



Communications Strategy

1 INTRODUCTION

This strategy will focus the communication efforts of the CLT and support it to be effective and efficient in its activity to engage with and serve the people of Mendlesham and our community.

1.1 Policy context

This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity ('the Code'). The Code is statutory guidance for CLTs and it is important that the CLT strategy fits with Mendlesham PC policies and those within the Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan.

1.2 The need for a communications strategy

Mendlesham CLT needs to engage effectively with residents, partners, employees and stakeholders.

Better communications lead to recognition and respect – reputation matters.

Achieving the CLT's aims and objectives requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with, or provide services for.

Without proper co-ordination it would be difficult to make sure messages communicated by the CLT are consistent and accurate. But if communication is managed effectively, the CLT can create and seize opportunities to communicate with partners and the public and build an accurate and positive reputation.

1.3 What should we be communicating?

Important drivers of CLT reputation among local residents should include:

- Perceived quality of services overall meeting local needs.
- Perceived value and quality.
- Media coverage.
- Direct communications.
- Regular evaluation of CLT performance.
- Clean, green, safe and sustainable environment.
- Positive experiences of contact with CLT Trustees, employees and contractors.

If the CLT is to build a strong reputation, effectively inform residents and engage and improve outcomes, these drivers must form the basis of our communications strategy.

There is also a need for proactive and reactive information:

- Proactively – sharing information with people to influence and change attitudes.
- Reactively – responding to residents with information they want to know.

2 COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

2.1 To ensure the CLT is aware of and responds in a timely manner to what the people of Mendlesham want and need to know.

2.2 To use a variety of digital and traditional communication channels to make sure the information we provide is accessible for the whole community.

2.3 To ensure our messages are relevant, clear and factual to ensure maximum impact and interaction between the CLT and our community.

2.4 To provide a user-friendly website to drive interaction with our audiences.

2.5 To celebrate success of interest to the village.

3 COMMUNICATIONS PRINCIPLES

Six principles underpin the strategy. Our communication channels need to:

- Be accessible for all.
- Be convenient to access.
- Help manage expectations.
- Be relevant, clear and factual.
- Encourage two-way positive engagement and to 'act together'.
- Be prepared to change direction where clear evidence shows the need to do so.

3.1 Identifying newsworthy items

It is the responsibility of everyone working within the CLT to identify newsworthy items; these will include a range of CLT activities and decisions and it is the responsibility of the Board Chair to make the decision as to whether or not a press release should be issued. The content of a Press Release should be approved by the CLT Chair and/or a Trustee of the CLT involved in the matter.

3.2 Handling media enquiries

The CLT Secretary co-ordinates all formal media enquiries to the CLT. Board Members, Members (their Trustees) and any CLT staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts. If Members are in any doubt, they should consult the CLT Secretary. CLT staff should refer all media enquiries to the CLT Secretary in the first instance.

The CLT should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members. The phrase "no comment" should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The CLT is open and accountable

and should always try to explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

3.2.1 Managing negative issues

From time to time the CLT might have to respond to negative issues. It is important that these situations are managed carefully so as to limit the potential for negative publicity.

Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) and Officers must alert the CLT Secretary as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media. Members and Officers must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted the CLT about an issue.

3.2.2 Correcting inaccurate reporting

Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about the CLT, a quick decision needs to be taken on any action necessary to correct it. The issue should be discussed with Board Chair to decide what action is appropriate. This could be a letter or news release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, a personal letter to the editor or legal advice. It will also be necessary to decide who is the most appropriate person to take the agreed action.

It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain; each case should be judged individually.

Occasionally the CLT will get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake, apologising and stating how the CLT will learn from the error or put it right.

3.3 Press releases

The use of press releases is a key technique for publicising CLT activities, decisions and achievements. An official CLT release is made on behalf of the CLT as a whole; it will be written and issued by the CLT Secretary. Official CLT releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the CLT, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Trustee.

CLT press releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of Board Members, individual Members (and their Trustees), nor identify any of their political leanings or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.

All official CLT releases will be placed on the CLT's website within one working day of issue.

3.4 Interviews

Any member of staff, Board Member, individual Member (and their Trustee) who is contacted by a journalist requesting an interview in their capacity as a representative of the CLT should refer the matter to the CLT Chair.

The situation and the information required by the journalist will inform the choice of person put forward for interview.

3.5 Media coverage of CLT meetings

Provision is made for the media to attend CLT meetings. During meetings Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) and Officers should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue.

Where a meeting of the CLT and its committees includes an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions.

Both the media and the public are entitled to film and record CLT meetings held in public.

4 AUDIENCES AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

The CLT has to be clear on the range of audiences it needs to communicate with, the reasons for doing so and their information requirements. Our audiences include:

- Mendlesham residents (individuals and target groups (e.g. young people))
- Local Community groups
- Businesses and Employers in Mendlesham
- Other interested bodies
- Local Gov (County and District)
- Existing and potential suppliers, for example builders, architects etc.
- Local schools
- Parish Council members Parish Council employees
- Local charities
- Media

4.1 Freedom of Information and data protection

Should the CLT receive a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on a topic on which there is correspondence (written or email), that correspondence will normally have to be disclosed unless it is

exempt. The fact that the disclosure may prove embarrassing would not, in itself, prevent disclosure. In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data.

The Data Protection Act prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Trustees should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them.

The CLT cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law.

5 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The type of communication channels used will depend on the target audience and the message to be communicated. These will include:

1. CLT website.
2. Social media.
3. Consultations and feedback forms, surveys or questionnaires.
4. Correspondence (general).
5. Direct responses (email, phone, in person representations).
6. CLT meetings.
7. CLT working groups.
8. Nominated CLT spokesperson (e.g. for social media responses).
9. Village working groups/forums/events/surgeries.
10. Annual Meetings.
11. Mendlesham Board Members, Members (and their Trustees).
12. Features submitted to local newsletters (e.g. regular presence in Mendlesham Newsletters).
13. CLT publications.
14. Posters, flyers, newsletters.
15. Village notice boards.
16. Networking links with partners/stakeholders.

5.1 Website

The CLT website is an important vehicle for the promotion of CLT activities.

The website will not:

- contain content that may result in actions for libel, defamation or other claims for damages.

- be used to process personal data other than for the purpose stated at the time of capture.
- promote any political party or be used for campaigning.
- promote personal financial interests or commercial ventures.
- be used for personal campaigns.
- be used in an abusive, hateful or disrespectful manner.

5.2 Social media

Social media can be used by the CLT as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

The aim of this part of the policy is to make sure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of CLT-based services through the use of social media.
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media. This includes the removal of offensive or bullying material.
- That CLT information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media. A Website with robust security and protection to be in place.
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.
- That the CLT is not brought into disrepute.

Social media activity isn't something that stands alone. To be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be included in social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

The CLT's social media policy is attached as Appendix A.

6 REVIEW

A Communications Working Group will be established to oversee the development and implementation of the strategy (see section 4.2).

This will be reviewed annually by the full CLT.

APPENDIX A – MENDLESHAM CLT SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

This policy provides Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) and CLT staff with an overview of social media, guidelines on how to use social media, and advice on minimising or mitigating any risks or pitfalls associated with social media.

Mendlesham CLT acknowledges social media as a set of useful communication tools. However, clear guidelines are needed to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix, and that their use does not expose the CLT to security risks, reputational damage or a breach of the General Data Protection Regulations.

This document provides a structured approach to using social media effectively, lawfully and without compromising

Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) and CLT staff must use social media sensibly and responsibly, in line with CLT policy. They must ensure their use will not adversely affect the CLT or its business, nor be damaging to the CLT's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any CLT policies.

This policy applies to Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) and CLT staff.

2. Definition of Social Media

Social media is a term describing online tools, websites and interactive media that enables users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction focuses on user participation and features user-generated content.

Social media:

- Covers many formats, including text, video, photographs and audio;
- Allows messages to flow between different types of device, such as computers, smart phones and tablets (e.g. iPad);
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information;
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information;
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications;
- Allows communication to take place in real time or intermittently.

Examples of popular social media tools include: Email, smart phone apps, social networking sites, blogging, tweeting and other sites centred on user interaction. Popular social media platforms include: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp,

Wikipedia, You Tube, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Google Plus. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of such systems, with people sharing similar interests being attracted to share information.

Please note: Email is a form of social media!

3. Why the CLT needs a social media policy and presence

Social media increases our access to audiences and improves the accessibility of our communication. It allows us to communicate with a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to our activities, providing updates, news, information and 'retweeting' of relevant information from other sources. It also provides an opportunity to communicate directly with young people, the business community and harder to reach groups. This enables us to be more active in our relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders, and encourages people to be involved in local decision making, enabling better engagement and feedback, ultimately helping to improve the services we provide.

It can also:

- Provide a forum for debate, where those speaking can choose to either be identified or remain anonymous;
- Be used to encourage feedback and interaction;
- Provides a less formal means of promoting key facts/events and engaging with individuals.

This method of communication is two-way. It is as much about listening as speaking. As such, it resembles a recorded conversation far more than a website or notice board. Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) should conduct themselves on social media with the same transparency, authenticity, professionalism, and adherence to the NOLAN principles that they would conduct themselves with when engaged in conversation.

The CLT recognises and welcomes these uses of social media as part of the wider communications landscape. It understands these diverse voices can be heard worldwide, and each individual or group opinion is important.

4. Dangers of social media

While social media tools are a very useful way of sharing information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of. These pitfalls are generally the same as those associated with everyday conversation, though they are exacerbated by their being written down. The following risks have been identified with social media use

(this is not an exhaustive list):

- Disclosure of confidential information;

- Damage to the CLT's reputation;
- Engineering attacks (also known as 'phishing');
- Bullying or 'trolling'. An internet 'troll' is a person who starts arguments or upsets people, by posting inflammatory or off-topic messages online with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response, or of otherwise disrupting normal discussion, often for their own amusement;
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation;
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals;

The CLT appreciates not all social media users share its point of view or its goals, and that differing perspectives must be treated with respect. This is especially important where an issue is contentious.

Opinions, questions and discussions appearing on social media should be treated as if they are available for all to see, as they often are. Once posted, they will remain accessible for future users to find.

The CLT will use approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control their use to minimise risks such as those stated above.

5. How to use social media

Social media will be used by the CLT as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity. When using social media, all Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) and CLT staff will:

- Engage with individuals and communities to successfully promote CLT-based services;
- Ensure a consistent approach is adopted and maintained;
- Ensure CLT information remains secure and is not compromised;
- Operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation;
- Ensure the CLT's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected;
- Aim to keep communication effective, timely, appropriate and useful;
- Utilise cross-promotion of other CLT communication tools (for example, website, noticeboard, Mendlesham Newsletter).

Social media activity does not stand alone. To be effective it must be integrated as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities should utilise cross-promotion with other CLT communication tools

(for example, website, noticeboard, Mendlesham Newsletter) to increase reach and exposure.

6. Responsibilities

Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) and CLT staff must use social media sensibly and responsibly. As with all communication, it should not adversely affect the CLT or its business, nor be damaging to the CLT's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any CLT policies.

- You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a libel action for which you will be personally liable; no indemnity from the CLT will be available.
- Social media sites are in the public domain, so it is important to ensure you are confident of the nature of all information you publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without your consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed.
- Make use of stringent privacy settings if you do not want your social media to be accessed by the press or public. Read the terms of service of any social media site accessed and make sure you understand their confidentiality/privacy settings.
- Do not disclose personal details of others, such as home addresses and telephone numbers. Ensure you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the CLT's data protection policies.
- Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are open to misuse by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report them.
- Do not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or exempt reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the Freedom of Information Act).
- Copyright laws still apply to social media. Using images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.
- Be aware of your own safety when sharing information on social media, and do not publish information which could leave you vulnerable.
- Use of the CLT's social media platforms must always reflect the CLT's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be

used to express personal or political opinion, particularly when used by a Board Member or Member (or their Trustee).

- Statements made on behalf of CLT should be either statements of fact or CLT policy.
- Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

7. Principles for using social media

You should follow these five guiding principles for any social media activities:

- Be respectful – set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language, and be cordial, honest and professional at all times. Respect people’s confidentiality – do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others.
- Be credible and consistent – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure what you say online is consistent with your other communications.
- Be honest about who you are – it is important that any accounts or profiles you set up are clearly and easily identifiable. Be clear about your own personal role.
- Be responsive – make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you cannot. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner.
- Think twice – think carefully about all your social media posts. Once published it will be too late to change your mind. If unsure, say nothing.

Follow these rules and seek further guidance if needed.

8. Inappropriate Use of Social Media by Others

Anyone receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the police.

Other inappropriate content can be reported to the social media site directly to ask for it to be removed.

You may wish to save a screenshot in these circumstances.

9. Guidance for Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) – social media and meetings

The CLT encourages Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) to keep residents informed and the use of social media can help with this, especially during official CLT meetings. Below are extra guidelines for Trustees to consider if they use social media during CLT meetings:

- Handheld devices and laptops are permitted (indeed encouraged) for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings, not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'.
- Trustees' tweets/blogs during CLT meetings should refer to discussions taking place at the meeting.
- Tweeting/Blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting, so should be avoided.
- Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) have a responsibility to take CLT business seriously and it is not appropriate for them to use social media to tease or insult others. Mendlesham residents expect debate and to be informed about CLT business. They do not expect to witness petty arguments.
- Remember that if you break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.

9. Structure

A communications team will oversee the CLT social media presence. In addition to the guidelines outlined above, the role of the team is also to:

- Advise upon and monitor social media interactions.
- Create, disable and remove social media accounts and posts.

The communications team will consist of three Members plus the Secretary. Members of the team will be appointed by the CLT and membership will be reviewed annually at the Annual CLT meeting.

APPENDIX B - INDIVIDUAL POLICY FOR BOARD MEMBERS, MEMBERS (THEIR TRUSTEES) AND OFFICERS

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all people involved in dealing with the media and to provide guidance on how to handle media interest. It is also to ensure that the CLT is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner.

This policy does not seek to regulate Board Members, Members (and their Trustees) in their private capacity but does provide advice and guidance on their sensible use of conventional and social media. The CLT's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the CLT. If the views of any Trustee are different to the CLT's agreed position and views, it is the responsibility of every Trustee to make this distinction clear.

Subject to the obligations on people not to disclose information referred to in section 4.1 and not to misrepresent the CLT's position, they are free to communicate their position and views.

In all cases, the CLT's approach, is that all individual Trustee communications should:

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to the CLT's policies, particularly Equality and Diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity (e.g. elections).

If in doubt, never say anything you will be uncomfortable repeating in court.

APPENDIX C - DEFINITIONS

Member - someone who owns (singly or jointly) one share in the CLT.

Board Member - a Member who has been voted or co-opted onto the Board of the CLT

Trustee - someone who, with agreement, can "stand in" for a Member.

Officer - someone who is employed by the CLT.

Agreed by Board on	March 2022 reviewed August 2025
CEO and Chair	MJ Exley
Review date	Annually