

**IMPLEMENTATION OF SUGGESTED COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES**

Introduction

On 20 January 2025, the Council considered a report entitled “Communications Report December 2024” and resolved to support the proposals of the Communications Officer in section F of that report and to request a further report on how those could be implemented in view of the resources required (ref. minute 25/8).

Section F of that report is set out below for ease of reference:

**F. Suggested strategies<sup>2</sup>**

1. Positive communications strategies should be continued. As the Town Council, we should engage and encourage the residents to keep the town clean, healthy and beautiful in a positive tone. We should also spread good news of Cranbrook through other channels.
2. If resources allow, opening Facebook comments to the public is indeed a valuable move for the Town Council as it can gauge residents' reactions (public comments provide direct insight into how residents feel about the Town Council's work, allowing for a better understanding of community sentiment). Open comments create a more transparent communication channel, demonstrating the Town Council's willingness to listen to feedback and engage in open dialogue. It encourages two-way communication, allowing residents to ask questions, seek clarifications, and offer suggestions. The Council can also use this platform to address concerns, correct misinformation, and foster a sense of community involvement.
3. The Communications Officer has been working with various parties including community groups, clubs, activity organisers and service providers to promote different campaigns and activities in Cranbrook. It helps strengthen the relationship and build a better community in Cranbrook. This should be an ongoing approach.
4. The Town Council can involve residents by organising activities and events and inviting residents to take part. It is always helpful to engage our residents.
5. To consider review the website layout. It would be helpful to add a “news” page for publishing media materials such as press releases

**Considerations and Resource Implications**

Points 1 and 3 above are included in the Council's Communications Officer's daily work already and therefore do not require any additional resource allocation.

The Communications Officer has confirmed that she has capacity to add a news page to the Council's website and to maintain it within existing resources.

Over the past few months, the Town Council has organised various events and activities in collaboration with residents and community groups. These initiatives have received highly positive feedback, reinforcing the importance of fostering community engagement. We are committed to continuing this approach and look forward to providing more opportunities for meaningful participation in the future

### Enabling Comments on Social Media

The Council discussed enabling comments on its main Facebook page at the full Council meeting on 20 January 2025 on a trial basis. This element is covered in point 2 above and, if implemented, will require an additional resource allocation. Below is a table comparing the advantages and disadvantages of enabling comments:

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Increased engagement – Allows followers/ audience to ask questions and express opinions, fostering community dialogue	Moderation burden – Requires time and effort to monitor comments and discussions
Transparency & trust – Shows the Town Council is open to feedback	Risk of negative comments – Potential for criticism, misinformation, or abuse
Opportunity for clarifications – Provides a chance to address misinformation directly	Potential for misinformation spread – False claims can gain traction quickly
Community involvement – Can create a sense of inclusion and participation	Trolls & spam – Risk of disruptive or irrelevant content
Increased visibility of Town Council content online by virtue of higher engagement levels and therefore better exposure to platform algorithms	

### Monitoring Strategies and Response Plan

The Council is invited to agree to **community guidelines** which define acceptable commentary and tag it at the top of Facebook page / Instagram account as follows:

*The Town Council welcomes public comments as part of a constructive and respectful community dialogue. However, comments which are offensive, discriminatory, contain hate speech or spread misinformation may be hidden or removed. We encourage all participants to engage with courtesy and respect, as they would in face-to-face discussions.*

It is suggested that the Council's Office Administrator could monitor comments on Facebook during that postholder's working day and to bring any comments which may require a response to the Communication Officer's attention.

## Suggested Protocol and Response

### **Post and pin the below on social media**

*The Town Council encourages respectful and constructive community communications and discussion. Comments should relate to the post's subject. Disagreements should be respectful with no personal attacks or harassment. Only share true and accurate information.*

Inappropriate comments will be removed, including hate speech, discrimination, or harassment; threats, violence, or illegal content, spam, advertising, or self-promotion, misinformation or conspiracy theories, obscene or offensive language/images.

The Town Council will monitor and respond during office hours, Monday to Friday 10:00am to 2:00pm, within 36 hours of the comments being posted, where appropriate.

### **Responds on comments**

Positive comment	React with "like"
Comments which are inappropriate e.g. offensive, discriminatory, contains hate speech	<p>Remove the comment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If the comment contains hate speech, threats, harassment, discrimination, profanity, or personal attacks.</li><li>• If it spreads false and harmful misinformation.</li><li>• If it includes spam, promotions, or explicit content.</li><li>• contravenes with the provisions contained within current legislation (e.g. Equality Act 2010)</li></ul> <p>If comments being removed - "This comment has been removed as it violates our protocol. We encourage respectful and constructive discussions."</p> <p>The Communications Officer will remove any content in consultation with the Clerk.</p>
Comments which are irrelevant to the post's subject	<p>Hide the comment with standard reply:</p> <p>"This comment is irrelevant to the post's subject."</p>
Comments sharing opinions related to the post's subject	<p>Standard reply:</p> <p>"Thank you for your comment. The Town Council will take this into consideration."</p>

Comments request further information related to the post's subject	Standard reply: "Thank you for your comment. Here's the information you're looking for: [Provide link or brief response]."
--	---

All relevant provisions contained in the Council's customer services policy apply. However, the latter suggests that all correspondence must be responded to within three working days. While this timeframe may be reasonable for email enquiries, it may be too long for interactions on social media. Users typically expect a quicker response on these platforms, as prompt engagement is a fundamental best practice in social media management. Suggested to respond in 36 hours.

### **Recommendation(s)**

To enable comments on the main Council Facebook page on a trial basis and to recognise that Council officers will at their discretion remove any content which is offensive and/or contravenes with the provisions contained within current legislation (e.g. Equality Act 2010).

To agree to community guidelines which define acceptable commentary and the approach to responses to comments articulated in this report.

To receive a further report to the full Council meeting on 24 March 2025 which details the impact of monitoring and responding to comments on social media on officer hours and capacity.