

Communications and Engagement

Purpose of this Paper

1. The Council recently adopted six principles and a set of current priorities that direct our work. This paper sets out the Communications Advisory Group's proposals in the light of principle 6 ("We will protect and promote our community resources and work to maximise participation in village life").
2. The Council are invited to discuss the proposals and agree the recommendations.

Communications Principles

3. We propose that our communications and engagement activity should be guided by a set of communications principles:
 - (1) The Council will be proactive in seeking to widen and deepen its communication and engagement with village, especially amongst people who are currently less likely to be engaged.
 - (2) To improve its reach, the Council will focus on utilising broader village communications media, rather than relying solely on stand-alone products based around the work of the Council. This may be achieved adapting by PC initiated activity to have a broader village feel (as the Globe currently does) or by utilising media produced by others (eg What's on Wylam).
 - (3) The Council will develop a forward plan highlighting the key themes and timings for its communications messages.
 - (4) All proposals from Councillors for activity or products will include consideration of how engagement and village-wide communication will inform its development and delivery.
 - (5) The Council will make explicit the importance of demonstrating wide village engagement to support bids for funding for the Council, and all such bids will be required to demonstrate that appropriate community engagement has been undertaken in formulating the proposals and outline the communication and engagement activity planned to maximise village participation in any resultant activities.

The Council are asked to endorse these principles

Proposed Activity

Widening and Deeping our Communication and Engagement with Village

4. The Comms Advisory Group propose that our initial focus should be to improve our engagement with children, young people and families with your people. Specific proposals will be presented to the October meeting.

Forward Planning for Communications and Media Themes

5. The Group propose to produce a “forward look” setting out future themes for communications and media. The first of these will be presented at the October meeting.

Utilising New Media

“What’s on Wylam”

6. “What’s on Wylam” is a Facebook Group used for passing on information about activities and issues in Wylam. It has a large membership (760, and growing, members). Informal use of this group has shown issues can achieve high reach (for example, a recent post of cycling safety received 54 “likes”, 12 “shares” and around 20 supportive comments). Parish Council news has been posted on the site occasionally and informally, and receives a generally positive response.
7. It is proposed we use this site more systemically, posting notices of meeting, agendas, issues of importance to the village, invitations to join in projects or consultations etc.
8. We are due to discuss our social media policy – and our protocols for using social media - more broadly, but the following specific guidelines are proposed:
 - The Chair of Council meetings should be responsible for posting details of the meeting and agendas, and inviting the public to attend.

- All Councillors should consider using the group to inform the village of news, projects, opportunities for engagement or consultations etc, bearing in mind the need for the Council to speak with one voice.
- Posts should be used primarily to communicate facts, with anyone wishing to comment or contribute invited to contact the Council or Councillors away from the site rather than in the public comments section.
- Councillors should monitor any responses to their posts and take responsibility for managing any comments or issues that arise.
- Councillors are free to join in any online discussion, but should avoid engaging in controversial subjects unless there is a clear, agreed Council position. Councillors should make explicit where the position they articulate is an agreed Council position. If they wish to express a personal opinion, they should make explicit what is their own opinion and what is the current position of the Council.
- None of this prevents Councillors from using social media in a personal capacity or their capacity as an individual elected representative.

9. What's on Wylam administration have been contacted about more regular Parish Council use of the group and our content for us to proceed.

The Council are asked to agreed we proceed on this basis.

A "Wylam" Website

10. The Comms Advisory Group would like to explore the appetite and practicalities for supporting the development of a "Wylam" internet presence.

11. There are a number of ways this could support our guiding principles:

- As a mechanism for pulling together community, cultural, sports and recreation activity into one space, aiding information dissemination, engagement, participation and collaboration (principles 3 and 6).

- As a mechanism for promoting our industrial and natural heritage to residents and visitors (principles 4 and 5).
- As a mechanism for highlighting Wylam businesses via eg “places to stay”, “places to eat” (principle 1).
- As a way of improving the reach of Parish Council information and messages by integrating it into a site that people are visiting for other purposes (principles 2 and 6)

12. There are a number of issues to explore before considering whether to proceed with such a proposition, including:

- The appetite in the village for such a resource, both from clubs, societies, businesses etc and whether the public would find it a useful resource.
- What kind of internet presence would be useful, its functionality and style.
- The costs of developing and running the site, including whether it seeks to generate its own income and whether seed funding from the Council is required.
- The appropriate governance, including whether this should be a Council owned product or an independent product supported or sponsored by the Council

The Council are asked to agree we proceed with this work

Access to Councillors

13. Feedback suggests some residents want better communication for those who do not use the internet / social media. The question has also arisen of how people can have access to Councillors. Various suggestions have been considered from councillor surgeries through mail shots to simply

advertising the existing channels (email, attending meetings) etc more effectively. There was limited consensus for any particular option, although there was a general view that there was room for improvement.

14. The proposal here is try a few new approaches and see what works. A package might look like:

- Better promotion of Council meetings and business via Whats on Wylam (as above)
- Pictures of Councillors on the noticeboards (a resident's suggestion)
- Councillors considering the time they have and suggesting ways in which they are prepared to be contacted (this could range from being "tagged" on Whats on Wylam to be being in a community space at a regular time, with a full "contact us" being posted on noticeboards, websites and via social media.

The Council are asked to agree and contribute their preferred mechanism for public contact.

Engagement on these Proposals

15. We held a public input session of how we communicate at the Annual Village meeting in June. There was a clear consensus that communication and engagement from the Council could be – and needed to be – improved. There was, however, little clear consensus on how we should achieve this.

16. It is proposed that once this package of measures is agreed, we (1) conduct some further informal consultation to seek views on our approach (2) monitor the success of our measures are review within six months.

The Council are asked to endorse this approach.