**Sixpenny Handley and Pentridge Parish Council**

**Communications Strategy**

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# Mission

This Strategy document enables Sixpenny Handley and Pentridge Parish Council to

communicate effectively and engage effectively with the community we serve.

The Parish Council seek to demonstrate that we communicate, consult, and actively involve our electorate, local organisations, and members of the public. Thereby earning and maintaining the goodwill of the parish that the council serves.

The Parish Council will seek to ensure that people are well informed about their council services, what they stand for and that through this we are far more likely to build trust and a strong reputation for their work. In return, communities will have confidence in our decisions.

Individual Parish Councillors or the Parish Clerk can convey their own opinion but in doing so should make it clear that this is their personal opinion and is not necessarily the view of the Parish Council as a whole. This strategy and associated communications channels is the only method for conveying the Parish Councils messages.

# Executive Summary

National research affirms that the reputation and effectiveness of local councils depends upon public awareness. There are many excellent examples of where this is already being achieved through the hard work and commitment of local representatives. Both the national association of Local councils (NALC) and the commission for rural communities (CRC) recognise that one of the chief drivers in developing and sustaining a good relationship with communities lies in the range of ways councils communicate to their audiences.

The regular communications issued by the Parish Council will be delivered through the Parish Council Communications Plan (6DHPC) which underpins this strategy document.

The Situational Analysis defines the criteria for invoking the PC Comms Plan, this ensures communications are timely and appropriate for any given situation identified by or to the Parish Council.

The Research and within it the Situation Analysis elements states how PESTLE and SWOT analysis is actioned within the communications plan and are listed within this document to ensure a consistent method of delivery is in place and agreed through this strategy document.

To ensure this strategy is effective, Objectives, which are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable and Realistic with defined Timescales) have been defined and agreed. These will be monitored to establish how effective this strategy and the PC Comms Plan have been in operation. This will be through 6 monthly reviews by the Parish Council. These reviews are to learn lessons from the communications to ensure the methods and tools are effective or are improved as necessary.

Stakeholder and Target Audiences define who this strategy is focussed upon. These are members of the community and external individuals and organisations who are considered with regard to the correct channel of communication to apply when delivering Parish Council messages. These stakeholder groupings are included in the PC Comms Plan to ensure visibility at the time of communication updates being made to maintain focus on individuals being engaged through the plan is appropriate and timely.

To communicate messages to stakeholders in the most appropriate manner, tactics and communication channels are identified, this recognises how best to communicate with one or more stakeholders and what channels are available to the Parish Council.

The PC Comms Plan will contain the Research approach and format to allow PESTLE and SWOT analysis of the situation being communicated at the time of updating the 6DHPC. This ensures the Parish Council will be focussed on the issues, concerns at hand and have assessed what needs to be communicated to who and method of delivery.

The Parish Council will review the previous 6 months communications to establish how effective this strategy has been actioned, where improvement or changes can be realised this strategy will be updated to ensure continual improvement and the effectiveness of this strategy is realised.

# Situation Analysis

This situational analysis will be under constant review, below are the key aspects that need to be factored into any messaging issued by the Parish Council. The following are examples of where this may occur:

* A new housing scheme within the Parish
* Changes to services provided within or to the Parish
* A Dorset Council policy that has a local impact
* Work being conducted with in the Parish requested by the Parish Council
* Incidents requiring Parish Council support
* Good News events which are supported by the Parish Council

# Research

This research is conducting in line with any updates to the communications plan to ensure that the appropriate messaging is actioned via the appropriate tool or tools to convey the message or messages.

## PESTLE Analysis

PESTLE analysis is a study of six macro-environmental factors. These factors affect businesses and industries worldwide. Each letter of the analysis stands for a specific environmental factor and are broken down as followed:

• Political factors

• Economic factors

• Socio-cultural/social factors

• Technological factors

• Legal factors

• Ecological/environmental factors

By studying how these factors influence the community, a local organisation, business or an individual can discover trends and use analytical data to enhance productivity and sales. As such, decision-makers can make informed and strategic changes that may lead to more success for the company or brand.

## SWOT Analysis

Base on the event identified through the PESTLE analysis the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat factors are identified relative to the situation. From these key messages or impacted parishioners can be identified.

Depending on which elements of the SWOT analysis are identified may also result in communications with people or organisations outside of the Parish eg Dorset Council, Bus companies, Builders etc. These communications may use some of the tools within this strategy but should not be totally dependent on this strategy as it is likely to be within the existing policies or ways of working carried out by the Parish Council

# Objectives and Metrics

Messages defined within the Communications Plan should be monitored to identify the following:

* How many people received the message (estimated for newspapers, captured on Facebook ‘insights’, likes on NextDoor App, Google Analytics for PC Website)
* What feedback was received (positive/negative) – verbal (if noted by councillors at the time), letters, comments on posts
* Was the message appropriate to the stakeholder and communications channel. (review messages where significant negative responses are received or a lack of responses (positive or negative)
* Was the message delivered in a timely manner – relate to timing of the message in relation to associated event

# Stakeholder and Target Audiences

Generally, the stakeholder will always be members of the parish and to people outside of the parish. Depending on the messaging it will be further broken down within the Communications Plan. The breakdown of who to communicate with could be to any of the following:

* Specific areas of the parish e.g. Flooding, road closures
* Specific members of the parish e.g. age specific such as the young or mature, parents, businesses etc
* Specific organisations within the parish e.g. WI, Allotment Society etc
* External to the village e.g. our Dorset Council representative or individuals and/or organisations linked to the village e.g. Social Care, Dorset Council departments, Bus companies etc

# Tools & Tactics

The parish council wall have a range of tools to use when communicating messages to its stakeholders, these range from word of mouth, publications as well as ‘online’ media. The specifics for each are listed in the following subsections. The Tactics for each ‘channel’ define how it is used to communicate messages. Which channel is selected for a message is captured in the Communications plan.

# Communications Channels

Each communication channel not only has a cost associated, time and effort by a member of the council but also potential costs in deploying messages eg paying for printing or the cost of hosting a web site. This cost and the efficacy for conveying a message dictate which channel to utilise. This will be based on coverage, speed of delivery as well as how best to inform a particular stakeholder or group. For example, it would be pointless delivering a message solely through online media if the target audience does not use the internet. Likewise publishing in the Downsman may not be best suited to the younger stakeholders who are more familiar with online delivery.

## Word of Mouth

This is best suited to short messages that cannot be misconstrued, anything that takes time to explain is probably not best passed through conversations. Doing so risks exposing the messenger to questioning which cannot be fully answered and could lead to stakeholders disengaging. It would be appropriate to point stakeholders to further information e.g. an article in The Downsman or the Parish Council website rather than extending a conversation. Good examples of word of mouth messages are:

* The Parish Council will be discussing xxx topic on Thursday at the next Full Parish Council meeting
* Information about footpaths can be found on the Parish Council Website

## Notice Board

The notice board is for any long-term messages or to make stakeholders aware of upcoming events or meetings. It can also be used to inform stakeholders about specific topics such as points of contact, rights of way code or other such information that can be conveyed on a single sheet of A4 paper.

## Newspapers

Where publicity about a Parish event or situation would be beneficial, news articles should be written using the PC News Article template. Such articles could be good news events that have happened, where wider support for an initiative is deemed appropriate or to act as a ‘notice board’ to inform the general public about an event taking place within the Parish.

## The Downsman

This is a key message vehicle for the Parish Council, notwithstanding ‘Clerks Corner’ which in itself informs the Parish about Parish Council activities. The Downsman can be viewed as a subset of Newspapers, therefore utilising the PC News Article template. Messages in the Downsman should be more personable to the Parish to ensure key messages are passed out to the community, recognising the publishing timescales.

## Flyers

Flyers can be seen as a portable ‘Notice Board’ but recognising the cost to both publish and deliver. These messages should be straight forward and clear with basic information. Typically, this would be to inform the parish about a significant event or information about something notable that has occurred which affects the parish. An example of this would be a change to bus services and how the Parish Council has engaged with both Dorset Council and the bus company. Flyers are likely to be asking for action or a response. It could therefore be a questionnaire to gauge views throughout the parish.

## Parish Council Online Newsletter

The Parish Council Online Newsletter is a feature of our website, the frequency of delivery should be agreed and could provide similar information to The Downsman but at a greater frequency, perhaps monthly. As it is online use of this channel does not provide access to the same readers as the Downsman and therefore cannot replace The Downsman. Access to the online Newsletter is through registration on the Parish Council Website, this needs to be publicised for utilisation of this channel to be effective, once established it will need to be maintained as online stakeholders will expect regular issues to be delivered.

## Parish Council Website

The website has a range of communication facilities within it, from publishing agendas, minutes, policy documents and general information about the Parish Council and its functions down to a ‘news and events’ section. The website complies with national accessibility rules in that the text size can be increased by the viewer and for partially sighted any words on the website can be highlighted and read out to the site visitor. The news and events section can and should be used to issue messages on an as required basis. It is a good link to word of mouth as it can provide the detail and information not feasible to pass via word of mouth. Again, it needs to be recognised that this will only be viewed by those using the internet albeit this is a growing area of the parish. Any page of the website can be saved as a ‘shortcut’ which can then be pasted into other online systems such as Facebook and NextDoor. This saves time and effort, removes duplication, and reduces the risk of error in conveying a message.

## Facebook

Facebook is widely used by the public, businesses and organisations increasingly utilise Facebook to inform people about their activities. During COVID 19 lockdown it was used as part of the messaging in conjunction with the Parish Website to inform parishioners about COVID 19 related information. The Parish Council can utilise Facebook, setting up a ‘Page’ which can be administered by two or more members of the Council to issue messages to the public and in particular the parish. This sets up a two-way dialogue where individuals can respond to posts and thereby communicate with the Council. All posts can be moderated with rules defined by the Parish Council on what can and cannot be published. Where posts do not comply with these rules the administrators can remove the offending post. Facebook pages capture statistics about how many people have viewed, liked or commented on a post as well as show how well used the page (and its posts) are used. This is therefore a good source of metrics about messaging that the Parish Council can use. During the COVID 19 lockdown one post about Father Christmas coming through the village had over 1500 views, compared to a post about COVID 19 which had less than a hundred. The Parish Council can therefore gain an insight into what is important to readers. The Parish Council should agree to the use of Facebook which is noted through the appropriate Parish Council meeting minutes in which the rules will also be reviewed and agreed.

## NextDoor Application

This application is similar to Facebook albeit with a less frequent use, it is very much a community communication forum, providing the opportunity for individuals to share information, request support or offer to sell items. Pages can be set up in a similar way to Facebook, but access can be controlled in relation to the parish boundaries. Information published can be limited to just the parish or additionally to surrounding communities. Again, administration of the page is set up, but the NextDoor app defines the rules overall and therefore comments are not directly controlled by the page administrator. Any comment can be referred to the area administrator as well as adjacent area administrators to vote on whether the post contravenes the rules. If it is not accepted, the post is removed. NextDoor app is not generally used to post views and opinions or what people are doing and so is not as invasive as Facebook. The audience is community focussed and is therefore a useful tool for passing messages to the community. During COVID 19 it was used in exactly the same way as Facebook to pass information out to the wider community, less feedback was provided but through conversations with individuals it was clear this method of communication was gratefully received. The Parish Council should agree to the use of NextDoor app which is noted through the appropriate Parish Council meeting minutes.

## Other online media

There are a number of other online media applications such as WhatsApp, Twitter etc, these are currently out of scope for this strategy.

# Communications Plan

This is the day to day, month to month embodiment of this strategy document. Information and activities affecting the Parish will be known to the Parish Council. As part of Parish Council meetings this information will be reviewed and assessed as to whether stakeholders should be informed. The key messages will be captured and assessed as to which communication channels should be utilised. It is likely that multiple channels are used to convey the messages. To assist in establishing this PESTLE and SWOT analysis can be conducted. It should be noted that this is not necessary every time messages are identified as the groups of stakeholders will be easily identifiable. These stakeholders will be aligned to the appropriate channel for them through establishing the Communication plan. This will simplify use of the communications plan but leave the Research Tools available for use when required. The communications plan should therefore be saved as a unique file each time it is updated with the month and year being part of the file name. Should there be multiple updates in a month then the file should be numerically increased eg 6DHCP2021-Nov-1, then 6DHCP2021-Nov-2. Instructions on the use and maintenance of the 6DHCP (Sixpenny Handley Communications Plan) are within the spreadsheet including how to conduct PESTLE and SWOT analysis.

# Evaluation of the Strategy Objectives

This strategy and the associated communication plans should be reviewed every six months to ensure communications are appropriate and effective. This will be done by reviewing the metrics associated with the communications such as:

* How many people received a message?
* what positive/negative response was received?
* How did the Parish Council address responses?
* Have generally communications been beneficial?
* Has it been onerous to carry out communications via each channel, if so which ones and how can this be addressed?
* Did a channel’s use have an impact on how communications from the Parish Council were received? If so, what can be done to address this?

Based on the views of the Parish Council of this review, this strategy should be reviewed and updated, addressing issues experienced with any of the communications channels and/or adding further channels if deemed necessary.