

2026-27 Hassocks Parish Council

Public Communications Strategy

1. Context

This strategy aims to improve the quality of public communications by Hassocks Parish Council and support the delivery of the 2024-29 business plan – with a particular focus on the key area of ‘Engaging with the Community’. The strategy aims to give staff the flexibility to communicate effectively with residents, while ensuring that communications content and time/resource expenditure are appropriate, and in line with council policy.

Currently, public communications by the Council (particularly on social media) are restricted to manage limited staff resources. The addition of a Community Engagement Officer, and the aspects of the 2024-29 business plan that require public engagement and information, justify and require an increase in The Council’s public communications.

2. Content

2.1. Voice and tone

‘Voice’ is the consistent, overarching personality or style of The Council’s public communications. ‘Tone’ is the specific attitude or emotional quality conveyed in any communication. While voice is consistent, tone varies depending on the context, audience, or situation.

- **Voice (who we are):** We are the local council of a great place to live, work and play. Our voice is always helpful, inclusive and upbeat.
- **Tone (how we say it):** Depending on context we can speak as a ‘Proud friend’ or ‘Respected authority’, with a range of tones in between.

Examples of tone

- **Proud friend:** This is our most upbeat tone for celebrating everything we love about Hassocks – our wonderful environment or culture, or the success of a local group, business or resident. We are inclusive by being proud friends to all rather than promoting one group or cause over another. Being helpful is less important when using this tone, but we are helping residents to discover more to love about Hassocks.
- **Informative neighbour:** That person on your street who always know what bins should go out tomorrow. We are not shouting warnings at people but sharing what it would be helpful to know. We are inclusive by sharing a wide range of information relevant to different groups. Wherever possible we are upbeat e.g. focussing on how this weekend’s inconvenient road works will improve traffic flow in the future.
- **Disappointed parent:** This is our tone when discussing littering or other ASB which harms the community spaces and facilities we all value. We remain upbeat while expressing disappointment, not aiming to encourage anger or conflict. We are inclusive by showing that we care about the whole community and not using language antagonistic to any particular group and are helpful by providing information that can help address this issue in future.

- **Good listener:** This is our tone when in listening mode e.g. in consultations or seeking residents' opinions. We are upbeat (Hassocks is great, tell us how it could be better), helpful (we will do our best to act on this feedback) and inclusive (we want to hear everyone's views).
- **Respected authority:** This is our tone when communicating serious public health and safety information - usually relayed by other authorities. This is distinct from our 'Informative neighbour' tone and is used sparingly. In this tone our voice is less distinct as we are often passing on information.

2.2. Core purposes

Any public communications on behalf of The Council must clearly serve at least one of two approved purposes.

Purpose 1: *'Informing the public of, or encouraging participation in, the work, activities and responsibilities of the Parish Council, or of relevant District and County Councils.'*

Examples:

- **Council meeting notices and agendas:** Dates, times, venues, agenda highlights, and how residents can attend or submit questions.
- **Consultations and calls for feedback:** Invitations to comment on Council plans, facilities, traffic concerns, public spaces, or local priorities.
- **Updates on Parish Council projects and services:** Progress on playgrounds, open spaces, allotments, noticeboards, the Parish Centre, environmental work, or community engagement projects.
- **Service updates:** News about local services and whether they are provided by the Parish, District or County Councils, or other organisations.
- **Opportunities to get involved in The Council:** Councillor vacancies, committee participation, volunteering linked to Council activities or events

Purpose 2: *'Promoting public understanding of the social, civic, economic and ecological life of Hassocks, including sharing information on local social and civic events and organisations.'*

Examples:

- **Historical or ecological information:** Pictures of historic Hassocks, information about famous residents or events, sightings of local wildlife and nature updates.
- **Local community events and activities:** Event flyers, and information about fairs, exhibitions, talks, open days or other activities run by local organisations.
- **Special interest days:** Recognising special interest and diversity days, festivals and celebrations e.g. Black History Month, Pride etc.
- **Business or tourist information:** Promotions by local shops, information on local walks and transport connections.

2.3. Visuals

Visuals are increasingly central to effective communications and community engagement. Residents often encounter Council information quickly, on phones and social media, where strong

visuals (photos, graphics, or videos) are essential for messages to stand out. Residents have stronger visual expectations when engaging with offline media – from posters to publications.

We have a beautiful and active village with striking local landmarks, and great community venues. These strengths all lend themselves well to utilising great photography across our public communications.

With our refreshed brand and consistent style guide (see below) we can supplement photography with high quality graphics.

2.4. Sources

Our process for creating content will follow the responsibility rules in the Communications Policy. Content sources will include:

- **Meetings:** Announcements, agendas, minutes/official records and decisions.
- **Partners:** Information from partner agencies and councils.
- **Community groups:** We will follow the rules on third-party content in our Communications Policy.
- **Councillors:** Individual councillors and committees will have topics they want to have shared.
- **Hirers:** Information about clubs, societies and other groups using our facilities.
- **Events, projects and activities:** Updates about council led events, projects and activities.
- **Research:** We may carry out research to inform communications on specific issues.
- **Business Plan:** When delivering on aims and objectives, we will work to keep residents informed and to celebrate the successful work of The Council.
- **News searches:** We will regularly check news search results for [Hassocks](#), [Hassocks Council](#) and [Hassocks Parish](#) and subscribe to a Google Alert for 'Hassocks Parish'.

We will aim to maximise the efficiency and reusability of content. For example, creating a news article and Facebook post about the same story that we have included in a *Hassocks Life* article, or scheduling a recurring post about facilities.

3. Channels

3.1. Main channels

Our main communications channels are the website, Facebook, ebulletin, noticeboards, Hassocks Life and local press. Together they provide digital and printed routes to reach residents, visitors, groups and other stakeholders. Our voice is consistent across all channels, but different channels lend themselves more to specific content types and therefore different tone.

Facebook

Our main online platform for broad based local engagement. We post to our page and reshare important posts in Hassocks Uncovered.

Core content: Broad range of news about The Council and local community.	Regularity: Regular 4-7 posts a week.	Third party content: Yes. We prefer to reshare news and events from local groups, rather than posting it ourselves.	Responsibility: Community Engagement Officer/Clerk
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We will continue to review the extent to which we have comments open on Facebook posts- keeping these closed in the short term and moving towards a case-by-case approach depending on experience and capacity. We will have a clear plan for when and how to close comments where these are disproportionate or unproductive.

Website

The main place for residents to get more detailed information on Council activities, meetings, events and services, and links to other local information.

Core content: Any content related to the two purposes in our Communications Policy.	Regularity: Regular 1+ news articles a week, 1+ meetings post a week.	Third party content: Events and community groups can be submitted for listing.	Responsibility: Community Engagement Officer/Clerk.
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Ebulletin

Newsletter or special announcements sent to subscriber mailing list.

Core content: Round up of news and meetings and any special messages from the Parish Council.	Regularity: Monthly	Third party content: Limited. May link to partner information or contain a list of upcoming events.	Responsibility: Community Engagement Officer/Clerk.
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Noticeboards

Current Parish Council noticeboards and any new ones we may install or take over management of, and the leaflet table in the Parish Centre.

Core content: Wide range of local information.	Regularity: Reviewed once a month, with any inappropriate or outdated content removed. Total refresh twice a year.	Third party content: Yes. Community groups can submit A5/A4 posters or flyers to be posted. Must have contact details and follow rules. Groups may post directly on some noticeboards.	Responsibility: Community Engagement Officer to monitor content and manage requests.
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Publications Posters, leaflets, and larger reports.			
Core content: Information about The Council	Regularity: Occasional	Third party content: N/A	Responsibility: Community Engagement Officer/Clerk with content agreed by relevant committee/working group.
Hassocks Life Local magazine. We have a paid for double page spread.			
Core content: Varied updates from The Council	Regularity: Every other month. Press releases or quotes could be sent occasionally for news articles beyond our double page spread.	Third party content: N/A	Responsibility: Community Engagement Officer with content agreed with Policy, Resources & Communications Committee (PR&C).
Local press Mid Sussex Times, The Argus, BBC South East etc.			
Core content: Major local news stories, and announcements of new programmes or resources.	Regularity: Irregular, largely reactive to requests for comment. Occasionally proactive – e.g. press release about new facilities or projects of wider community interest.	Third party content: N/A	Responsibility: Community Engagement Officer/Clerk with content agreed by relevant committee/working group.

Email and offline written communications with residents and other stakeholders are not ‘public communications’ but should maintain The Council’s voice and tone.

3.2. Minor channels

Minor channels are those which The Council may use occasionally for specific purposes, but where we have no ongoing aims to create content, and no plans for ongoing engagement. We also do not offer any responses on these channels, and do not share third party content.

- **LinkedIn:** We should create claim ownership of the [company profile](#) automatically created on LinkedIn and brand it. We will only use this page for advertising staff, volunteer and councillor vacancies, and to validate identities.

- **YouTube:** We should create a channel to host any videos of events or other promotional/invitational films. These could be unlisted with closed comments and embedded in articles to make clearer that we are not using this channel for engagement, but simply as a hosting service.

3.3. Unused channels

We will continue to review alternative channels (e.g. Instagram or WhatsApp, BlueSky etc.) and the desirability of establishing a council presence there. However, have no active plans to do so.

Maintaining an active Twitter presence would be inefficient and carries potential for reputational harm. Our [Twitter account](#) should remain dormant, and links to it should be removed from the website.

4. Events and consultations

4.1. Events

We will publicise council meetings and strengthen our ability to deliver events including:

- Consultation events
- Annual Parish Meeting
- Remembrance

We will look for opportunities for The Council to establish a presence for outreach (and better promote our support for) local events including Light Up Hassocks, Hassocks Market and Oldland Mill open days.

4.2. Consultations

We will use effective communications to promote engagement in consultation regarding

- Local developments
- Use of S106 funds (e.g. Adastra Park improvements or the Ockley Park community centre)
- Transportation
- The needs of specific groups or communities
- Other projects or initiatives

5. Projects - 2026/27

5.1. Business Plan projects

- **Website and branding:** We will fulfil our objective to 'Review our branding and website and maximise its use as a communications tool.' by having a significant refresh but not a comprehensive redevelopment of our website and branding.
- **Noticeboards:** We will 'review Parish Centre noticeboards' in line with the business plan. We'll consider improvements to Council owned noticeboards and potential new sites around the village and ensure a fair and consistent approach to third-party content.

5.2. Other communications and engagement projects

- **Community event:** We will look for opportunities to develop a Community Showcase event separate to the Annual Parish Meeting. This event could incorporate a 'Newcomers Reception'. We will avoid replication of the Adastra Hall 'Hassocks on Show' event which runs every other year. This could include combining the Community Showcase and 'Hassocks on Show' into a joint event.
- **Ebulletin:** Creating a monthly ebulletin would strengthen direct resident engagement. Using mostly repurposed content, we could build a mailing list for future engagement on specific projects or issues.
- **Event and community group listing:** A website listing will help residents find local activities and support community participation. We could develop a process for groups to make submissions, which ensures a consistent fair approach, while managing staff time and resources.
- **Follower audit:** We will review who we are currently following on social media, to ensure that we are able to connect with local businesses, community and civic groups, and to ensure we have a consistent approach.
- **Welcome pack:** We will create a new residents welcome pack to inform newcomers of The Council and our responsibilities, promote local businesses and encourage participation in local civic life.
- **Style guide:** We will follow the [Local Government Association's \(LGA\) writing style guide](#) by default, as well as codifying specific rules on how we use our brand (including the formatting of any branded materials) or other terms not covered by the LGA guide.
- **Email signatures:** To increase our professional appearance and enhance the use of Hassocks Parish Council branding, all council email accounts should use a consistently formatted email footer/signature.

6. Reporting

Communications policy: *'Staff should monitor and regularly report to the Policy, Resources & Communications Committee on the effectiveness of Council communications.'*

For each meeting of the PR&C, the Community Engagement Officer will prepare an update on:

- Statistics on the following for each of the three proceeding months, with commentary on any significant changes or feedback:
 - Facebook: Page followers and reach
 - Website: Unique page visitors and number of new posts (news stories, meetings or events)
 - Ebulletin: Subscribers and total emails opened
- Any feedback on or issues with noticeboards or existing publications.
- Plans for any new publications.
- Plans for the next *Hassocks Life* article and any feedback on the previous article.

- Details of any local press enquiries or mentions of the Parish Council.
- Project planning, attendance at or feedback from any Council events.
- Number of responses to any Council consultations or surveys, and commentary on those responses.
- Any planned communications activities related to specific projects or activities.
- Information regarding Council consultations.

7. Mitigating risks

7.1. Risks

- Increased communications increase opportunities for negative public feedback – particularly on two-way channels such as social media. It can also create displacement e.g. complaints, feedback or requests for information coming in via social media channels or unrelated social media posts, which would previously come in via email or directly to the office.
- We don't have an existing history of active communications meaning we have few online followers.
- Certain issues (particularly anti-social behaviour and new housing developments) can attract disproportionate negative engagement regardless of the Parish Council's position or responsibilities.
- Strong local media (e.g. *Hassocks Life*) and engaged online community (e.g. Hassocks Uncovered) are strengths and potential drivers of engagement. However, they give the potential for negative engagements to spread quickly.
- Older residents are less engaged with online communications.
- Lack of engagement from new/outlying developments and residents.

7.2. Mitigation

- A clear voice (helpful, inclusive and upbeat), a well thought out range of tones and consistent approach.
- Focus on uncontroversial and feelgood posts with wide appeal.
- Clear explanation/justification for why we share certain content in certain ways, and stock responses for common complaints.
- Build up trust and familiarity slowly and steadily.
- Manage expectations and set clear rules, particularly around third-party content.