

# Communicating with your Constituents

You have a legal and ethical responsibility to communicate with ALL the citizens living in your community. You must do this regularly and effectively to be able to claim that you represent their views and needs, and not the personal opinions of Community Councillors.

There are two parts to this duty – seeking their views and keeping them informed of your work as their elected representatives.

This is a positive duty. Fulfilling it will immensely improve the service you give constituents. Here are some examples you should follow ... *(your CC should be doing many if not most of these)*

- Use the ASCC Best Practice guidance on Local Authority (LA) support for Community Councils to ensure your authority is giving you the support you need to fulfil your duty.
- Include main contact details in every piece of paper, email, etc that issues from your CC. Always invite contact and encourage feedback. Make this a permanent “text box” in your papers.
- Whenever possible, restate the ways constituents can contact you. Make this as easy as possible for them.
- Create a website, or get a section on the LA website. List contact details for ALL Community Councillors, including pictures where possible – you are elected representatives, if you feel uncomfortable about being approached or identified as such, you have misunderstood the nature of your role and the status of CCs. Show the date, time and venue of meetings, and the agenda. Include the minutes of all previous meetings.
- Collate a database of email addresses for constituents. Ask for permission to send them email bulletins seeking their views and reporting your actions.
- Display CC contact details in all public buildings. Include information on what you do and how you can help. Get the LA to design and print posters, flyers etc.
- Secure space in any local newsletters. Publicise your work, and invite comments.
- Get space in all publications sent out by the Local Authority. You might do this collectively among all your CCs. Make sure you have control over what is said about you in these.
- Encourage the local press to attend meetings. Issue press releases on matters of local interest. Seek training on media relations. Consider appointing a press liaison CCllr.
- Whenever you have a change of officers, ask the LA to send out a mailshot to all local organisations, public, private and voluntary, indicating the new officers and reinforcing the status, work and approachability of your CC. Do the same after every CC election.

- Hold surgeries for constituents in public venues. These could be community premises, or local supermarkets, libraries and the like. Advertise these well in advance and again closer to the time. Experiment with times, days and venues, and with the format of the surgery. Always have at least two Councillors present.
- Create and deploy surveys at least once per year. Ask questions about constituents' perceptions of you, of their community, their quality of life. Ask what you can do to improve the community. Find out what their priorities are. Be sure to include questions on the issues that will be important to your constituents in the future even if the details are not fully known. Get the support of the LA to print, distribute and collect the survey papers. The ASCC has a model survey format you can use.
- Consider shorter, faster surveys on individual issues of significant local importance. The responses will be very important in helping you prove you speak for the community.
- Hold public meetings (in the true sense – all meetings of CCs are by law open to the public) whenever there is an issue of sufficient local importance. Judge the attendance in terms of whether it representatively reflects the community – age, sex, affluence, area of residence, overall numbers and so on.
- Place suggestion boxes in prominent, busy local venues. Leave pencil and paper for ease of use. Explain these are for citizens to make comments and/or suggestions on how to tackle a local issue or generally better the community. Always respond to comments left when the person gives contact details. Regularly report comments at full CC meetings.
- Deliver flyers or leaflets door to door. This is also an excellent way for Community Councillors to get to know their constituents, and vice versa.
- If there is a local community radio station, use it. Try for a show regularly presented by a Councillor, perhaps with calls from the public.
- Word of mouth and informal personal contact is a common practice, and has its place. It is the least objective method of discovering the community's views and should not be relied upon in making important decisions.

***Remember:***

- **Always make it easy to contact you**
- **Always seek comments and opinions from constituents**
- **Always judge your effectiveness by RESULTS**
- **Never let the personal opinions of individual Community Councillors come out**