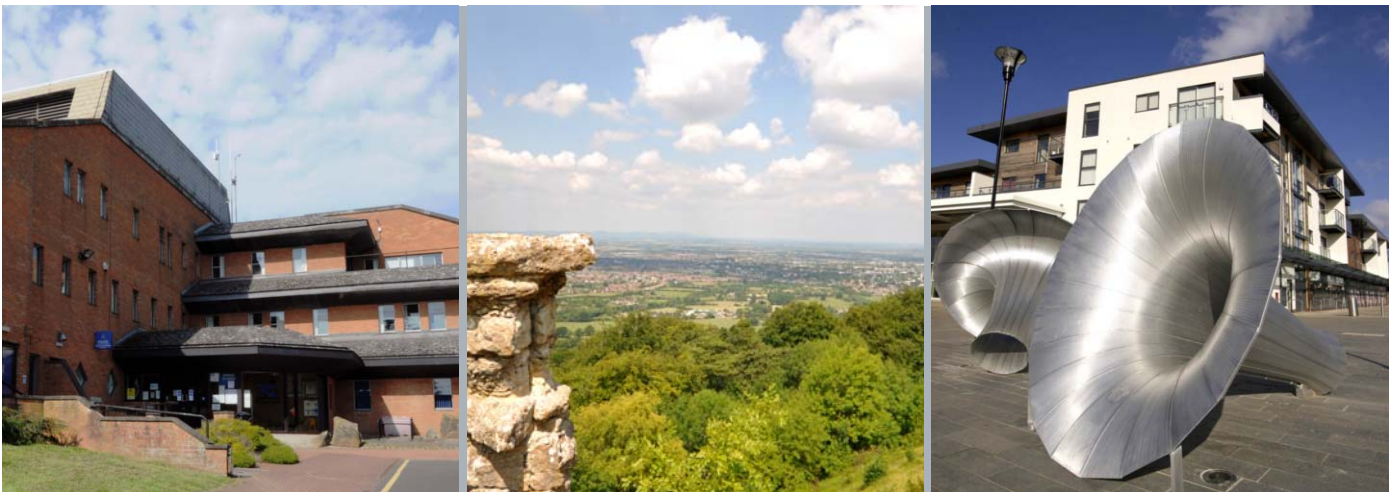


Communications strategy

2014-2016



“ communicating is at the heart of everything we do ”

March 2014

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“It is important we recognise that **communicating is at the heart of everything** we do at all levels”.

Why do we need a communications strategy?

To communicate effectively means to listen as well as broadcast and it only works when what we are saying is clear and easy to understand. Given that we are a council delivering a wide range of complex services to more than 80,000 residents, we face a significant challenge to communicate well. This strategy explores how we will go about facing that challenge.

It is important we recognise that communicating is at the heart of everything we do at all levels of the organisation. Clear communication helps us to strengthen our links with the public, our residents, partner organisations, councillors and staff.

“ The more informed people are about their council's services, the more satisfied they are with the council overall (MORI 2006). ”

This strategy provides a framework and action plan for how we can drive forward our approach to communications, ensuring we embrace modern digital communication channels (such as social media, the website and email communications) while recognising the need to continue to include the more traditional methods (such as face-to-face and phone).

As the financial challenges facing local government continue and services change to be as cost effective as possible, it is vital that we communicate these changes to our target audiences – both internally and externally. Our customers, members and staff need to know when

and how a service is changing or when it can be accessed in a different way.

This communications strategy is short and simple, looking at how we can grow our communications from how it is now, to our aims for the future. It is backed up by a detailed action plan, which sets out the milestones along the way.

This strategy is underpinned by a recent (2013) restructure of the communications function and will be delivered through a variety of communications programmes and techniques.

Roles of the team

This section outlines the scope of the Communications and Graphics team:

Internal communications

The team is responsible for corporate internal communications to keep employees informed about council policies, important events, and service news.

Corporate communications

The team manages proactive communications to increase public awareness of council policies, initiatives and service updates. The team is also responsible for maintaining a strong corporate identity across the council, and for managing high-quality and consistent communications.

Media relations

The team is responsible for promoting the council to the public through local, regional, national print and broadcast media. The media relations team issues corporate and service media releases, and builds relationships with editors and journalists to

ensure fair and accurate coverage of council news. The team also produces a daily electronic update of the council’s media coverage for councillors and managers, and manages news sent via social media channels

Supporting documents:

The following plans support the work of the Communications and Graphics team:

- Media Protocol
- Social Media Policy and Guidelines
- Social Media User Tips
- Social Media Response Check
- Written Style and Branding Guide

Aims, vision and values

The introduction of our Council Plan in 2012 means we have an agreed vision with established priorities and objectives until 2016.

As there is a clear relationship between how well informed people are about our services and how satisfied they are with us, then we need people to understand who we are and what we stand for.

Our key principles

To help us achieve that, the following principles will underpin all our communications work:

- We recognise that good quality communication is essential for the effective delivery of our services.
- We will be as transparent, open and accountable as possible.
- We will ensure information is shared, accessible and meets equality standards.

All our communication - spoken, written and electronic - will:

- Be honest, accurate, timely and up-to-date.
- Be clear, in plain English and easily understood.
- Be consistent and suitable for the audience - including hard to reach groups.
- Meet the corporate Written Style and Branding Guide and be clearly identified with Tewkesbury Borough Council.
- Be compliant with relevant legal requirements and conform to the Code of Conduct on local government publicity.

What have we done so far?

Since the introduction of our previous Communications Strategy 2010 to 2013, there has been a number of notable achievements as a result of improved communications, including:

- The introduction of the new Communications and Graphics team to allow for a more integrated approach to communications.
- An increase in proactive communications – more press releases, seminars and media briefings now take place.
- A reduction in the number of negative articles reported in the media. There has been a significant reduction in the number of media articles that have a negative tone.
- Improved media relations – we now have excellent media relations with the local media.
- New ways of communicating – we have introduced seminars and newsletters for our town and parish councils, we now have a number of social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and we have started a

- monthly online newsletter for staff.
- The adoption of a Written Style and Branding Guide ensures all external communication is written and designed in a consistent and professional manner.
- A new Community News page in Tewkesbury Borough News has opened up the opportunity for town and parish councils across the borough to add their news to our paper.
- A consistent, accurate and controlled approach to our response to emergency situations is now in place.

What do people think of us now?

To know what people think of us, we need to understand how our reputation really stands in our communities.

In June 2013 we carried out a residents' satisfaction survey to find out what our residents think of how well we run things. The questionnaire included many 2008 Place Survey questions, plus ones developed in the 2010 Residents Survey, with additional questions in relation to, for example, how our customers get in touch with us.

There was a specific section within the survey that focused on how well we keep our residents informed. The feedback from this section of the survey allows us to gauge how well we are communicating with our residents, and what areas need improving.

The survey revealed:

- That nearly 80 per cent of residents feel that we keep them very or fairly well informed about our services and benefits we provide, but 16 per cent still feel not very well informed.

- Encouragingly, the main way residents find out about the council is through our own publication Tewkesbury Borough News (54 per cent) followed by the council website (34 per cent) and via local media (33 per cent).
- 80 per cent of residents read Tewkesbury Borough News either in full or in part, and only six per cent of residents receive it but do not read it.

What do we want to achieve?

While the feedback from our residents' satisfaction survey is encouraging, it can only be regarded as an indication and the Communication and Graphics team wants to continue pushing communications forward through traditional and digital channels.

To help us achieve this, we have established the following six communications objectives:

- Maintain and improve our local reputation.
- Ensure that all elements of our communications (traditional, digital and graphic design) are integrated, consistent and co-ordinated across all channels to give maximum support to our Council Plan.
- Promote the image of the council as an effective, efficient and listening organisation that is focused on the public and their needs.
- Build and maintain a professional corporate identity for consistent and co-ordinated use throughout the organisation.
- Ensure all staff understand the priorities of the council, and feel valued and able to contribute to major council changes, such as through the Transform Tewkesbury Borough programme.
- Ensure that our communications activities reflect the full diversity of the community and help ensure equality of access to all our services.

"Supporting and **promoting digital channels** is now a communications priority to reflect the rapid growth in web and social networking."

How will we achieve this?

Embracing digital change

Supporting and promoting digital channels is now a communications priority to reflect the continuing and rapid growth in web and social networking.

Through digital channels, such as our website and apps, we can communicate quickly, target our more hard-to-reach groups (for example, young people) and it tends to be inexpensive.

A channel shift plan will form part of the new customer services strategy, which is currently being developed.

It is also important to recognise that while it is important that we embrace digital channels, our traditional methods of communication are still important. We must not exclude groups or individuals who do not have access to social media or the internet.

Social media

According to BDO International's Social Media Survey (2012), social media now accounts for nearly a quarter of total time spent on the internet, which far surpasses email. Social media is also shifting significantly to mobile - nearly 40 per cent of social media users access content from their mobile phones. Many disadvantaged groups with no broadband provision have smart phones.

It is now important to any organisation to ensure they have a strong grasp of social media and engage in the conversations that are going on about them online.

We currently have four Twitter accounts, two facebook accounts and an Instagram account:

Twitter:

Corporate
Tourism and Out of the Hat
Economic Development

Facebook:

Corporate
Sports Development

The Communications and Graphics team, alongside the council's digital take-up officer, will continue to research the most appropriate and effective use of online communication tools and social media for the council, which will include Instagram (photography) and YouTube (video) among others.

Supporting Transform Tewkesbury Borough

A key role for the new Communications and Graphics team will be to support and lead on communicating the council's Business Transformation Strategy. Having already developed flexible branding to support the council's change programme, the team will be instrumental in communicating the work programme to staff, members and the public. A separate communications plan has been developed for the Transform Tewkesbury Borough programme, and many actions within this Communication Strategy's action plan will directly relate to the Transform Tewkesbury Borough programme.

"We now have **excellent working relationships** with the local press, our aim is to continue this through regular meetings"



Twitter case study

Through social media, we have already realised that we are able to engage in two-way conversations with our residents about the issues that concern them. The conversations have helped to reduce contact with customer services as well as increase satisfaction. For example, on Twitter:

@TewkesburyBCgov: Tewkesbury Borough Council is freezing council tax for 2014/15 - that's a freeze for the fourth year running.

@Resident: well done keep it up but could we have a road sweeper around once or twice a year please.

@TewkesburyBCgov: Hi @laurencerowles, we have street sweeping vehicles to help clean our borough. Where do you live? We can pass on to our depot

@Resident: we live at xxxx , we had one cleaner here last year but only came half way down the road.

@Resident: wow , what a really clean road we have tonight , thanks for the prompt response.

We already have a Social Media Policy and Guidelines to ensure we use social media appropriately and consistently. In addition to this, a new Snapshot of Social Media and Responding to Social Media have been developed as a quick reference guide for anyone using social media in a professional capacity on behalf of the council.

Media and PR

We now have excellent working relationships with the local press, and it is our aim to continue this through regular meetings and briefings. The local media now rely on us to issue regular press releases, and respond quickly, accurately and honestly to enquiries.

In line with our Media Protocol, we will not respond with a 'no comment' and we will always respond to media enquiries within the same day.

Our media coverage is positive for a local authority, with approximately only four per cent of coverage being negative. The Communications and Graphics team will continue this trend.

Currently, the council's communications team leader is the main communications contact for all press relating to the Joint Core Strategy (JCS). This enables the JCS to have a consistent and reliable approach to media relations, and ensures its reputation is protected where possible. It is anticipated this set-up will continue for the timeframe of this strategy.

Press statements, media releases and features

The Communications and Graphics team runs a busy press office function, producing responses to daily media enquiries and issuing proactive releases to publicise council services, news, decisions and performance.

Creative and design service

We have an experienced, in-house creative team working across all forms of design for digital as well as print media.

The team offers a professional service – managing the whole process from concept to production.

Key to the work of the team is to protect and manage the use of our corporate identity, ensuring the quality of council artwork adheres to the highest standards and the purpose of publications is relevant.

The team will also take a lead in developing innovative design solutions to present council information through digital and social media platforms. This will help us to ensure that our digital presence remains current at all times.

Tewkesbury Borough News

Our residents’ newspaper, which is delivered three times a year, provides timely information and features about the council and its services, as well as details of events in the borough. Our residents’ satisfaction survey revealed that it is the main way in which residents find out about council-related news.

Following a review of its design and delivery, the three editions of the paper costs approximately £18,000 per year to produce and deliver, which works out at less than 50p per household per year.

Internal communications

Where staff understand what is required of them and morale is high, they become ambassadors for the organisation.

Even without a specific programme of change, organisations - particularly councils - are changing constantly and good internal communication is the best way of retaining the support of staff and the key to long-term improvement.

We have a multi-channel approach to our internal communications including:

- Staff Briefings
- Rachel’s Blog
- Intranet
- News4U (internal web-based newsletter)
- E-newsletters on specific topics, such as Refresh
- Brilliant cards – used to thank individual members of staff for going above and beyond their normal call of duty.
- Mythbuster: A service on our intranet, which allows staff to ask anonymous council-related questions.

Our 2012 internal communications survey revealed that 90 per cent of respondents find out corporate news and information from our internal newsletter News4U. We will, therefore, continue to use the newsletter as a key channel for communicating news to staff.

The importance of communicating effectively is recognised in the new Behaviours Framework, which was adopted in February 2014. The framework outlines six behaviours for every member of staff, regardless of their role and grade in the organisation and one of the six behaviours is to communicate effectively.

A detailed action plan for improving internal communications is attached at appendix A.

Who is responsible for communicating?

Communications is the responsibility of everyone who works at Tewkesbury Borough Council, not just the Communications and Graphics team. If we all continue to take it seriously and work together, we can carry on improving and developing our reputation.

Management teams

Communication is a priority activity for the council's leadership team. The team will identify external and internal communication issues and opportunities as an integral part of service plans. The team will communicate key corporate decisions to managers and other staff accurately, clearly and timely so they can be shared with all employees as appropriate.

Communications and Graphics team

Day-to-day management of the corporate communication function is a key responsibility of the Communications and Graphics team. The task of the team is to enhance the reputation of the council by designing and delivering two-way communications that change behaviour or perceptions for the public good.

Media relations are used to protect reputation, internal communications is used to increase understanding of the goals of the management team, and graphic design is used to ensure our campaigns are accessible by all.

Managers

Group managers and operational managers all have responsibility for creating awareness of and implementing the communications strategy among

their teams. They also have responsibility for establishing two-way channels of communication with all members of their teams. This will ensure employees are aware of key council and service decisions and, importantly, provide opportunities for feedback from employees to the senior management team.

All employees

All of our employees have some responsibility for communicating with the public. It is important that our key principles for communication are followed so that accurate, honest, appropriate and timely information flows openly from the organisation at all levels. It is also vital that our employees are kept well informed about our key themes, targets and performance.

Members

Our councillors are a vital channel of communication, and as community leaders they represent and champion Tewkesbury Borough. Councillors should see themselves as guardians of the council's image and reputation, especially as they often have to provide the official response to media enquiries. It is therefore important they have up-to-date information on council projects to allow them to carry out their role effectively. In line with that, it is imperative that officers bear in mind the needs of councillors when communicating information on the council projects they are working on.

Strategy review

This Communications Strategy and action plan will be reviewed regularly by the team, and progress on the action plan will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny on an annual basis.

This detailed plan pulls out the communication actions that reflect Council Plan actions, and sits alongside the day-to-day work of the Communications and Graphics team, which includes:

- Delivering communications support to the individual Council Plan actions across all services.
- Responding to media enquiries.
- Responding to communication and design requests from all services across the council.
- The production and delivery of proactive communications such as press releases, Tewkesbury Borough News, Staff Briefings, and e-newsletters.
- Social media monitoring and updates.

Internal communications					
Action	Council Plan priority	Audience	What difference will it make?	Responsible Officer(s)	Target year
Lead on communications and design to deliver the Transform Tewkesbury Borough work programme.	Value our employees	Staff, Members	Transparent and effective communication will enhance understanding and help to alleviate concerns	Communications team leader, Senior graphics officer	Years 1,2,3
Deliver annual internal communications staff survey every other year.	Value our employees	Staff	A better understanding of staff views of internal communication will help us to improve it.	Communications and policy officer	Year 1
Review News4U	Value our employees	n/a	The internal communications staff survey revealed News4U is read by 90 per cent of staff, so it is important it is reviewed to see where improvements can be made.	Communications team leader	Year 1

Internal communications					
Action	Council Plan priority	Audience	What difference will it make?	Responsible Officer(s)	Target year
Arrange media training for Executive Committee, group and operational managers, and other key staff.	Value our employees	Members, Staff	It will give confidence to those in media-facing roles, and will help to protect the council's reputation.	Communications team leader	Media training provided early 2014. Likely next training in 2015.
Review the current intranet and make recommendations about its replacement, based on what staff want.	Value our employees	Staff, Members	The current intranet is not used effectively and costs the council money. A replacement could be securely web-hosted and free, as well as being easy to navigate and update.	Communications team leader	Year 1
Redesign the council's key internal posters to bring them in line with the council's Written Style and Branding Guide.	Value our employees	Staff, Members	Ensure messages are eye-catching and presented in a consistent and professional way.	Senior graphics officer	Year 2
Review internal communications, including introducing a universal powerpoint template and redesigning key internal posters.	Value our employees	Staff		Communications team leader/ Senior graphics officer	Year 1
Carry out a review with members about internal and corporate communications	Value our employees	Members	Improvements to member communications	Communications team leader	Year 2

External communications					
Action	Council Plan priority	Audience	What difference will it make?	Responsible Officer(s)	Target year
Support the Transform Tewkesbury Borough work programme and deliver its communications and engagement plan	Use resources effectively and efficiently	Staff, Members, Tenants, Media, Residents	Clear, consistent and accurate communication is needed throughout this major council project to ensure all audiences feel engaged and understand what is happening and why.	Communications team leader, Senior graphics officer	Years 1,2, 3
Undertake a baseline assessment of communications and graphics to explore opportunities for shared working.	Use resources effectively and efficiently	N/a	Help us to provide an efficient and effective service.	Group manager policy and performance, Communications team leader	Year 1
Review with a view to reduce corporate spend with external design agencies	Use resources effectively and efficiently	N/a	With two in-house designers, it makes sense to look at where we can stop spending on using external designers. Where it is possible, it will help to reduce the money spent.	Senior graphics officer	Year 1
Explore the possibility of providing an external graphic design service, for example to town and parish councils or local organisations.	Use resources effectively and efficiently	Town and parish councils, Businesses	Other councils have proven this works well. It would help to provide an income stream for the council.	Senior graphics officer, Communications team leader	Year 2
Promote council achievements in the local government arena, such as the Municipal Journal.	Provide customer focused community support	Media, Local government representatives, Councils	Help to improve our reputation within the local government arena.	Communications team leader	Years 1,2, 3

External communications					
Action	Council Plan priority	Audience	What difference will it make?	Responsible Officer(s)	Target year
Investigate the use of info-graphics to help visually communicate complicated messages (such as the budget).	Use resources effectively and efficiently	Residents, Stakeholders, Media, Businesses, Councillors, Staff	Info-graphics are being used by organisations to communicate messages using graphics. This will work well for areas such as the budget and enviro-crimes.	Communications team leader, Senior graphics officer	Year 2
Support the Strategic Locality Partnership to communicate their objectives, messages and events.	Provide customer focused community support	Staff, Members, Stakeholders, Media, Businesses	It will help to promote our public services centre and our joined-up aims.	Communications team leader, Senior graphics officer	Years 1,2, 3
Support the production of a residents' survey every two years from 2013.	Provide customer focused community support	Residents	Regular residents surveys help the council to gauge an indication of satisfaction levels – including how well informed residents feel.	Communications team leader	Year 2
Review Parish Matters.	Provide customer focused community support	Town and parish councils	Ensure we are communicating effectively with our town and parish councils.	Communications and policy officer	Year 2
Provide communications support for the delivery of the new leisure centre.	Provide customer focused community support	Public, Residents, Media, Staff, Members, Stakeholders	Ensure consistent and accurate information is provided to all audiences on this major council project.	Communications team leader	Year 1

External communications					
Action	Council Plan priority	Audience	What difference will it make?	Responsible Officer(s)	Target year
Work with the Community Development team to improve communications with the borough's hard-to-reach groups. For example, look to introduce a regular young people's column in Tewkesbury Borough News.	Provide customer focused community support	Hard-to-reach groups	Improve the reputation of the council will groups that are traditionally harder to reach.	Communications team leader, Communications and policy officer	Years 1,2, 3
Provide communications support for a range of development control and planning policy areas, including the team leader's role as main media contact for the Joint Core Strategy.	Develop housing relevant to local needs	Residents, Public, Media, Stakeholders, Staff, Members	Help to ensure consistent and accurate information in simple language is provided for complex issues, such as the Joint Core Strategy and the Tewkesbury Borough Plan.	Communications team leader	Years 1,2, 3
Digital communications					
Support the council's Customer Services Strategy to promote channel shift and digital ways of communicating.	Use resources effectively and efficiently	Residents, Public, Media, Businesses, Staff, Members, Stakeholders	Clear, consistent and accurate communication is needed throughout this major council project to ensure all audiences feel engaged and understand what is happening and why.	Communications team leader, Senior graphics officer	Years 1,2, 3
Continue to lead on corporate social media accounts and research the best channels for the council to use. This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a month-by-month content calendar for social media communications. - Introduce a software monitoring tool to securely manage the council's social media activity 	Use resources effectively and efficiently	Public, Residents, Media, Stakeholders, Members, Staff	Help to increase followers on social media, protect the council's reputation, and keep the council up-to-date with new social media communication channels.	Communications team leader, Digital take-up officer	Years 1,2, 3

Digital communications					
Action	Council Plan priority	Audience	What difference will it make?	Responsible Officer(s)	Target year
Create a database of town and parish council contacts for noticeboards and newsletters.	Provide customer-focused community support	Town and parish councils	Help us to deliver our council messages through local communication channels.	Communications and policy officer	Year 2

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