



## Communications Strategy & Action Plan 2025-2029

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Policy covers	All HTC including Post Office and Hailsham Youth Service

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## **1 Introduction**

This Communications Strategy aims to establish a protocol and general objectives for effective communication of the Town Council's activities and other relevant information to members of the public.

The policy applies in conjunction with the Town Council's Media Relations Protocol and Social Media Protocol for Members and Staff.

### **1.1 Context**

Communication is a vital part of running the Town Council and allows the organisation to both give out and receive information from a range of stakeholders that it regularly interacts with or is accountable to. Within the context of a local council, communicating to the public is intrinsic to the Town Council's function and purpose as a democratic body.

Such communication should operate to professional standards and be consistent in terms of production, quality, relevance and frequency.

### **1.2 Accountability**

The Town Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to share its projects, activities, decisions and actions to the public through various media channels. Additionally, all communication and public information will be conveyed in an open and transparent manner.

## **2 Established Communications**

The Town Council currently promotes its activities via various means/channels.

### **2.1 How We Communicate**

Digital and Telecommunications

*2.1.2 Websites:* Hailsham Town Council website: [hailsham-tc.gov.uk](http://hailsham-tc.gov.uk)

This is an easily accessible platform that covers most of the Town Council's operations, activities, documents, important dates/times and relevant contact

information. The website is updated regularly and, although it serves for the provision of information and one-way communication, a facility exists for the public to comment on all pages (via an approval/checking process).

2.1.3 Subsidiary websites: [hailshamyouthservice.org](http://hailshamyouthservice.org) / [hailshamstreetmarket.org](http://hailshamstreetmarket.org) / [jameswestcommunitycentre.org](http://jameswestcommunitycentre.org) / [hailshamneighbourhoodplan.co.uk](http://hailshamneighbourhoodplan.co.uk)

Additional websites providing further information on some of the Town Council's activities. A requirement exists for regular updating of the Hailsham Youth Service website due to frequent activity programme changes. The Hailsham Street Market, James West Community Centre and Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan websites require only occasional updating.

#### 2.1.4 E-mail

- Members of staff and town councillors are accessible via e-mail to discuss issues or obtain information about a policy or service. Email is a two-way channel allowing for direct interaction with the public and are accessed/viewed regularly. Replies to emails will usually be given within five working days. If a more urgent response is required, it is advised that telephone communication is preferable.

#### 2.1.5 Telephone

- Members of staff and town councillors are accessible either via landline or mobile phone to raise an issue, discuss specific services or request information. Again, this is a two-way channel allowing for direct communication with the public.
- The office switchboard telephone number is available to town councillors and the public during office hours (9am-4pm, Monday to Friday - except bank holidays and an out-of-hours emergency (mobile) contact number is available for the public to report damage or necessary repairs to Town Council-maintained property. The emergency number is advertised on the Town Council website, noticeboards and social media pages.

#### 2.1.6 Letter/hardcopy documents

- Any hardcopy letters or communication received.

#### 2.1.7 Social Media

• [facebook.com/hailsham.towncouncil.3](https://www.facebook.com/hailsham.towncouncil.3) | [instagram.com/hailsham\\_town\\_council/](https://www.instagram.com/hailsham_town_council/) | <https://x.com/HailshamTC> | <https://www.facebook.com/HailshamYouthService/> | <https://www.instagram.com/hailshamyouth/>

- Our social media channels are easily accessible platforms which promote much of the Town Council's operations, services, facilities, activities, documents, important dates/times and relevant contact information to the

public, as well as Town Council and community events, emergency public information and mayoral engagements.

- Our social media pages are updated as frequently as necessary. Both serve as two-way communication channels allowing for direct interaction with the public, the opportunity for the public to post their opinions, like or share posts and the facility to direct message.

#### 2.1.8 Printed Publications

- *Town Council Residents' Newsletter ('Our Hailsham')*

- 'Our Hailsham', which is currently published three times a year (February, June and October), includes articles of interest to residents such as information on the Town Council's activities, service updates, upcoming community projects and town events. It is currently distributed to a small number of public outlets for display/collection by residents, as opposed to being delivered to households in the town as was the case in previous years.
- Residents can access the newsletter online as a downloadable Portable Document Format file via the Hailsham Town Council website and social media page links. Readers are invited to subscribe to receive a link to the latest newsletter as and when it is published.
- The newsletter is a one-way channel that provides information to all residents, whether they have access to the internet or not, and has the broadest scope of all communication channels.
- Whilst the newsletter is published three times a year, the collection of information occurs continuously.

#### 2.1.9 *Partner Authority/Stakeholder Newsletters*

- Where requests are made for information from Hailsham Town Council

#### 2.1.10 *Parish/Town Notice Boards*

- These are located at various locations in Hailsham and contain relevant information, such as public notices of meetings and consultations, local events, office hours and town councillor contact information.

#### 2.1.11 *Leaflets, posters and marketing materials*

- The Town Council endeavours to distribute and/or publish posters, public notices, leaflets and other marketing/promotional material to advertise its activities, services, facilities, projects and events. Printed copies are placed in the Town Council noticeboards and digital versions published online via the Town Council's website and social media pages or partner premises.

#### 2.1.12 *Weekly Local Media and Newspapers*

- *'Hailsham Herald', 'Sussex Express' (and other weeklies where applicable)*

- Weekly print publications that also have daily articles on their website ('Sussex World' - [sussexexpress.co.uk](http://sussexexpress.co.uk)), covering news items throughout the town, district and county.
- Media/press release are regularly sent to local newspapers to promote the Town Council's services, facilities, new and ongoing projects, activities, event and public meetings/democracy.
- Journalists or other printed publication representatives may contact the Town Council to cover a developing story/news item.

#### 2.1.13 Monthly/Other Local Media and News Publications

- *Hailsham News, Hailsham Eye*

- The Town Council also publishes advertisements and other promotional items in 'Hailsham News' and has some articles published by them (printed monthly, in addition to the Hailsham News website and social media page) and Hailsham Eye (formerly Wealden Eye) which also covers Town Council activities.

#### 2.1.14 Local/Regional TV and Radio

- *Hailsham FM, Ashdown Radio, BBC Radio Sussex, BBC Southeast Today, Meridian Tonight.*

The Town Council participates in interviews on the radio to promote its activities, in particular local community radio stations 'Hailsham FM' and 'Ashdown Radio', but also BBC Radio Sussex on more salient issues or news items of region/countywide appeal. Coverage on local TV news outlets occurs occasionally, predominantly relating to larger-scale community events and major projects.

#### 2.1.15 Face to Face

- *Exhibitions and Public Engagement Events*

- Often linked with consultations below, an exhibition allows the Town Council to present ideas and proposals to interested members of the public and partners/stakeholders who attend the event. Members of the Town Council and staff are available to provide information and answer questions from the public.
- Exhibitions and public engagement events are two-way channels that allow for direct communication with the public and responses provided in person.
- Such events take place on an ad hoc basis and are generally infrequent.

- *Public Speaking at Meetings*

- During the first part of all Full Council and Committee meetings, members of the public, stakeholders and elected members of local authorities can raise matters to the Town Council and are invited to address members during the 15 minutes set aside for this purpose.

- Members of the public are welcome to stay for the duration of a meeting after the public session as observers but will not be able to join in the discussion unless invited to do so by the Chairman of the Council or Committee. The public and press/media may be excluded by a resolution of the meeting for specific items which need to be discussed in confidence (e.g. tenders for contracts, staffing matters, some legal issues).
- Full Council and Committee meetings are two-way channels that allow for direct communication with the public and responses provided in person.

#### 2.1.16 *Surveys and Polls*

- Surveys are conducted to get a broad opinion of public or user group opinion on a myriad of issues, including their experiences, concerns or issues relating to the Town Council's reputation. All data collected then potentially forms the basis of policy creation and action plans to ensure the proper running, functioning and overall efficiency of the Town Council.
- Surveys are a one-way channel that allows participants to provide information to the Town Council.
- Surveys (including snapshot polls), although held infrequently, help considerably in terms of formulating documents, action plans and strategies.

#### 2.1.17 *Public Consultations*

- Often held in conjunction with an exhibition or public engagement event, consultations allow for the public, partners and stakeholders to provide their opinions, view, ideas and proposals to the Town Council on a specific issue under consideration. Additionally, such practices can help to support one or more grant funding proposals.
- Public consultations are one-way channels that allow those consulted to provide information to the Town Council.
- Consultations, although held infrequently, help formulate policy or provide evidence of community support for a development project or grant funding application.

#### 2.1.18 *Town Council Reception, Information and Enquiries*

The Town Council continues to house its resident and visitor information point situated in the front reception during office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm). Visitors to the town and residents have one-stop pick-up point for all enquiries and a wide range of locally produced leaflets, brochures and other information is readily available.

The reception/public information point is staffed to offer free help and advice for day visitors and group travel organisers on nearby attractions, accommodation and events in the locality.

Free information is also available to residents on local facilities and council services, community safety, general consumer advice and public transport - including timetables for local buses.

#### 2.1.19 *Hailsham Town Council Annual Report*

Every year, the Town Council produces an annual report which describes its activities over the preceding 12 months. The document is circulated to residents at the Annual Town Electors' Meeting and posted on the Town Council website.

## **2.2 What We Communicate**

One of the communication principles of this document is the requirement of relevant information for the public and partners. Relevancy is determined by the needs of specific stakeholders and information they may need to receive from us could include:

### *2.2.1 The Public and Local Groups*

- Parish Council office opening hours and closures
- Staff changes and recruitment opportunities
- How the Town Council operates
- Hailsham parish information/data
- Town Council financial documents, such as completion of an audit
- Full Council and Committee meeting times and dates
- Full Council and Committee meeting agendas and minutes
- Data Transparency documents
- Financial regulations, standing orders and various policy documents
- Local events of interest to the public
- Who to contact about certain services the Town Council provides
- How to submit feedback, such as raising an issue or complaint
- Contact information of Town Council staff and elected members
- The roles and powers of newly enacted Town Council decisions
- Policy proposals
- Information on accessing and using Town Council services
- Costs of using services where applicable
- How to access and apply for grants from the Town Council

### *2.2.2 Partner Councils and Organisations*

- Newly enacted Town Council decisions
- Changes to Town Council services
- Contact information for the Town Council office and council members
- Legally required notifications, e.g. Building Control Plans following a project

### *2.2.3 Local and Regional Media*

- Media releases of interesting and informative topics/stories
- Advertise local community events
- Interact with journalists on a breaking story affecting Hailsham

## **2.3 Who We Communicate With**

A stakeholder is a person, group or organisation that has an interest in the workings and/or success of the Town Council - or can be partly or wholly affected by the organisation's policies, actions and objectives. The Town Council works with several employees, individuals, partner organisations, businesses and local community groups to achieve its vision for the town and its environs. Stakeholders include:

### 2.3.1 Internal Stakeholders

- Hailsham Town Council office staff.
- Hailsham Town Council outdoor/works staff.
- Hailsham Youth Service staff.
- Hailsham Post Office staff.
- Hailsham Town Council retained staff, e.g. Water Bailiffs.
- Hailsham Town Council elected or co-opted members.

### 2.3.2 External Stakeholders

- Residents who live in the parish of Hailsham
- People or organisations that use the Town Council's services
- Non-resident users of the cemetery and other Town Council-maintained property such as play areas, outdoor seating, rubbish bins, etc
- Visitors to Hailsham
- Emergency services
- Schools in Hailsham
- Users of the Town Council's community halls and meeting rooms
- Local community groups and voluntary associations in the town
- Residents' associations
- County, District and other local parish councils
- Constituency Member of Parliament
- Business suppliers and the business community in Hailsham
- Local and regional media
- External funders that have provided funds
- External scrutineers
- Wealden District Association of Local Councils
- Cuckmere Buses Stakeholder Group
- Environment Hailsham Board
- Wealden & District Citizens' Advice Bureau Board
- Hailsham Active
- Wealden Dementia Action Alliance
- Movement and Access Strategy for Hailsham & Hellingly Steering Group
- Police & Crime Commissioner Liaison Focus Group

## 2.4 Communications Governance

2.4.1 Day to day Information arising from within Town Council, such as changes to office hours/closures, staff changes, advertising of meetings/cancellations, policy announcements, town and community events, etc, can be approved and uploaded at the discretion of the Corporate Services Manager and/or Communications Officer.

2.4.2 Where news items cover the activities of a particular Committee, any information, including media releases and newsletter items will need the additional approval of the Chair of the relevant Committee (or in their absence, the Vice-Chair). The same applies to any other town councillor, member of staff or stakeholder who has a quote attributed to them in any media item.



2.4.3 The Town Council has adopted a separate Media Relations Protocol, which provides more details regarding communications governance procedures. However, a general outline is included in the table below.

<b>METHOD:</b>	<b>CARRIED OUT BY:</b>	<b>CONTENT APPROVED BY:</b>
Media releases	Communications Officer	Corporate Services Manager, relevant Committee Chair (if applicable) and anyone who has a quote attributed to them
Social media	Communications Officer	Communications Officer
Websites	Communications Officer	Communications Officer
Public engagement/consultation events	Town councillors, Town Clerk, Communications Officer and stakeholders	All relevant stakeholders
Promotional literature	Communications Officer	Corporate Services Manager and relevant Committee Chair (if applicable)
Residents' newsletter	Communications Officer	Corporate Services Manager, Chair of Council and Vice-Chair of Council
Public information signage	Various staff members	Corporate Services Manager and relevant Committee Chair and/or Chair and Vice-Chair of Council (if applicable)
Events and displays	Various staff members	All stakeholders
Radio/TV interviews	Town councillors	Corporate Services Manager and/or Communications Officer

## 2.5 Communications Accessibility

2.5.1 It is now a requirement for all websites containing the '.gov.uk' suffix to provide reasonable adjustments and adhere to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). This involves making the website accessible for people with a range of disabilities, such as with visual impairments.

2.5.2 The Hailsham Town Council website and subsidiary websites provide reasonable accessibility for users and audits should be carried out by an external body every 4-5 years to ensure that any requirements or necessary updates are fulfilled. The next website(s) accessibility audit will be undertaken in 2024/2025. A full Accessibility Statement is available to download from the Hailsham Town Council website: [hailsham-tc.gov.uk/legal-information/accessibility/](https://hailsham-tc.gov.uk/legal-information/accessibility/).

### **3 Communications Action Plan: 2025-2029**

The above section outlines the Town Council's approach to communication with internal and external stakeholders, which is a crucial part of achieving the Town Council's objectives of transparency and accountability.

Communication should be clear and disseminate relevant information to the public, with the aim of informing residents and maintaining the reputation of the Town Council.

This strategy will look at how the Town Council can develop its communications over the course of the next 4 years.

#### **3.1 Vision For 2025-2029**

Our vision is that the people of Hailsham have a clear understanding of the Town Council's priorities, operations and activities - and that they recognise the Town Council as a reputable and forward-looking council, aiming to promote the town of Hailsham as a good place to live, work and visit.

#### **3.2 Commitments For 2025-2029**

We will achieve the above vision by communicating with the public we serve, the people we employ and the local authorities, community groups, voluntary organisations and businesses that we work with. This will be achieved by regular two-way communication with relevant stakeholders.

#### **3.3 Principles For 2025-2029**

All Town Council communications should be consistent and uphold good standards of writing, production and dissemination. This reflects the culture at the Town Council and the aims and aspirations it has. Communication should encourage and enable a two-way flow of information, which involves acknowledging stakeholders' views and in turn, informing them of ours.

All communications should:

- Be lawful
- Be objective and even-handed
- Clear and concise
- Be cost-effective
- Have regard to equality and diversity
- Be accurate at the time of production, with updates and corrections made where errors have occurred
- Deliver key messages relating primarily to council matters, but also those of our partners where applicable
- Be accessible to all
- Be timed appropriately
- Be monitored periodically to gauge what is or is not successful

### 3.4 Communication Improvements For 2025-2029

Some improvements to communications should be carried out over the course of the next four years and additional objectives set out for effective communication of the Town Council’s activities and other relevant information to members of the public. These include:

#### 3.4.1 Production of Communications Data Output Report – in progress, in effect from January 2025

The Communications Officer should produce a report for Strategy Committee meetings listing the subjects and media output for news items published during each period, in addition to information regarding social media performance (data readily available via Facebook’s ‘Professional Dashboard’). The report will be fed into any relevant strategic plan documents produced by the Town Council.

#### 3.4.2 Installation of External Hard-Standing Communications - completed

The Town Council should, over the course of the next 4 years, produce and install a series of exterior entrance/informational signage on additional Town Council-maintained sites across the town, to effectively promote the Town Council’s facilities, parks and open spaces and in turn make residents more aware of the Town Council’s responsibilities.

#### 3.4.3 Installation of additional public noticeboards - completed

The Town Council currently has public noticeboards in Vicarage Field, at the south entrance to Hailsham Country Park, inside the foyer at the James West Community Centre and at the front of the Town Council office building. However, there is a need for additional noticeboards to be installed on other areas of Town Council-maintained land. Further noticeboards across the town are essential to maximise outdoor communications and further promote relevant information on Town Council facilities, services and events, in addition to public notices of meetings and consultations and town councillor contact information.

### 3.5 Communication Improvements For 2025-2027

Objectives	Owner	Date of completion
Distribution of ‘Our Hailsham’ residents’ newsletter to all households in Hailsham Parish to maximise reach	Communications Officer	From June 2025, to review Summer 2026
Build our subscriber email list for ‘Our Hailsham’ residents’ newsletter	Communications Officer	From June 2025, to review Summer 2026

Explore the use of a smart/digital screen promoting council services/events in Town Council office, also for use at council meetings to work towards being paper free meetings	Corporate Services Manager/Communications Officer	By end of 2025
Continuing to promote Council activities through press releases, social media and via our websites	Communications Officer	Ongoing
Monitor recently set up Instagram account and increasing Instagram followers	Communications Officer	By Summer 2025 increased followers to 150
Creation of more dynamic methods of communication, including posting of videos on social media to promote Council services/projects and activities	Corporate Services Manager/Communications Officer	In progress by January 2025
Continuing promoting large community projects and activities of our community partners	Communications Officer	Ongoing
Collaborating with newly appointed Grants Officer in promoting any new funding opportunities/projects.	Communications Officer/New Grants Officer	Ongoing
Continuing to promote Hailsham Youth Service CIC and Hailsham Post Office CIC with any communication campaigns	Communications Officer/Any	Ongoing

### **3.6 Summary of Objectives And Action Plan**

This Communications Strategy aims to establish a protocol and general objectives for effective communication of the Town Council's activities and other relevant information to members of the public. Throughout the course of the current administration (2025-2029), the Town Council will continue to provide effective communications to the public as outlined in this document and will fulfil the communications improvement requirements and objectives as included in Section 3.4 of this document.

### **3.7 Contact Information**

#### **Corporate Services Manager:**

Emily Hastings | 01323 841702 | [emily.hastings@hailsham-tc.gov.uk](mailto:emily.hastings@hailsham-tc.gov.uk)

#### **Communications Officer:**

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