



Penrith Town Council

Communications Policy

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Introduction

1.1. The aim of Penrith Town Council ("the Council") is to communicate clearly and effectively within the Council, to the media and to the public. As the tier of local government closest to the community, communication between the Council and the public is essential for information sharing, access to services and for local democracy.

1.2. The Council is committed to improving its reputation and to promoting a positive image of its services, employees and councillors.

1.3. This document aims to establish a comprehensive policy for effective communication of the Council's activities and pertinent information within the organisation, to the media, to partners and to members of the public.

2. Monitoring

2.1. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the Council's communications have been identified to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy:

- Engagement across all platforms
- Number of posts (including number of articles produced for printed mediums)
- Website traffic
- Media mentions

2.2. This policy will be reviewed at the beginning of each new council term at the Communities Committee according to these KPI's.

3. Responsibility

3.1. Responsibility for Council communications starts at the highest level of the organisation and filters through to all other levels. The Councillors and Council Officers recognise communication as a priority for the Council. They play a role in communicating important information and decisions throughout the organisation, and represent the Council to the public, partners and the media.

3.2. The Town Clerk has overall responsibility for Council communications and provides guidance to the Council to undertake planned communications activities, to ensure a consistent approach within Council guidelines.

3.3. The Communities Committee has overall responsibility for community engagement and plays a strategic role in Council communications and approves new areas of work.

4. Core Principles

4.1. The underlying principle of all council communication, internal and external, is a focus to engage residents and stakeholders on Council matters.

4.2. To achieve this, there must be a consistent and strategic approach to communications across the council, using best practice. The following core principles underpin the Council's communications strategy:

- Clear – jargon free communication using Plain English which is easy to understand
- Transparent - ensuring information is as widely available as possible
- Accessible - communications should be accessible for all
- Adaptive – tailored content for specific audiences
- Collaborative – utilise both formal and informal partnerships to maximise engagement

5. External Communications

5.1. External communications are those processes responsible for communicating with people and organisations outside of the Council.

5.2. Effective external communication with the community is essential for access to information, services and for local democracy.

5.3. The Council recognises that:

- All people within Penrith should be involved in the decisions that affect them
- All people within Penrith deserve high quality public services, shaped around their needs
- The Council's policies and strategies should reflect local priorities, requirements and the aspirations and vision of the community of Penrith.
- The community is diverse
- There is a need to provide appropriate opportunities for local people and the community to participate at whatever level they wish to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development

5.4. Defining those processes for communication is therefore essential to ensuring the effectiveness of the Council's external communications.

6. Who the Council Communicates with

6.1. Key groups (not exhaustive) the Council will communicate with on various matters include the following:

- Residents
- Councillors
- Businesses and Business Networks (Penrith BID, Penrith Industrial BID and Penrith Chamber of Trade)
- Voluntary sector organisations
- Community groups (formal and informal) including resident groups (by Ward)
- MPs, local government (Westmorland & Furness Council) and national government as appropriate
- Local, regional, trade and national media

7. How the Council Communicates

Type	Mechanism	Frequency	Medium
Council News, information and decisions	Newsletters	Monthly	Website / Email / Social media / Printed / Recordings / Noticeboard
	Press Releases	Ad hoc	Website / Email / Council office / Social media / Press
	Posts	Ad hoc	Social Media
	Councillors	Daily	Face-to-face / Social media
	Annual Report	Annually	Website / Email / Council office / Social media / Press
Meetings	Public participation	As per meeting Schedule	Council Meetings

	Agendas	As per meeting schedule	Website / Email / Library / Council Office / Website
	Draft and approved minutes	As per Meeting Schedule	Website / Email / Library / Council Office / Website
Council policies and financial information	Policies / procedures	Policies reviewed according to schedule	Website / Council Office
	Annual External Audit	Annually	Website
	Adopted Annual Accounts	Annually	Website
	Financial statements and other financial information	Ad hoc	Website
Partner organisations	Newsletter	Ad hoc	Website / Email / Council office / Social media / Recordings
	Posts	Ad hoc	Social Media
	Links	Ad hoc	Website

8. What the Council communicates

8.1. The Council will use its mechanisms for Communication to engage with the public and our various stakeholder groups about the Council's services, facilities and other information including:

- How the Council works
- The Council's values
- What services the Council provides and where and how to access these services
- Changes to these services
- Resolving problems or complaints about these services

- How to contact Council officers and Councillors
- How to provide feedback and opinions on different Council policies, decisions, and activities
- Who our partners are and how we work with them
- The Council's role in the wider community
- Councillor and staff vacancies
- Our successes
- Who local Councillors are and what their role is
- Where and how the Council can help and support stakeholders
- How stakeholders can influence the Council's policies, plans and activities
- How stakeholders are or can become involved with the Council's services
- What the Council's policies are
- Events and activities in and around Penrith (including Council events)
- Information of benefit to the people of Penrith

9. Community Engagement

9.1. The Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to engage the community on its decisions and actions. The Council recognises that this is a two-way process which the Council must take every effort to facilitate.

10. Social Media

10.1. Social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing and aggregation of content, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks.

10.2. Social media is an effective means of communicating council business and other pertinent information with the Penrith public and facilitates a two-way process for community engagement.

10.3. The Council currently has a presence on a number of social media platforms including:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- X (formerly Twitter)
- govDelivery (email distribution)
- YouTube

10.4. The Council's Officers manage the Council's presence on these social media platforms and communicates relevant information. The performance of these social media accounts are routinely monitored through a

“Communications Update” brought to each meeting of the Communities Committee.

10.5. The Council Officers reply to direct messages and (where relevant) comments generated by its use of social media.

10.6. Where relevant, and with the agreement of the Council Chair, the Council may also respond directly to some posts about the Council which are not factually correct.

11. Website

11.1. The Council website is an important part of the Council’s engagement with the Penrith community. The Council’s website:

www.penrithtowncouncil.gov.uk will be up-to-date and provide a hub of information for the Penrith community.

12. Council Meetings

12.1. All members of the public are welcomed and encouraged to attend any Council meeting. Council meetings include:

- Full Council
- Finance Committee
- Planning Committee
- Communities Committee

12.2. The dates of all meetings are publicised through the noticeboard, the Council website, email and social media.

12.3. Public Participation is available at all public meetings and is held at the beginning of the meeting:

- It is helpful if a member of the public who wishes to speak at a meeting makes a request to speak in writing to the Town Clerk PRIOR to the meeting. They will be able to speak at the discretion of the Chair
- Their name will not be recorded in the minutes of the meeting
- The Chair will invite them to stand/sit in location where they can be clearly heard
- They can speak for a maximum of 3 minutes per meeting
- Supplementary questions will be allowed for a maximum of 2 minutes
- The Council may reply at the meeting or may write to them
- They must not interrupt speakers or speak during the Councillor’s debate
- They must not hold conversations with other members of the public during meetings

- Members of the public who become disruptive during the meeting will be asked by the Chair to leave
- Electors in the parish area are able to take part fully in the Annual Town Meeting which may be called by the Chair or by residents following legal guidelines

13. Councillors

13.1. Councillors represent views and opinions of the community, support local organisations, campaign on local issues, and develop links with all parts of the community. Councillors act as a voice for local people, help individual residents and represent their local area.

13.2. Councillors are involved in a range of roles within the community and is available to their electors to engage in a range of local issues, raising these with the Town Council or other body as appropriate.

13.3. To effectively engage the community, Councillors should have regular contact with the community through any of the following:

- Council meetings
- Email
- Letters
- Telephone calls
- Social media
- Residents meetings (resident associations, walks around their ward, etc)

14. Contacting the office

14.1. Residents and visitors are welcome to put forward their thoughts, ideas, concerns, criticisms or worries by telephone, email, social media or in writing and the Town Council will consider and respond to all such communications.

- Address: Unit 1, Church House, 19-24 Friargate, Penrith, Cumbria. CA11 7XR
- Telephone: 01768 899773
- Email: office@penrithtowncouncil.gov.uk
- Facebook & Instagram: Penrith Town Council Cumbria
- X: Penrith Town Council

15. Consultation

15.1. Whilst Councillors are elected to represent the views of the people through their daily contact with constituents, Councillors cannot be aware of the views of all the people they represent on every issue. It is therefore essential for the Council to undertake additional forms of consultation as and when necessary.

15.2. The Council has an approved Consultation Policy which gives guidance on consultation. The policy can be found on the Council website.

16. Petitions

16.1. The Town Council encourages community feedback and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let the council know their concerns.

16.2. The Council has an approved Petitions Policy which gives guidance on petitions. The policy can be found on the Council website.

17. Media Engagement

17.1. The Council is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities.

17.2. The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet ("the media").

17.3. The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. If the views of councillors are different to the Council's corporate position and views, they will make this clear.

18. Press Releases

18.1. Press releases are the primary means of official communication with the media.

18.2. Guidelines for the Council's press releases have been detailed below:

- Press releases from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Town Clerk or an officer
- The Town Clerk will clear all press releases with the oversight of the Chair (or Deputy Chair) of the Council or the Chair of the relevant committee

- Press releases should include a quote from Chair of the Council or the Chair of the relevant committee
- The press release will always include an officer contact that should be available to speak to the media to give more information if required
- If a photo / video is circulated with the media release, this needs to be a good quality image / video

19. Statements

19.1. Statements to the media are issued to communicate the council's position on a specific issue. They should therefore be short and to the point. The approval process for statements to the media is the same as press releases.

20. Officer interaction

20.1. Officers may contact the media directly if the Council wants to provide information or any other material about the Council. In this capacity, Officers can act as formal spokesperson(s) for the organisation. The Town Clerk will clear any information shared with the media with the oversight of the Chair (or Deputy Chair) of the Council.

21. Councillor interaction

21.1. Councillors develop their own direct relationships with journalists and the Council recognises that any councillor may talk to a journalist at any time. However, it is important to distinguish between a councillor voicing their own opinions and one who is formally representing the Council on an issue.

21.2. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, if asked for comment by the press they should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

21.3. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it, should be sent to the Clerk, and the writer should note on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

22. Elections

22.1. During elections, the council's media interaction will be superseded by election protocols, where the law restricts the type of publicity that councils

can undertake and who can be quoted in statements and publicity issued by the council, as well as who can be involved in publicity during this period.

22.2. During this period:

- Councillors will not be quoted in any publicity nor feature or take part in any material promoting the work of the council
- Where quotations are needed these will be attributed to the Town Clerk or to a Council spokesperson
- Councillors and officers will be informed in advance of the restrictions imposed by election protocols

23. Monitoring

23.1. Council Officers will produce a summary of all external communications along with any (relevant) media coverage concerning "Penrith Town Council" which at relevant meetings of the Communities Committee.

24. Internal Communications

24.1. Internal communications are those processes responsible for communicating within the Council.

24.2. Internal communication is essential for the Council to keep councillors informed about ongoing projects, good news stories, external / partner organisations and other key issues.

24.3. When councillors are well-informed and aligned with the council's goals and priorities, they can effectively communicate council decisions, initiatives, and policies to the community.

24.4. Internal communication is therefore a priority for effective communication with the Penrith community.

25. Mechanisms for Communication

Activity	Medium
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Members briefing	In-person / online
Members update	Email
General information	Email
Council Meetings	In-person

26. What the Council communicates

26.1. The Council will use its mechanisms for Communication to engage with councillors about:

- Council services
- Council assets
- Officer workplans
- Dates of Council meetings and committees
- Issues / opportunities
- Policies
- Latest news

27. Equality Communications

27.1. Some people may need information in languages and formats other than written or spoken English. Accessible communication is fair, inclusive, and makes good business sense. We will ensure that the views, comments and opinions of all our diverse local communities are considered. We will make it easy for people to access information, collaborate with us to shape decision making.

28. Interpreting, translation and transcription (ITT) service

28.1. We want to make sure that everyone can fully understand our messages. We aim to provide you with information in your preferred language or format. Translation services are provided on the Council website. Translation services will be available upon request for surveys and consultations. The Council's website will comply with Accessibility Regulations.

29. Alternative Text

29.1. Alternative (Alt) Text describes an image which then enables screen readers to read the information for the benefit of a person with visual impairments, low vision, different learning abilities, and for people who cannot otherwise view an image online.

29.2. Guidance for good practice in relation to alt text can be viewed below:

- Alt text should be specific and not overly descriptive
- Good descriptions are concise but describe what's in your images accurately enough to understand their context
- Stay clear of repetition
- Never start your alt text with 'image of' as this will be obvious to the user
- Include any essential text or data that's part of the visual
- Images that already have a caption describing the image, may not need additional alt text
- Screen readers will pause and stop when you tell them to but, depending on user settings, might not announce exclamation or question marks
- Alt text is used by search engines too, so using alt text can help grow a brand's visibility online

30. Brand Guidelines

30.1. Having a strong brand is essential in purporting an excellent reputation for the Council and is key to helping the Council improve its identity and overall visibility. The Council's identity, which is key to our brand, is made up of seven key elements:

- Logo
- Colour
- Typeface
- Strapline
- The words 'Penrith Town Council'
- penrithtowncouncil.gov.uk
- Style

30.2. These seven key elements form the basis of our brand guidelines. The guidelines can be used by officers and councillors alike to ensure they are always promoting the professional council brand when communicating on behalf of the council.

31. Logo

31.1. The logo is our primary means of identification. Its consistent use helps the public understand the services that we provide on their behalf as well as maintaining a positive and professional image.

31.2. There are two versions of the council logo which can be used: the full and the shortened version. These different versions can also be reproduced without the text "Penrith Town Council". The logo should always be produced

in our corporate colour, where this is not possible it should be reproduced in greyscale or white (against a colour background).

31.3. Examples are shown in the table below.

Full Version	Shortened version
	
	
	
	

32. Colour

32.1. The Council’s primary corporate brand colour is dark red which is shown below in point 33.

32.2. The overwhelming appearance of the brand should be dark red against white.

32.3. Secondary colours can be introduced to add accents of colour to help bring a layout to life. Any additional colours should (where possible) be chosen from the secondary palette detailed below.

32.4. It is important that the primary colour is dominant, and use of the secondary colours remains secondary.

33. Penrith Town Council Colour Palette:

Name	Hex	RGB	CMYK
Corporate Dark Red	#9A3321	R 154 G 51 B 33	C 0 M 40 Y 47 K 40
Black	#000000	R 0 G 0 B 0	C0 M 0 Y 0 K 100
Blue - Pantone P 114-5 C	#3A87AD	R 58 G 135 B 173	C 45 M 15 Y 0 K 32
Orange – Pantone 1665 C	#E9490B	R 233 G 73 B 11	C 0 M 34 Y 67 K 7
Purple - Pantone 7442 C	#8935B7	R 137 G 53 B 183	C 18 M 51 Y 0 K 28
Pink - Pantone 7424 C	#DA337A	R 218 G 51 B 122	C 0 M 65 Y 38 K 15
Red - Pantone 193 C	#C31F41	R 195 G 31 B 65	C 0 M 64 Y 51 K 24
Burnt Purple - Pantone 249 C	#802064	R 128 G 32 B 100	C 0 M 38 Y 11 K 50
Green – Pantone P 152-16 C	#2D8133	R 45 G 129 B 51	C 33 M 0 Y 31 K 49
Dark Blue – Pantone 7462 C	#00588D	R 0 G 88 B 141	C 55 M 21 Y 0 K 45

34. Typeface

34.1. The agreed typeface/font for all Council communication is Verdana. This typeface/font has been chosen as it is designed to be easily read at different sizes and distances making it Dyslexia friendly.

34.2. Ideally 12pt should be used, it is the preferred size to meet accessibility guidelines.

35. Style

35.1. Language

The Council recognises the importance of using accessible language when communicating with the community.

Communication will endeavour to:

Use Plain English:

- Keep sentences short and paragraphs to 3 or 4 sentences
- Use active not passive verbs and sentences
- Use everyday words, avoiding jargon
- Where acronyms are used, the full meaning should be used initially with the acronym in brackets

Reflect our Values:

- Equality Recognition - Everyone is of equal value and should be respected according to individual needs and abilities.
- Reasonableness - To be fair, reasonable and just in all council activities
- Accessibility - Providing equal access for all in employment and service delivery.
- Empowerment - Helping individuals take on responsibility so that they can influence and participate in the decision-making process.
- Quality - Obtaining the highest standards in service delivery

36. Strapline

36.1. "Working with you to make a difference". This is part of our brand and must always appear in Verdana.

Adopted:

Reviewed each new term of Penrith Town Council.