



## **WINSFORD TOWN COUNCIL**



## **Communications and Community Engagement Strategy**

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### **COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND POLICY 2027-2030**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Winsford Town Council is committed to open, transparent, accessible and effective communication with residents, businesses, partners, visitors and stakeholders.

The Council recognises that effective communication is essential to:

- Build trust and confidence in local government.
- Increase community participation and civic pride.
- Support informed decision-making.
- Promote council services, projects and events.
- Demonstrate accountability for public expenditure.
- Strengthen partnerships across the town.
- Ensure all sections of the community can access information and influence decisions.

This Strategy establishes the Council's communication principles, objectives, governance arrangements and engagement framework for the period 2027-2030.

#### **VISION**

*To ensure every resident and stakeholder has access to timely, accurate and accessible information, and has meaningful opportunities to engage with and influence the future of Winsford.*

#### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

The Council will:

##### **Objective 1**

Provide clear, proactive and transparent communications regarding council services, decisions, projects and finances.

##### **Objective 2**

Increase awareness and understanding of the Council's role, responsibilities and achievements.

##### **Objective 3**

Strengthen community engagement and participation in local decision-making.

##### **Objective 4**

Promote and celebrate Winsford's people, places, achievements, heritage and community spirit.

##### **Objective 5**

Ensure communications are inclusive, accessible and reach all sections of the community.

**Objective 6**

Protect and enhance the reputation of the Council through professional and responsive communications.

**Objective 7**

Develop evidence-based communications and engagement activities which can be measured and evaluated.

**COMMUNICATIONS PRINCIPLES**

All Council communications shall be:

**Open**

Providing information proactively wherever possible.

**Accurate**

Factually correct, balanced and evidence-based.

**Timely**

Issued at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

**Accessible**

Meeting accessibility standards and considering the needs of all residents.

**Inclusive**

Recognising the diversity of Winsford's communities.

**Professional**

Maintaining political neutrality and public confidence.

**Respectful**

Encouraging constructive dialogue and participation.

**Consistent**

Reflecting agreed Council priorities and values.

**KEY MESSAGES**

The Council's communications should reinforce the following messages:

- Winsford Town Council works for and on behalf of the community.
- Residents' views matter and influence decisions.
- The Council is accountable, transparent and approachable.
- Partnership working delivers better outcomes.
- Winsford is ambitious, welcoming and proud of its heritage and future.
- Community involvement makes Winsford stronger.
- Public money is managed responsibly and effectively.

**AUDIENCES**

The Council communicates with:

*Internal Audiences*

- Town Councillors
- Council staff
- Volunteers and project groups

*External Audiences*

- Residents
- Community organisations
- Voluntary groups
- Local businesses
- Educational establishments
- Sports clubs
- Faith groups
- Young people
- Older residents
- Visitors
- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Emergency services
- Funding bodies
- Regional and national government bodies
- Media organisations
- Strategic partners

Attention will be given to ensuring engagement with under-represented and seldom-heard groups.

**COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

The Council will utilise a mix of traditional and digital channels.

**Digital Communications**

- Council website
- Facebook
- Instagram
- X (or successor platforms)
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Email newsletters
- Digital surveys
- Consultation platforms
- Electronic noticeboards

**Traditional Communications**

- Noticeboards
- Local press
- Community newsletters
- Printed leaflets and posters
- Public meetings
- Community events
- Exhibitions and drop-in sessions
- Annual Town Meeting

### **Direct Communications**

- Customer enquiries
- Councillor engagement
- Stakeholder briefings
- Partnership meetings
- School and youth engagement activities

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

The Council will use the following levels of engagement:

| <b>Level</b> | <b>Purpose</b>                    |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Inform       | Provide information               |
| Consult      | Seek views and feedback           |
| Involve      | Work directly with communities    |
| Collaborate  | Develop solutions jointly         |
| Empower      | Support community-led initiatives |

Engagement methods may include:

- Surveys
- Public consultations
- Focus groups
- Community workshops
- Stakeholder forums
- Citizens' panels
- Online engagement tools
- Targeted engagement with specific groups
- Community events and festivals

### **ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION**

The Council is committed to ensuring communications are accessible to all. This includes:

- Compliance with accessibility legislation.
- Plain English communications.
- Alternative formats where appropriate.
- Mobile-friendly digital content.
- Accessible venues for engagement activities.
- Consideration of digital exclusion.
- Targeted engagement with harder-to-reach communities.

### **MEDIA RELATIONS**

The Council will maintain constructive relationships with local, regional and specialist media.

#### *Principles*

- Openness and transparency.
- Timely responses.
- Clear spokesperson arrangements.

- Accuracy and consistency of messaging.

The Town Clerk shall be responsible for coordinating media enquiries unless delegated by the Council. The Mayor may act as civic spokesperson where appropriate. Political matters shall remain separate from Council communications.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

Social media provides opportunities to communicate quickly and directly with residents. The Council will:

- Use social media professionally and responsibly.
- Maintain a respectful online presence.
- Respond proportionately to enquiries.
- Monitor inappropriate content.
- Comply with GDPR and safeguarding requirements.
- Retain appropriate records where required.
- Follow election period restrictions.

The Council reserves the right to remove or hide content that is:

- Offensive or abusive.
- Discriminatory or defamatory.
- Unlawful.
- Spam or commercial advertising.
- Breaches confidentiality.

### **CONSULTATION STANDARDS**

When undertaking consultations, the Council will:

- Clearly explain the purpose of engagement.
- Provide sufficient information.
- Allow reasonable response periods.
- Consider all responses fairly.
- Publish outcomes where appropriate.
- Explain how feedback informed decisions

### **CRISIS AND EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS**

The Council will maintain arrangements for responding to:

- Major incidents.
- Public safety concerns.
- Severe weather events.
- Reputational issues.
- Service disruption.
- Civil emergencies.

Key principles include:

- A single source of verified information.
- Rapid communication.
- Coordination with partner agencies.
- Clear public messaging.
- Ongoing updates.

## **BRANDING AND IDENTITY**

The Council's visual identity should promote recognition and professionalism. All official publications should:

- Use approved branding.
- Follow accessibility standards.
- Use consistent visual design.
- Reflect the Council's values and reputation.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### *Council*

- Approves the Strategy.
- Sets communications priorities.

### *Town Clerk*

- Overall accountability for implementation.
- Media management.
- Communications governance.
- Compliance and monitoring.

### *Councillors*

- Act as community representatives.
- Share information responsibly.
- Comply with the Councillor Code of Conduct.

### *Officers*

- Deliver communications professionally.
- Support engagement activities.
- Ensure information is accurate and timely.

## **PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**

The Council will monitor:

### *Communications*

- Website visits.
- Social media reach and engagement.
- Newsletter subscriptions.
- Media coverage.
- Customer enquiry response times.

### *Community Engagement*

- Consultation participation rates.
- Diversity of participants.
- Event attendance.
- Volunteer involvement.
- Community satisfaction indicators.

An annual communications and engagement report shall be presented to Council.

## **ANNUAL COMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN**

An annual action plan will identify:

- Priority campaigns.
- Major projects.
- Key consultations.
- Community events.
- Partnership initiatives.
- Performance targets.

Current examples may include:

- Brunner Guildhall restoration and reopening.
- Barton Stadium and Wharton Recreation Ground developments.
- Community energy initiatives.
- Environmental and sustainability projects.
- Civic events and commemorations.
- Youth engagement activities.
- Community grant programmes.

## **REVIEW**

This Strategy and Policy shall be reviewed every three years or sooner if required by legislative, operational or organisational changes.