Gainford & Langton Parish Council

Communication and Engagement Strategy: 2021 - 2025

Introduction

This strategy will guide the Parish Council's communication and engagement activities with everyone they have contact with, either directly or indirectly. It is based on the guiding principle that effective communication is two-way and should enable the Parish Council to inform people about what we do and to actively listen to what people tell us about themselves and the service improvements they need or would like.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this document is to provide a procedural framework for Parish Council communications to deliver the following objectives:

- To develop and maintain effective communications
- To effectively inform residents and stakeholders of the aims, objectives and activity of the Parish Council
- To encourage and support residents and stakeholders to be involved with the Parish Council or other community groups and organisations
- To use a variety of contemporary communication methods to ensure effective communication with all stakeholders and
- To build and maintain trust by being accessible, open, and transparent.

Stakeholders

We aspire to reach everyone with an interest in the villages of Gainford and Langton, i.e., the people who live, work, or do business here and people who have an influence in the future of the area. This includes for example:

Village residents (individuals)	Local businesses and employers
The Village Hall	Voluntary groups
Local schools	Older people
Young people	Youth service providers
County Council Officers	Elected County Councillors
Parish Clerk	Parish Councillors
Other Parish Councils	Local agencies (inc. Police)
MPs	Opinion formers (inc. politicians and journalists)

Community groups & organisations (a full list of which is published in the Parish Magazine).

The Role of Parish Councillors

Parish Councillors are elected representatives of the community in which they live and are governed by a Code of Conduct which encourages open, informed, timely and courteous communication at all times. Access to this code shall be made available on the Parish Council's website, under the heading "Parish Council", by accessing the Documents Archive then via link to the statutory documents section.

Proactive Communication & Engagement Methods

The Parish Council will use a variety of proactive methods to reach people in an efficient, appropriate and cost effective manner, including:

Methods	Strategy for Delivery
Parish Councilors contact details	To be published widely to encourage open access
Parish Council website	www.gainfordlangtonparishcouncil.org.uk to be maintained
Parish Council notice boards	Two notice boards maintained in Gainford and Langton villages; updated monthly as a minimum
Parish Council social media	Facebook account maintained
Parish Council meetings	All meetings (including committees) open to the public and press and publicised as such – except items exempt
Parish Council agendas and minutes	To be made available to all, both electronically and in hard copy, displayed on the Parish Council notice boards, and a copy on request.
Parish Council Newsletter	To be published monthly in the Parish News
Press releases	To be released to local media on significant points of interest or achievement
Parish Councillors' visiting & networking	Commitment to regular involvement with local groups, organisations and clubs at events or meetings
Community events	To attend or host community events seeking to hear resident's views on specific issues or developments

The delivery plan for the methods outlined in the table above is detailed in the annual Gainford & Langton Community Engagement – Annual Statement of Intent.

Responding to Correspondence and Contact

The Parish Council defines correspondence and contact as either formal or informal, to manage workload and enable acceptable standards to be established and met. Formal correspondence, either by letter, email, phone call or text, includes the following:
- Contact requiring or requesting a formal reply
- Contact from Parishioners or stakeholders (as outlined in 'Stakeholders')
- Complaints
- Telephone contact
- Contact from bodies such as the Government and CDALC
- Regulatory or legislative correspondence
- Freedom of Information (FOI) requests
- Correspondence directly relating to the Parish Council's governance e.g., insurance, audits, quotations etc.

Comments and views expressed on social media regarding the Parish Council and its activities shall not normally require logging nor necessarily require a response unless, by exception, it is deemed to be appropriate by the Chairman in conjunction with Parish Clerk. It is accepted that by the nature of social media, communication is informal and conversational.

Responses to formal correspondence and contact shall be guided by the following considerations:

Contact	Response Option	Timescale
Phone call, phone message	Phone call, letter or 1:1 meeting	Within 1 week
Letter, e-mail not requiring a response	Acknowledgement via the received route	Within 1 week*
Letter, e-mail requiring a response	Acknowledgement via the received route	Full or holding reply: 2 weeks. Substantive reply: provide timescale in the holding letter

The exception to the above is for unsolicited and/or broad-sweep letters, which require neither logging nor response (e.g. flyers, indiscriminate requests for donations etc.).

A holding reply shall be made where the preparation for a substantive reply will take many days or weeks, or where the matter requires discussion at the next Parish Council meeting. The timescale for the substantive reply shall be stated and the reason for that timescale explained.

*The Parish Clerk shall make all formal written replies available for the Chair to view and offer comment. Councillors will refer any non-official responses to the Clerk
The Clerk will note receipt of all formal contacts including phone calls and phone messages with time and date received as well as the replies. All formal replies made available to the Chair to view and offer comment.

Complaints

Gainford & Langton Parish Council have a complaints procedure that has specific activities and timescales built into it; these shall take precedence over any commitments or timescales stated in this strategy. The complaints procedure may be found on the Parish Council's website, under the heading "Parish Council" and then by accessing the Documents Archive.

Tone and Context of Messages

It is important that all Parish Council communications are as clear and concise as possible. All communications shall endeavor to be:
- Short and to the point; constructive and positive
- In plain English; honest and unambiguous
- Focused on involvement and inclusion
- Based on fact, information, action or achievement
- A clear explanation of what we can do, rather than what we can not, offering possible alternatives where possible
- Clear on timescales for subsequent communication, as appropriate

The following key messages, if appropriate, need to underpin all Parish Council communications:
- Gainford & Langton Parish Council always wishes to make a positive difference
- The Parish Council needs to hear the opinion of others for it to maintain a mandate
- The Parish Council needs the help and support of its community to make improvements and deliver improvement plans

- The Parish Council aims to work in partnership with all its stakeholders for a better future for Gainford & Langton
- Reference to successes, achievements, and recent examples of such
- Recognition and celebration of support, partnerships, successes, and achievement is vital to continuing engagement

Consultation

For matters of no great significance, for example an issue where a 'straw poll' would provide sufficient information, the Parish Council shall carry out informal consultation with its residents via appropriate communication methods such as its website, social media and its notice boards.

However, on occasion, an issue will require formal consultation, in order to understand people's views, needs and support as part of a decision-making process or to provide the Parish Council with a mandate for appropriate representation. The following points are a guide to help select the most appropriate consultation method for the issue in hand:

Scale of Issue	Options for Consideration
A group of houses or a road	Councillor visit, letter drop
Discrete part of either village	Letter drop, Parish News, agenda item
Substantial part of either village	Parish News, special agenda item or meeting
Most or all of either village	Parish News, special agenda item or meeting, public meeting

The above will also be influenced by the importance of the matter (for example if it has minor or significant potential impact), the time available for a response to be formed or the level of detail involved.

Feedback to Parish Council Meetings

To keep the Parish Council informed of progress, developing, and arising issues, there shall be formal feedback as standard Parish Council agenda items. The Chairman (or appointed deputy) shall feedback on any events of the past month and any plans for the forthcoming month and the Parish Clerk shall submit a Progress Report with the meeting papers and support with more detail as appropriate at the Parish Council meetings.

Parish Council Spokesperson

In the event of any media enquiry, the Parish Clerk (in conjunction with the Parish Council Chairman, Vice-Chairman or nominated Councillor), will be responsible for issuing a response from the Parish Council. Individual members of the Parish Council shall clarify – if they are approached for comment directly – whether they are giving an individual opinion or shall be referring the matter to the Parish Clerk for a formal Parish Council response. In any event, notification of any contact with the media shall be made to the Parish Clerk or Chairman as soon as possible.

For specific activities, a Councillor may be nominated as the lead and may be the point of contact on that specific issue, having agreed the approach and plan with the Parish Council. This responsibility shall be recorded in Parish Council minutes. As above, a copy of all communication shall be made to the Parish Clerk or Chairman as soon as possible.

The Parish Council website shall be updated and edited by the Parish Clerk, as will the Facebook account.

Corporate Identity

It is important to reflect the professional image of the Parish Council in all of its corporate correspondence/communication. Letterheads will be printed to a good quality/standard and will include the following image as a logo:

Involvement

Wherever possible, the Parish Council, its committees and working groups shall actively seek to consult a wider audience and encourage and support the involvement of residents and other interested parties in its work.

All memberships and community responsibilities shall be recorded in meeting minutes, the Annual Statement of Intent, and the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting; a log of memberships shall be maintained and made available and appended as an annual record to the Annual Parish Meeting minutes.

Where involvement is requested and is not possible, the reasons for this shall be communicated swiftly, openly, and transparently (see Correspondence and Contact above) and recorded in meeting minutes.

The Parish Council shall actively seek to recognize and perhaps reward involvement and good citizenship. It shall recognize and celebrate individuals or groups in Gainford & Langton who perform a service which benefits or improves the community in part or as a whole. Rewards are at the Parish Council Chairman's discretion, and shall be funded from the Chairman's fund, a budgeted item in the Parish Council's precept.

Communication and Engagement Strategy Review

This Strategy aims to be contemporary and current and therefore its effectiveness and evolvement will be reviewed and steered periodically (at least annually) by the Parish Council. These reviews and a summary of amendments are recorded below:

Date	Revision	Reviewer	Summary of Amendments
3 Nov 21			