

Oadby and Wigston Borough Council Communications Strategy April 2022 – April 2025

Created by Communications Manager, April 2022
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Oadby & Wigston
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Introduction

It is vital that we have strategically planned communications at the Council to ensure we are engaging fully with our residents, customers, partners, businesses, council tenants, Members and staff.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a light on the importance of timely and effective communications and the borough council has invested into its Communications & Marketing Team to enhance and expand its level of service in this area.

We need to embrace digital channels to help get our key messages and information to the right people, at the right time and in the right way, acknowledging that this is how the majority like to engage with content and news in the modern world.

It is not just about broadcasting messages. We need to use these same channels to gather customer feedback, opinions, views and ideas. We need to join in the conversations taking place about how we make our borough a better, safer and more prosperous place.

Utilising digital channels will also enable us to build solid networks within our communities and that applies to more than just the communications team, but other staff and members as well.

We must also recognise that we have diverse communities in our borough and many still prefer traditional communication methods, and some cases do not have access to the internet. These harder-to-reach audiences must be considered and we must make efforts to engage and communicate with these groups, including through paper communication.

Ensuring our communications are audience focused will make them more effective.

Our Corporate Plan and Vision set out a number of priorities and targets that help drive our work. Therefore it is essential that this strategy supports the Corporate Plan and helps us achieve our goals.

What we are striving for is an outstanding communications function that is inextricably linked to achieving our business goals.


Executive Summary

The strategy sets out how we will develop the Council's external and internal communications to meet the needs and demands of our customers, staff, members and partners over the next three years.

The primary areas of focus will be:

- Launching, developing and expanding a new digital communication tool that can deliver targeted messages to subscribers with an email address
- Further expansion social media and other digital channels to engage with customers and develop networks
- Ensuring that we communicate with hard-to-reach groups through more traditional methods, such as paper, while encouraging them to embrace our digital channels too
- To use our communication channels to enhance and improve the council's reputation
- Developing campaigns to support the aim of the Corporate Plan and ensure that they are fully evaluated

1. Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1 The communications landscape continues to change at speed.
 - 1.2 The print audiences of local media continue to decline with the local media's website and social media audiences growing
 - 1.3 The Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged more and more people to engage with digital channels, for example having internet access to communicate with friends and family and email addresses to order shopping and Covid-19 tests
 - 1.3 The Council's own social media channels have continued to grow in popularity
 - 1.4 While digital communications will increase, the strategy needs to acknowledge our hard-to-reach groups and be creative in how we target them with key information
 - 1.5 As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, we need to ensure we increase our visibility and face to face communications
 - 1.6 The purpose of the strategy is to provide a clear direction for the development of Communications across the organisations.
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2. Key Objectives and Outcomes

- 2.1 The objectives are to:
- Be driven by our corporate plan, our strategic objectives and our council values
 - Grow the council's own audiences using digital channels
 - Enhance the council's reputation using all available communications channels
 - Execute three key campaigns each year which support the Corporate Plan and are fully evaluated to measure success.
 - Improve our communication reach and effectiveness for hard-to-reach groups and individuals within the borough
 - Ensure that web content is well-managed, easy-to-read and meets stringent accessibility requirements
 - Improve and develop internal communications channels to meet the needs of the organisation and support member and staff engagement
 - Offer effective marketing support to income generating ideas to sell council services
 - Successfully lead on the delivery of the council's events programme
 - Drive an effective and beneficial consultation strategy that ensures we receive useful feedback and insights from stakeholders throughout our communities

3. Our Communication Principles

- 3.1 We will communicate the **right information** with the **right people** at the **right time** in the **right way** to make sure our priorities, key decision and actions are understood.
- We will be **proactive and transparent** – even when the story is a negative one
 - Wherever possible, we will only talk publicly about things that are **definite**
 - Those who communicate should act as leaders – **inspiring, confident and empowering**.
 - We will make sure the most **affected people know the information first**
 - We will **target particular audiences** depending on what we're talking about
 - We will use the **right tools** for the job e.g. digital vs face to face

4. How we will speak

- 4.1 Our tone of voice will be professional and approachable
- Use of our corporate Style Guide to ensure plain English
 - Friendly, approachable tone of voice in all communications
- 4.2 We'll push the use of digital communications
- Many customers are now comfortable transacting with organisations online
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- We will push digital communications, giving us the chance to focus telephone and email contact for our customers who need more support
- We will use Gov Delivery to enhance and expand quality and reach of our communication

4.3 We'll use the right tool for the job

- We will use the evidence we have already to make sure communication is targeted in the right way
- We will acknowledge that not all customers have access to digital channels and respond accordingly

4.5 We will constantly evaluate all communication to continually learn the best ways of communicating with our audiences

4.6 Our communication principles will guide all communication activity across the whole organisation.

5. Who we'll talk to

5.1 Our communications is not limited to, but needs to account for, all of the following:

- Staff
- Members
- Customers
- Direct partners e.g. Leicestershire County Council, neighbouring district and county councils, health partners, the emergency services, skills providers/employment/DWP
- Businesses
- Tenants
- Community groups
- Stakeholders
- Specific interest groups

6. Gov-Delivery digital communication tool

6.1 Using its new tool, the Council will drastically expand the number of digital communications it sends and increase the number of topics covered

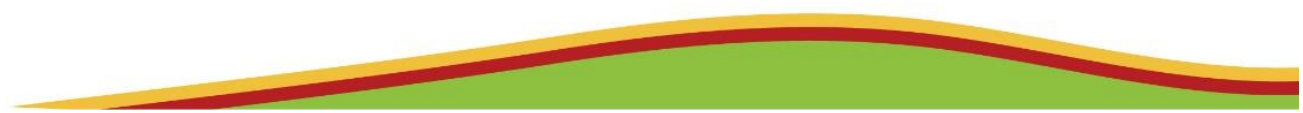
6.2 A new topic will be created for council tenants, opening a new and innovative way of communicating with our tenants

6.3 Create a communications plan to support the launch, maximising the number of people aware of the tool and how to subscribe

6.4 We will use customer feedback to improve our use of the tool and provide the information and news that subscribers both need and want to hear

6.5 We will use training and workshops to embed a communication culture within the organisation to ensure there is a flow of content, news and information for all offered topics.

6.6 Insights



7. Social Media

7.1 The Council has four main corporate social media platforms:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn

We also have specialist community and wellbeing social media channels, managed by the health and wellbeing team, delivering a wide range of information through various methods, including video.

7.2 The Council's Facebook page continues to grow and receive substantial community engagement through its 3,500 followers

7.3 Our Twitter account has also grown and now has 2,500 followers.

7.4 Sentiment on social media can often be negative and positive news focusing on successes and achievement can combat this

7.5 Social media offers excellent opportunity for two-way conversations and to engage with our communities.

8. Oadby and Wigston Borough Council Website

8.1 The Council website is hosted by Cuttlefish. Oadby and Wigston Borough Council is part of a web unity group, including Charnwood and North West Leicestershire Councils. Charnwood is the lead authority in the unity group and holds the contract with Cuttlefish.

8.2 After substantial amounts of work, the website is compliant with WCAG 2.2 Government accessibility requirements, with work ongoing to improve this further

8.3 A new microsite will be launched to support the Economic Regeneration department promoting our offering as the South Leicestershire Gateway. This will include business offering, tourism offering and living offering

8.4 A network of website champions will be created among staff to improve website content and keep information up to date and current

8.5 Create and publish internal guides that set out accessibility requirements and how we achieve them.

8. The Media & PR

8.1 Deliver a proactive and reactive media relations service to improve the reputation and influence in the local, regional, trade and national agendas, and building and strengthening relationships.



Below is a list of the main media organisations operating in Oadby and Wigston and who cover Council activities and businesses:-


- Leicester Mercury
- BBC Radio Leicester
- BBC East Midlands Today
- ITV Central

- 8.2 We will proactively monitor our media coverage to understand how much positive and negative coverage we receive and the frequency of it
- 8.3 Difficult decisions the council has had to make to combat financial challenges have had a challenging impact on its reputation and public perceptions, and there is a need to get our successes and achievements into the local media
- 8.4 Ensure that a healthy rotation of members are used to showcase the council's work, its successes and its achievements in its work with local media
- 8.4 Continue to provide a proactive approach to Council news and supply local media with ready to use copy, pictures and video. More focus on selling-in of stories is to be encouraged and the development of relationships with key journalists
- 8.5 We will conduct internal workshops to encourage more good news stories to be presented to the communication team for publication.

9. Campaigns

- 9.1 The team has a set of corporately agreed priority campaigns to help meet the organisation's strategic objectives (see campaigns plan)
- 9.2 By prioritising campaigns, the team is able to deliver planned, well researched, targeted and measurable campaigns which influence and change perceptions and behaviours of the residents and businesses
- 9.3 This does not detract from the reactive communications work which inevitably occurs on a day to day basis e.g. press releases.
- 9.4 Each campaign has a structure plan approved by a service lead detailing the objectives, audience, budget, channels, timeline and evaluation methods and how it links to corporate objectives.
- 9.5 There will be a balanced approach, looking at the link with corporate objectives and also if the campaign will support services that can generate revenue for the Council.

The Government Communications Service says campaigns must contain:

- Objectives
 - Audience/Insight
 - Strategy/Ideas
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- Implementation
- Scoring/Evaluation

9.6 Each of the campaigns will have their own objectives and desired outcomes, but the high-level objectives are as follows:

- To influence attitudes, behaviours and life choices for the benefit of the Borough.
- To ensure there is a clear and consistent dialogue with our target audiences, ensuring messages are effectively communicated.
- Build residents' and businesses' confidence in the council as a decision maker
- To provide sound communications advice for members, senior officers, staff and partners.
- To ensure our own staff are informed, motivated and empowered
- To manage and protect the brand (logo, designs and narrative) ensuring it remains a symbol of quality.

10. Consultations

10.1 The team will develop a consultation strategy (currently under development) to serve as a blueprint for council officers or members considering the merits, requirements and need of consultation.

10.2 The strategy will help the Council meet its consultation duties by ensuring that all levels of community engagement are carried out in the most appropriate way with different methods of engagement used relevant to the activity and circumstances.

11. Internal Communications (Members and Staff)

Staff

11.1 Internal communications helps leaders inform and engage employees in a way which motivates them to maximise their performance and deliver the business strategy in the most effective way

11.2 The council is committed to utilising all internal communications channels to ensure employees are engaged, have a voice, have a clear understanding of the organisation's objectives and how their roles fit in with those objectives.

11.3 The Council has a number of key internal communication channels which are used to interact with around 150+ staff. The key channels used by the Communications Team are:

- All-staff weekly newsletter
- Intranet
- Microsoft Teams
- Quarterly staff briefings
- Corporate Management Team Meetings
- Email
- Working groups



- 11.4 We will continue with quarterly all staff briefings led by SLT, which are hybrid of online and face to face to support agile working
- 11.5 We will review our current intranet provision and look for alternate options that will improve this communication channel.

Members

- 11.6 The key channels used to communicate with members are the weekly bulletin, email, committees, working groups
- 11.7 The member enquiry system will be reviewed with members surveyed to understand how this system can be improved
- 11.8 We will survey both staff and members to gain feedback on our newsletters/bulletin with a view to improving content
- 11.9 We will implement a new member hub to give members better access to resources, information and council news
- 11.10 We will act upon the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Review published in January 2022, to improve communication between staff and members across the council.

12. Resources

- 12.1 The Communications Team handles external and internal communications which includes managing the content of the Council’s corporate website and intranet.

Communications Team Responsibilities (do we need to insert events /campaigns/consultations)	
Compiling proactive media releases	Producing content for our new digital communication tool and its various topics
Handling media inquiries	Planning proactive communications activity for a number of campaigns and consultations
Monitoring media coverage	Producing digital content, including video, to support campaigns
Horizon scanning for potential reputational issues	Maintaining and managing content on the Council website
Providing strategic media and communications advice to the Senior Leadership Team, Leader of the Council and Chief Executive	Issuing all staff e-mails and key messages on the intranet and through newsletters
Co-ordinate the council’s annual events programme, including Remembrance	Providing an ad-hoc design service for various marketing materials
Managing the Council’s corporate social media accounts	Producing weekly Digital Members’ Bulletins
Supporting and advising staff in the use of social media	Producing speeches and briefings
	Guardians of the Council’s branding
	Co-ordinating translations and interpretations
	Producing weekly Digital staff Bulletins

- 12.2 The Communications team comprises of two FTE.



13. Events

- 13.1 The Council has an event calendar (see separate document) that sets out the events, festivals, charity days, and similar that the council supports during a calendar year
- 13.2 We will ensure Remembrance services and parades have council backing and support and work with local organisations to make them happen
- 13.3 In 2022, the Queen's Jubilee is a priority event for the council and we will work to ensure inclusive events take place across the borough during the four-day weekend.

14. Equalities

- 14.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that all people from diverse groups are not discriminated against or disadvantaged by our actions in any way.
 - 14.2 All internal and external communications should use language that treats people with the respect that they deserve, be non-discriminatory and accessible to a wide audience. Plain English should be used all the time.
 - 14.3 It means the Council must also consider the ways in which people want to access information and engage with the Council. Although the use of digital channels is increasing and will continue to do so, there remains people in Oadby and Wigston who still do not have access to the internet.
 - 14.4 The Council's corporate website should be accessible to people with disabilities and meet WCAG 2.2 requirements.
 - 14.5 The council will continue to offer translations and interpreters.
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