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<b>Agenda Item:</b>	Communications Report
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	Monday, 18 November 2024
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Communications & Community Engagement Officer

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The purpose of this report is to update councillors on general communication matters and progress made since the last meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee.

### **Background**

At the last meeting, the Committee discussed items relating to Communication following the results of the annual resident's satisfaction survey. Communication regularly scores more poorly but comments generally refer to the District & County Councils' services.

Several items in this report refer to improved communication, while the first is outlining an access obligation which should be met by the Council.

Witney Town Council's website has undergone a rebuild and this is nearing completion. The team is also currently very busy with press and media and promoting the positive achievements of the Council via all outlets.

### **Current Situation**

#### **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2.AA**

New regulations concerning web accessibility have recently come into effect. The Communications and Community Engagement officer and the Business Administration Assistant are beginning to work through the site to ensure that the Witney Town Council website is compliant.

#### **Newsletters**

The Autumn edition was published on 31<sup>st</sup> October. A small December (Winter) update will be issued which will contain details of competition winners and Christmas sponsors plus a reminder to let us have any nominations for Citizens of the Year (we currently have 5 nominations, a mix of organisations and individuals, and Youth Councillors have been asked to consider if they know a young person who could be nominated.) Content suggestions from Cllrs for this edition are also welcomed.

The annual spring issue delivered to all homes will be issued in late February. Councillors should consider whether four sides of A4 are sufficient to contain everything the Council wants to include.

The regular theme of this issue is information about what the Council spends and the satisfaction survey about the services it supplies. Also often mentioned are; the Annual Town Meeting, what's on and Councillors in the Café in small items. The frontpage last year was dedicated to an article about Council projects. Previously, it has been a You Said, We Did response article. This year it could be a good opportunity to focus on our investment in young people or the Which Council Does What graphic.

**Appendix 1** is a copy of last year's newsletter for reference. Councillors could consider doubling the number of pages or splitting the information over a second 4-page hard copy delivery to households six months later in order to convey Council communications to the widest possible audience.

Updated quotes have been requested, but based on last years for printing and delivery once to 14,000 households the costs are,

- A4 sized 4-page issue for approximately £3,000 + VAT (as previous years)
- A5 sized 8-page issue for approximately £3,000 + VAT

A5 printed copies of the current e-newsletter have been produced in booklet form and are available to patrons at the 1863 café bar as reading material. They are perfectly readable and **Appendix 2** is an example of this version.

As communications always scores poorly in the survey, a second printed issue might be appreciated and keep the town council and its events on peoples' radar a little more. **This would however mean the newsletter budget would need to be doubled.**

#### **You Said We Did**

If this is not included in the newsletter officers will schedule Social Media Posts and an article in a future newsletter.

#### **Witney Town Council LinkedIn** <https://uk.linkedin.com/company/witney-town-council>

Officers are currently trying to expand the use and following of this platform. It has a different audience to social media platforms and employment opportunities and notable town council/news and information will be added moving forward.

#### **Witney Lake & Country Park Signage**

At the last meeting, Members discussed the idea of adding signage to promote the Witney Country Park, it was agreed that waymarking from the Leys be considered and that the CCEO provide details to be considered in the 2025/26 budget setting.

It needs to be established what the preference for the appearance of the signage is in order to gauge costs. Following discussion with the Biodiversity and Green Spaces officer and Communications and Community Engagement Officer it is suggested an information board that has a map showing the Leys, the town and the Lake with a **You Are Here** feature.

Additional signage would only run through the Avenue to the edge of the leys and would work as three finger posts positioned to point in the direction of Avenue Two which could say

Witney Lake and Country Park (via Avenue Two) 0.5miles at the Church end of the avenue of trees. 0.4 miles at the Station Rd end of the avenue of trees.

It might be possible to source one or both types of the above signage from the Witney shed.

Officers explored the painted-on footprints but these would also stop at the edge of the Leys and have to be signposted with finger posts but the footprints would be less noticeable than an information board and be more abstract. Some examples and costs are below.



Plastic  
£330 including VAT  
£275 without VAT



Aluminium  
£937 including VAT



Finger posts around £200 each

2-3 finger posts and aluminium board are needed.

### **New Residents' Information Leaflet**

At the last meeting the Committee discussed the need for a 'Welcome to Witney' leaflet for new residents.

For budget purposes, based on the costing for the newsletter it would be around £3000 including VAT for an A5 leaflet of 8 – 12 pages for 3k copies, but an actual figure needs to be sought for clarification.

### **Impact Assessments**

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – By issuing a newsletter to every household, the Council is providing the opportunity for everyone to have site of the Council's services and events and is not putting those who don't have access to computers or phones at a disadvantage. By ensuring the Website is accessible, the Council is fulfilling its obligations under legislation.
- b) Biodiversity – By adding signs to the Lake & Country Park, the Council will be helping raise awareness of the biodiversity at the location.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct impact from the contents of the report.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – The Council must balance the needs of residents in receiving information on the Council with the declared climate emergency. Extra paper would be used but it could be a condition that 100% recycled paper is used and also publish new resident information to the website, with a smaller slip to be provided by Estate Agents.

### **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.

When communication is deemed to be poor or inconsistent, it can undermine public trust, create confusion, and lead to a negative and damaging reputation.

The Council must also be as inclusive in its reach as possible so as to not inadvertently discriminate individuals in line with legislation.

### **Social Value**

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Communicating effectively with residents is key to delivering social value—long-term, positive benefits that extend beyond immediate outcomes to contribute to the social, environmental, and economic well-being of the community. By prioritising resident engagement and clear, transparent communication, councils can build trust, stronger communities, and ensure that Council services and policies reflect the needs and aspirations of Witney residents.

## Financial implications

- The 2024/25 budget for newsletters is £2,500.
- Witney Lake and Country Park Signage from the Leys could be funded from an underspend in the existing In Bloom budget.
- There is no budget in the current year for a new resident leaflet.

## Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

1. Consider the content and format for the spring printed newsletter that contains the budget and survey. Is one paper issue sufficient to deliver all the information the Council want to impart,
2. Budget to be set for printed materials as follows:
  - 14k copies one newsletter 4 pages £3,000
  - 14k copies two newsletters 4 pages £6,000
  - 3k copies new resident's leaflet 8-12 = pages £3,000
3. Budget to be set for the Lake & Country Park signage – approximately £1,500 which could be met from the existing In Bloom budget underspend.