered to every household in the Ongar area.	1 edition per year (June)
Office	Open to the public weekday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm. Telephones answered during this time. Answer-phone being deployed at other times.	
Phone answering service	At all times.	
Office, email, website address and social media	Available for public use. Shown on all correspondence.	
Councillors contact details	Shown on annual report, website, notice boards	
Public participation at Council meetings	<p>Public participation if facilitated at every meeting to which the public are entitled to attend. Notification of this is included in each agenda and where possible in the newsletter and website.</p> <p>The Council will hold regular consultation meetings to which Ongar residents, the press, District and County Council representatives will be invited. These will be publicised in the Ongar News, website and social media as well as on notice boards.</p>	The Council's schedule of meetings is published annually.
Special public meetings		As and when required.
Visits to and from community groups/schools	To promote understanding of local democracy.	When opportunities exist and as promoted by the Planning & Environment and Public Relations committee.

Grants to community groups	Funding provided as Section 137 grants when budgetary resources permit.	Consider annually.
Website	<p>Provides agendas and minutes and describes the Council's commitments and aspirations.</p> <p>Will seek to keep residents properly informed of significant matters affecting the community and will include a means of contacting the Council electronically.</p>	
Elections	The District Council is responsible for all facets of election management. The Town Council will facilitate access to information about polling arrangements and encourage participation in elections.	In response to the election cycle.
Annual Town Meeting		Annually between March and May (except in an election year when notice should be taken of the "purdah" period).

APPENDIX 2 PRESS RELEASE FORMAT (EXAMPLE)

ONGAR TOWN COUNCIL

**'Bansons',
Bansons Way,
Chipping Ongar,
Essex,
CM5 9AS.**

Website:

Email: clerk@ongartowncouncil.gov.uk

Twitter: https://twitter.com/ongar_town

Tel: 01277 365348

MEDIA RELEASE

Issued: March 16, 2015

Citizen and Young Citizen of the Year awards to be presented at Annual Town Meeting

Ongar Town Council is holding its annual town meeting at the Jubilee Pavilion, Love Lane, Ongar, at 7pm on Wednesday, March 25.

The meeting will begin with the official opening of the new kitchen, part of the improvements carried out at the building since the town council took over the management of the facilities from Ongar Social and Sports Club on February 10. There will also be the presentation of the town council's Citizen and Young Citizen of the Year awards, reports on the council's committees and short reports from local organisations.

Ongar Town Council's media service is provided by Everything Local News, part of the Everything Epping Forest
www.everythingeppingforest.co.uk

and

Everything Harlow
www.everythingharlow.co.uk