

**MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY (DRAFT TWO – 29-08-2024)**

Introduction

This paper should be read in conjunction with the HVPC Communications and Media Policy (CMP) (July 2023).

The policy aims, and identified the areas which need to be considered when undertaking communications either as an officer or Councillor, and on behalf of HVPC, are specified there.

The policy makes it clear that, in order to achieve its objectives, HVPC Councillors and Officers must be aware of their roles and responsibilities in terms of the effective and appropriate use of communications' media.

**The purposes of this strategy paper are, therefore, to identify the ways in which Councillors and officers are able to:**

- contribute to the delivery of HVPC aims, and in particular the communication and media policy objectives;
- enhance relationships with stakeholders;
- deploy, effectively and appropriately, a wide range of communications channels;
- activate and participate in regular community feedback and engagement strategies.

**NB** In order to help Councillors, Officers and Stakeholders understand the relationship between the CMP and the Communications and Media Strategies outlined in this document, extracts *in italics* from the CMP are presented prior to Strategy statements.

**CMP Key Aims**

*... The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media are crucially important in conveying information to the community (...) and to explain(ing) the reasons for particular policies and priorities.*

It is clear that, in terms of media for community engagement, "one size does not fit all". An effective, wide-ranging Communications and Media Strategy requires multiple channels which are used repeatedly and concurrently, as well as independently.

Further, 'soundings' taken from stakeholders about their media engagement are essential in order to keep abreast of trends.

**All HVPC Councillors and Officers play crucial roles in community engagement and have collective and individual opportunities to make a contribution.**

**In order to be MOST effective, media/press engagements need to be planned (whenever possible) and notice of activity shared with fellow Councillors/officers, so that consistent and accurate messaging can be delivered more widely than via, for example, a 'single FB post'.**

*Through the CMP the Council aims to:*

- *be recognised by the public as a Council which is open, accountable, accessible and willing to listen;*
- *find opportunities to share and celebrate the Parish Council's successes;*
- *ensure information is provided about policies and services as well as the democratic process so that people feel more informed about the Parish Council and its work;*
- *communicate public facing information in an accessible way;*
- *ensure negative issues are handled clearly and decisively.*

## **Social Media**

*Social media activity isn't something that stands alone. To be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be included in social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.*

*Members and Officers should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made*

*and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language. (CMP)*

With dozens of local groups in the Holme Valley, Facebook has considerable 'reach'. Whilst posting on HVPC FB page is useful, sharing to a wide range of Community pages, commenting and 'liking' can raise the profile of a 'story'. Councillors with Facebook accounts can contribute very effectively to this strategy.

**NB** As FB Reels, Youtube videos, Instagram, Tiktok, and X etc. are widely regarded as having a larger proportion of young people than Facebook, HVPC needs to develop its presence as time allows and expertise develops.

## **Organisation membership**

In line with FB groups, there are organisations of every complexion in the Holme Valley. Councillors and Officers are active members of such groups and make valuable contributions to their work. In order to ensure HVPC representation, rather than personal interest, the register of organisations needs to be updated regularly and relevant information from and to organisations both gathered and shared. Individual/Ward councillors have a significant role to play in this important.

## **Printed Media**

Still a channel for many people, 'top stories' of HVPC achievements, plans and work with and for the community are highly desirable contributions to the printed media output of HVPC. Repetition of SM and Web stories in printed media is an effective messaging strategy. Individual Councillors can submit 'stories' about their activities as Councillors to the Assistant Clerk for printed publications as well as for social media, or videos. The revitalisation of the Holme Valley Express paper presents opportunities to reach those who refer to printed as opposed to on-line media/

## **Stakeholder meetings**

The establishment of Community and Council stakeholder events is a key strategy for the recognition of community organisations, and showcasing their work which the Council supports via a grants and organisational membership. An annual event, to which grant recipients and local organisations and community groups are invited is to be a highlight of the HVPC calendar with the aim of cementing relationships, developing understanding and awareness, and expanding the involvement of the Holme Valley public in their community. Kirklees Councillors, representing Wards in the Holme Valley have an important role to play alongside their Parish Council Colleagues, particularly in terms of sharing important information and building relationships with HVPC stakeholders.

## **Surveys**

Regular 'soundings' of the Holme Valley communities' perceptions of HVPC, its roles and responsibilities, and its effectiveness is a key engagement and improvement strategy, highly recommended by Communications professionals. Councillors and Officers have opportunities to distribute paper versions and alert their contacts to on-line submissions at organisation and HVPC meetings, fairs and festival stands and via websites, social media and HVPC email distribution list.

## **Branding and Internet Presence**

The HVPC website is currently undergoing a review, concurrent with a rebranding. The need for clear, accessible and engaging online and media presence is driving improvements. Once complete (2024/5) there will be a re-launch, promoted to all community stakeholders and members.

## Council Meetings and Councillor Communications and Surgeries

All HVPC committee meetings are open to the public and video recordings posted on Youtube, with the exception of items held in private session due to sensitive information. All Councillors and the HVPC Clerk are available for contact via their Council email, details of which can be found on the HVPC website or by contacting the Office. Surgeries in individual Wards are one way in which the relevant Councillor can meet with their constituents.

## Public Events

Each year HVPC hosts or attends a number of events. The 'theme' of stands varies from year to year but reflects Council priorities. Councillors and Officers attend and help organise the stand, which is an opportunity to share HVPC information, meet constituents, build relationships and gather information.

## External 'Media'

*The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Officers and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. (CMP)*

The HVPC Chair and Clerk, jointly, take responsibility for media and press releases as necessary. Councillors and other Officers must take advice from the Clerk and Chair on matters on which they wish to comment on behalf of the HVPC.

## Notices

*The Council website will be used to convey information on matters of interest and latest news and will be updated regularly by the Clerks. The Council notice boards will be used for the advertising of agendas, minutes and other Council information along with occasional matters of local interest and the latest news. Every effort will be made to ensure notices are as accessible as possible. (CMP)*

## Consistency, Accuracy and Transparency, and Internal Communication

**NB** "Tone of voice" in all communications needs careful consideration and a consistent and appropriate approach. i.e. friendly, formal, enthusiastic, etc. All who those communicate internally and externally, including people who are commissioned to communicate on behalf of HVPC, need to adhere to these principles.

In outlining the activities which are commensurate with the role of HVPC in communicating with its local community and stakeholders, and delivering its policy objectives, **there are three over-arching requirements for success.**

- 1) **Effective messaging, regardless of media format or channel, requires consistency.** Councillors and Officers will strive to achieve this by ensuring they 'cross-reference' their contributions on behalf of HVPC to all media platforms, and where appropriate liaise with Officers or the Council Chair.
- 2) **Interpretation – or rather misinterpretation – of information is to be avoided at all costs.** The distribution of false information brings the Council into disrepute and undermines the integrity of the role of elected members or employed officers. Commenting, as a Councillor or Officer of HVPC must be clear, transparent and accurate using information available from the Clerk, or Chair as appropriate. The use of 'simple language' in all forms of communication is a good bench mark. i.e. avoiding technical language or acronyms, using full and complete sentences and site sources. For written communications "Readability" is essential. Guides to checking text can be found here.

**NB** Cllrs comments in social media on community issues need very careful handling. Comments must not include making promises or giving opinions; rather Cllrs should be seen to be supporting residents to get information from appropriate sources whilst avoiding personal opinions or political campaigning.

- 3) **Silo working is often a function of focus and getting things done .. but frequently leads to misunderstandings and waste of time.** Effective internal communication can alleviate problems, avoid misinterpretation and save time and effort. As a simple rule of thumb ask 'who else needs to know this or has an interest in this matter ? Better to share information and alert people than exclude. However, strings of one-word emails can result in the loss of detail and focus.

**NB** Training on the use of tools which enable the sharing of "live" documents, or encourage upskilling on other IT tools may be helpful.

Sarah Whitelaw CACE CHAIR 2029/08/2024