STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 12 June 2023

Title: Communications Report

Contact Officer: Communications & Community Engagement Officer - Polly Inness

Background

The purpose of this report is to update members on the status of various communication projects.

Current Situation

The Communications and Community Engagement officer is currently exploring ways in which the Council can use less paper and improve green credentials with regards to communications and improve engagement with younger people.

Newsletter

The June issue of the Newsletter will be a digital version and will contain information about new councillors and their wards; survey and feedback; a calendar of meetings and some promotional material for the Corn Exchange.

The Council had 233 responses to the survey in the last issue of the newsletter, which is down on what it hoped for since it had increased the number of copies to include delivery to Colwell Brook and Windrush Place. Officers have attributed this to sporadic, late and in some cases, completely missed delivery to some streets and areas in the town. Staff and councillors monitor receipt for officers so they can keep track of delivery. This is the first time the Council has experienced a problem on this scale, having regularly used this local company for a number of years. Officers always ask for a number of quotes for the newsletter, so councillors have other options for print and delivery next year.

Officers are still asking people to sign up for the Council's mailing list for digital copies.

Resident's Satisfaction Survey comments

This year's feedback is available on this link – no password is required.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-VNSeFyje3pOoHaoMf_2BQDwA_3D_3D/

Only two people under the age of 20 (less than 1%) answered the survey and no one under 17 responded, while 102 people over 60 (almost 48%) responded. Some of this is down to self-selection bias -those who respond to the mailed-out paper survey have a propensity to do so, being predominately in the age group associated with a preference for paper-based communication (though this assumption cannot be made of every respondent in that age group). Members will be asked to consider ways of reaching a more diverse audience in the Community Engagement report.

A little history of the survey could be useful at this point. Previously to undertaking the annual satisfaction survey the Council carried out an annual Best Value initiative which involved meeting shoppers and members of the public in the Market Square by the Woolgate Centre and interviewing them about various Town Council services.

In 2016 the Council undertook a Corporate Plan Survey on Survey monkey and in paper format, delivered to all households for the first time. It asked residents to rate out services and these two main questions:

- Would you be prepared to pay more for improved services across the Town?
- Considering the services above, what are the three main issues you see as important to Witney within the next five years?

The number of respondents to this survey was 431 – the highest response ever received. This year there were 233 comments. The average response over the last eight years is 297. The lowest response was 170 in 2017.

Digital Signage

The Communications and Community Engagement officer has spent some time researching the costs (financial and environmental) of producing paper posters vs using digital signage. Accurate information is hard to find since the only data available seems to have been produced by either paper producers and print media companies, or those that manufacture or sell digital signage displays. As a compromise a direct comparison between the benefits, or otherwise, of paper and digital signage is given in the table below.

The Council's print costs show that colour printing costs 10x more than black and white. Colour per copy is 0.0582p. The Council does not produce huge numbers of posters on a daily basis but a good number of those that are displayed on noticeboards are sent digitally as pdfs and jpgs, so it bears the cost of printing those. Of course, if there is a typo, other mistake, or omission on a poster they need to be reprinted.

The Council does not need to laminate posters on noticeboards as these have Perspex fronts. However, laminated posters are frequently dropped off by members of organisations. This is an issue that, having declared a Climate Emergency, the Town Council should consider discouraging wherever possible. Because it's a plastic, laminate film is not biodegradable, and takes hundreds of years to break down in landfill. It also contributes to the growing problem of plastic pollution in our oceans and other natural environments. By contrast, a non-laminated poster takes just a few weeks to break down and a digital poster has no decomposition time.

Paper	Digital
Environmental cost of manufacture and production of printer and noticeboards.	Environmental cost of manufacture and production of digital signage unit
End of life recycling of printer	End of life recycling of digital signage unit
Purchase/Rental/ running costs (electricity) (consumables – ink, toner, paper) plus environmental cost of production of consumables/noticeboards	Purchase/running costs (electricity) no consumables
Cost associated with printing third party posters	Third party posters scanned rather than printed
Lamination	No lamination

Cost associated with reprint	Digital correction has no cost
Physical space has limits, but multiple items can be displayed side by side	No limit to number of items that can be displayed on rotation but all one at a time
24/7 display has no power cost	24/7 display has cost implication –part offset - timer.
Time needed to place a notice on the noticeboard	Time needed to scan and add a poster to a USB
Noticeboards in multiple areas	Digital signage in indoor spaces only

The most obvious benefit of digital signage is that it is eye-catching and engaging. It could be used to present news and information about the Town Council, it's work and events in video format. For example, it would be very easy to get quick videos of maintenance teams at work, or the Biodiversity officer working with volunteers, video clips of important council meetings such as the Annual Town meeting will be more impactful and informative than static images and words alone.

If the Council wishes to invest in digital signage, the optimum space for this is in the window of the Admin Office where the clock mechanism and pull up posters are displayed – the other windows are designated for use by the Corn Exchange and displays by local organisations.

Appendix 1 contains suggested models and details.

An option for a large, portable, plug and play, stand-alone unit is given, with details of a second, cheaper, less flexible model, if members wanted a 'dip a toe in the water' option to trial.

There are various screen sizes available. The Communications and Community Engagement officer recommends that we should go for 50 inch or similar. Bigger than A3 to maximise impact, while bearing in mind running costs and space available.

The table below details the projected costs to run a digital display based on an assumed 30p per KW and 10 hours use per day.

Size	32 Inch - M32P5	43 Inch - M43P5	50 Inch - M50P5	55 Inch - M55P5
Power (W)	41	45	88	98
Converted to KW	0.041	0.045	0.088	0.098
KW(h) Cost	£0.30	£0.30	£0.30	£0.30
Time on per day (hours)	10	10	10	10
Total cost per day (£)	£0.12	£0.14	£0.26	£0.29
Total cost per week (£)	£0.86	£0.95	£1.85	£2.06
Total cost per year (£)	£44.77	£49.14	£96.10	£107.02

Noticeboards

Noticeboards across the town are generally quite old and many need repairing or replacing.

- Both free standing noticeboards at the Leys were kicked through and broken. These have been removed and a new noticeboard has been purchased and will be fitted at the Coffee Shed. It will hold 6x A4 portrait posters.
- Main noticeboard by Town Hall – locks are broken on at least one handle and the noticeboard can be opened by anyone; this results in some fly posting.
- Windrush Cemetery – keys are missing.
- Tower Hill Cemetery – there are three noticeboards.
  - The one at the Curbridge Road entrance is small but the locks work well.
  - The large board by the car park has one lock that is seized shut and it's not possible to remove or replace out of date information.
  - A very small – single poster board on the exit on to the Welch Way roundabout by the Co-op lodge has no keys and no one has claimed ownership – keys missing.
- Cogges shops – the Project Officer's street furniture audit reported that this is in very poor condition and potentially dangerous. It is popular and in use but has no locks and really ought to be removed quite urgently for health and safety reasons.

The Communications and Community Engagement officer suggests that a second audit takes place to see if locks on the boards that are in generally good condition, but not accessible, can be removed and replaced. Other boards may also need to be removed. Once new locks or new noticeboards are installed there needs to be new key control with a master set held in the Town Hall.

The refresh of posters and information should begin with the Cemeteries information and one person tasked with ensuring that all noticeboards are updated once a week (previously this has been part of the role of a caretaker). Cover would be necessary to make sure that news is kept current when that member of staff is absent.

It is not necessary but desirable if all newly replaced Witney Town Council noticeboards were branded and consistent in appearance.

PA Lockable storage system

Having purchased a PA for use at Town Hall events that is separate from any purchased from the Public Halls budget the Council needs to provide safe and practical storage for it. A lockable flight case serves the double purpose in providing a secure container that is also mobile and makes it easier to transport to venues and sites where it will be used as it is heavy and cumbersome to transport in the individual cardboard boxes it arrived in.

Examples attached as **Appendix 2**

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019, Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

- Ideally all new physical noticeboards should be tamperproof with APET (Amorphous-Polyethylene Terephthalate)- more environmentally friendly than PVC - or similar shatterproof doors.
- Consideration should be given to the use of digital signage in the Admin Office window space.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

With insecure noticeboards, there is a risk the Council could be brought into disrepute by the publication of inappropriate material.

Financial implications

Described in the appendices or as stated in the report above.

➢ The approximate price for digital signage (per the appendix is £2,000). This would need to be covered by a supplementary estimate funded from the general reserve as there is no specified budget.
➢ The approximate price for PA storage is between £300-£900. This would be covered from an underspend in the Coronation events budget.
➢ There is no budget set for replacement noticeboards. Any funds would either have to come from the events budget (4141/408) or the Community Infrastructure Earmarked reserve – balance £59,944 at year end.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Investing in Digital signage as per the Council's adopted Communication Strategy action, **4.17 To aim for digital by default wherever possible to reduce wastage of inks and paper, in line with the Council's ambition to be Carbon Neutral.**
2. Setting a budget for replacing or refreshing external noticeboards where dangerous or replacing locks if viable. Creating a key control system and tasking an individual with placing notices on all our boards.
3. Investing in a secure flight box to safely store and transport the Town Hall PA equipment.