

Witney Town Council

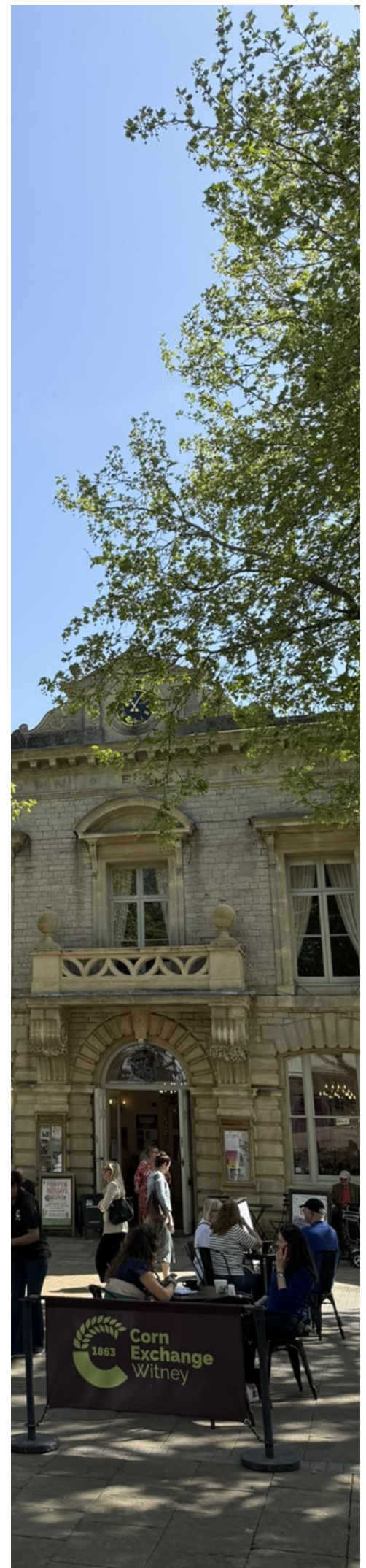


WITNEY
TOWN COUNCIL

Communications Strategy
2025

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Introduction

Effective communication is a two-way exchange and therefore it is important that the Council demonstrates that it regularly listens, assesses, and confirms that its messaging is useful, well-received and trusted. This document outlines a strategy for improving and delivering effective communications. It sets out how Witney Town Council will monitor and develop its external and internal communications to meet the needs and demands of our diverse audience of customers and interested parties.

A practical action plan drawn from this will ensure that the Council is always using the most appropriate communication tools, platforms and approaches to engage effectively with our residents, young people, community and business partners, visitors, education establishments, our staff, councillors and other levels of local government.

The Town Council will continue to report back to residents on how it takes action based on feedback received, for example by issuing 'You Said, We Did' social media posts, one of the ways in which we demonstrate that we are listening and responding.

Background and Context

Communication consistently scores low in the Annual Residents' Satisfaction Survey, indicating potential dissatisfaction among respondents. Issues include self-selection bias, primarily from an older demographic that prefers paper surveys, and apathy, as satisfied individuals generally respond less. There is no blanket method that will reach everyone, but we must continue try to address the dissatisfaction expressed by survey respondents.

Over the time we have been regularly surveying residents we have seen the satisfaction score for communication rise from its previous lowest at 76% of people expressing satisfaction in 2016, to 87% or above for the next five years.

This year (2025) the score has apparently dropped dramatically- a satisfaction level of only 62%.

While this is a cause for concern it is not likely to be a reflection of our output or the quality of our communications.

It is much more likely that much of the apparent drop is due to the impact of distorted data caused by two things, the inclusion of an additional response choice to the survey; and a more determined targeting of young people.

We added a 'don't know/don't use' tick box in 2023 and more recently we have directly surveyed school age residents using the same survey. Both of these have significantly skewed the data we collect.





None of this negates the fact that people who scored communication as poor do not feel that they are communicated with adequately. They have had a poor experience or hold a poor perception of Witney Town Council and we must continue to address that.

The distribution of newsletters to schools has yielded some welcome, useful feedback, but there is no doubt they are less familiar with certain services. They tend to tick 'don't know/don't use' and sometimes 'poor' if they do not have any experience of a particular service.

These additions have distorted satisfaction scoring data, to the extent that it is no longer particularly useful to refer to data that predates 2023.

Creating a separate youth-focused newsletter and survey may help gather more relevant feedback about their needs and aspirations and could be considered as a future action.

It is, though, still useful to look closely at data extracted from the annual residents' satisfaction survey on which this document was originally formulated and it is critical to return to the latest feedback at each review.

Witney Town Council has a strong portfolio of communication platforms, and a robust communication strategy to share positive news about ongoing projects and successes. The focus is on celebrating these achievements including drawing attention to the hard work that goes on behind the scenes.

We make conscious efforts to approach less favourable news stories with the same openness, integrity and sensitivity with which we impart the good news. We recognise how important this is given the amount of biased and false information to be found across all media, but in particular across digital and social media channels.

By maintaining consistent, responsible, and truthful communication, we aim to ensure that residents are accurately informed, can trust the information they receive, and feel confident in the Council's commitment to reliable information.



Honesty and impartiality must continue to be at the heart of our communications strategy.



Online Nation (Ofcom 2024 report)

Misinformation was the most prevalent potential harm with 39% of internet users aged 13+ saying they had encountered it. The types of misinformation that internet users saw fluctuated according to the topical news and current affairs when the survey was run.

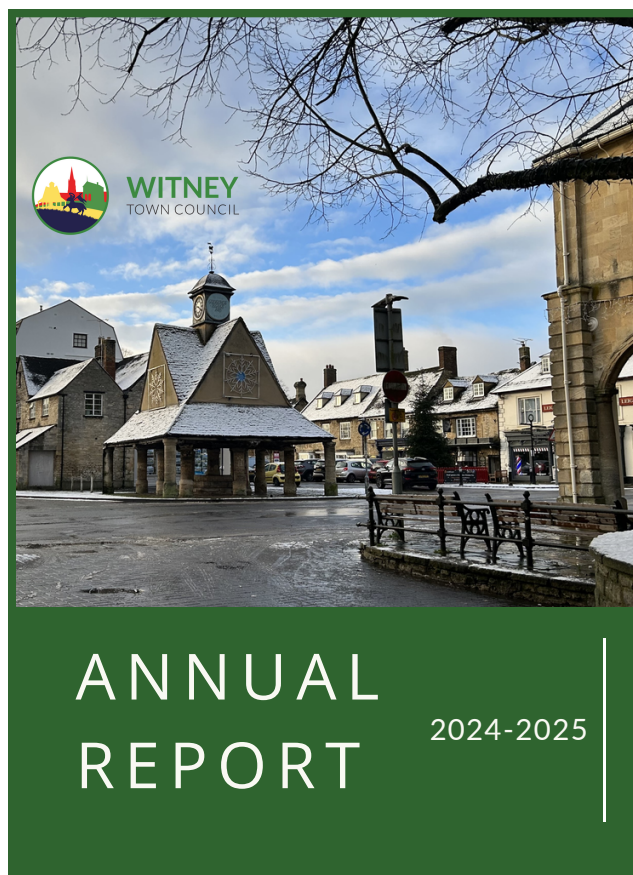
Following the announcement of the UK General Election, on 22 May 2024, there was a small but significant increase in June 2024 of internet users aged 13+ saying they had encountered political or electoral misinformation (25%), up from 22% in January 2024.

In January 2024, reports of misinformation about conflicts rose significantly (to 21% from 6% in June 2023), probably linked to the war in Gaza which began in October 2023.

We work hard to make our role and responsibilities clear. With three tiers of local government serving Witney, it's understandable that residents can sometimes be unsure who does what. Our Wheel of Responsibilities and Services design, featured in our quarterly newsletters and shared on Facebook and Instagram every 5-6 weeks, helps explain how services are divided — particularly shared ones such as grass cutting and tree maintenance.

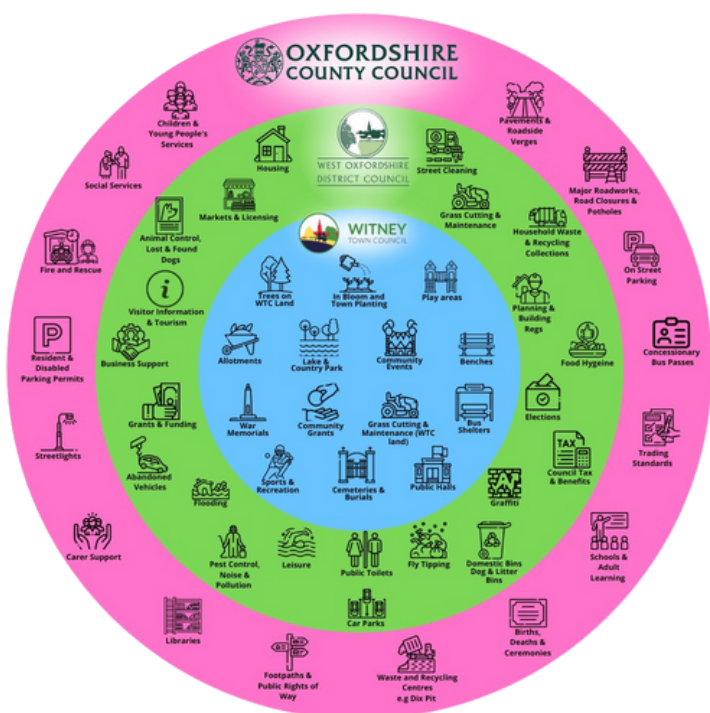
The Annual Report features a committee news round-up summarising key work areas.

We issue updates when the Town Council undertakes actions beyond its remit, such as clearing fallen trees or removing debris from non-riparian sections of the river, and it is vital to ensure this distinction is clearly stated.



We share 'You Said, We Did' updates to show actions taken in response to resident feedback from reception visitors, Councillors in the Café, the annual survey, and other consultations. Feedback on services outside our remit is passed on to the relevant authorities.

Despite reiteration of differing responsibilities there remains a perception of us as 'The Council' with no differentiation between the community level services we deliver and our stubborn refusal to fix potholes!



Steadfast and consistent branding of our news is the key to reshaping perceptions, distinguishing our work and the value we bring to our communities.



Purpose

The purpose of this communications strategy is to provide a clear direction for the development of external and internal communications across the organisation.

This strategy should be viewed as a living document that is reviewed regularly in order to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing communications landscape, and the expectations that come with that.

- It aims to support the council's other policies, strategies and plans including those that are emerging.
- It is intended to ensure that the place and purpose of Witney Town Council, its Vision and Strategy is understood in the community, and to demonstrate that in turn the community voice is heard, listened to and acted upon.
- To promote Witney Town Council as an easily recognised, trusted and news source with consistent branding and reliable, accessible digital and print formats.

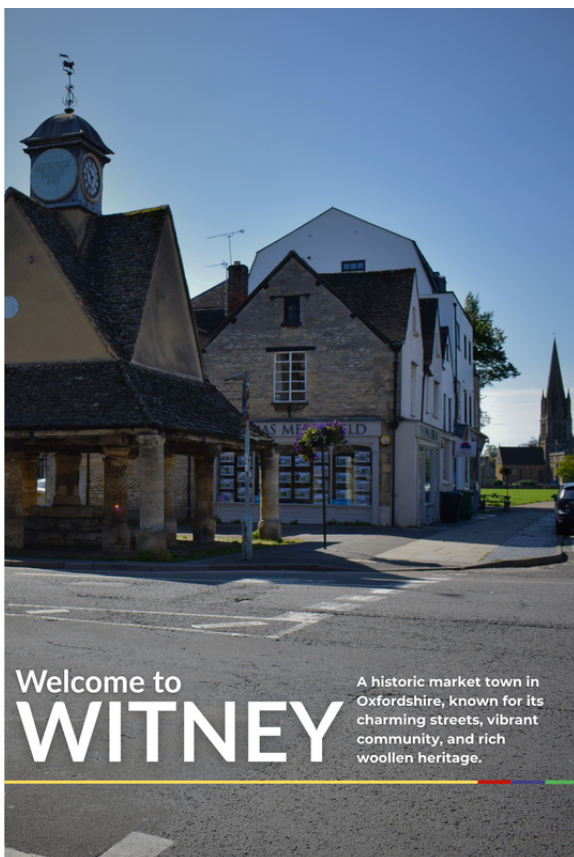
Objectives

- To set and maintain a consistently high standard of communication across all the Council's communications channels and departments even when the tone of voice is tailored according to the channel.
- Communications from Witney Town Council should be instantly recognisable as such. Standardisation of everything from email signatures to forms and templates, will ensure this. And this, in conjunction with re-branding, will have a positive impact on perceptions of the role and functions of Witney Town Council and will help earn trust.
- To deliver, with confidence and appropriate pride, a high standard of engaging, interesting, clear, useful, and factual communications, across a range of audiences and media.
- To communicate, clearly, the council's role and responsibilities in the community, maintaining and building upon a good reputation and signposting to where help may be found if it is not within our remit.
- To organise and modernise our approach, and use innovative ways to deliver news, report information and feedback to our residents.
- To engage and consult with our residents and enable them to communicate easily with the council, and for them to be able to expect a timely and appropriate response.
- To ensure that all internal and external communications use language that treats people with the respect they deserve, is non-discriminatory and accessible to a wide audience. Plain English should be used at all times with any obscure terms and abbreviations explained.



objectives contd

- To ensure that everyone has equal access to information and is not discriminated against or disadvantaged by our actions in any way. This includes reducing barriers wherever possible, for example through the use of the Voices of Witney panel.
- To ensure that all residents feel welcomed and included.
- To establish new and build on existing partnerships with other organisations and community groups.
- To establish measures to monitor and assess impact of communications.
- To continue to grow the Town Council's reach and expand the demographic spread on its digital channels.



Who Are We Trying To Reach ?



Continue to use, produce and develop, key print publications, maximising the reach and impact of these to help reach a wider audience, particularly those without internet access.

objectives contd

- To make better use of graphics and video across the council's digital platforms and explore other emerging technologies with an open mind.
- To develop internal communications channels which are tailored to a mobile workforce to meet the needs of the organisation and encourage staff engagement.
- To ensure web content is relevant and accessible.
- To continue to foster good relationships with the media, being both proactive in output and responsive to incoming enquiries and requests for comment/content.
- 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.

Color Contrast Checker - Pivotal Accessibility

Foreground: #1D0370

Background: #183D68

Color Contrast Ratio: 1.47:1

1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum) (AA)
Fail (Large) Fail (Regular)

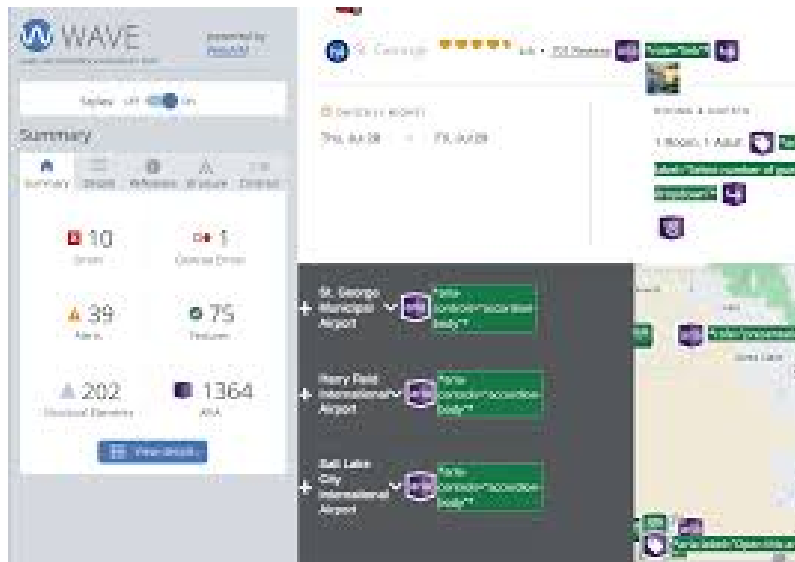
1.4.6 Contrast (Enhanced) (AAA)
Fail (Large) Fail (Regular)

1.4.11 Non-text Contrast (AA)
Fail (UI components and graphical objects)

Select a Success Criterion
1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum) (AA)

Select Text Type
Regular

Get Color Recommendations



The Comms team now use accessibility checkers for all web, social media, and print content to ensure sufficient text-image contrast and to provide text alternatives for any information shown in images. We are also already working to meet the requirements of the upcoming WCAG 3.0 (2.3). newly uploaded videos have captions (not live stream)

Ageing Towns

Most of the data from our Annual Residents' Satisfaction Survey, attendance at the Annual Town Meeting, the 1863 café clientele, and our event audiences shows a strong bias toward older people. While we appear to reach this group well, they are also the ones who most often say they don't know what we do or what's happening unless it's in the Witney Gazette or sent to them by letter.



Below are some extracts from a recent report by **Centre For Towns**, an independent non-partisan organisation dedicated to providing research and analysis of our towns highlights that many young people are moving in to cities and larger towns leaving smaller towns and villages as 'ageing towns'. This should be taken into account when considering what we do and how we want to improve.

- **The Office for National Statistics currently projects that by 2046 there will be seven million more people aged 65 and over in the United Kingdom.**
- **Around three-quarters of the increase in 45 to 64-year olds and over 65s between 1981 and 2011 took place in villages, communities, small and medium sized towns.**

Digital - Website

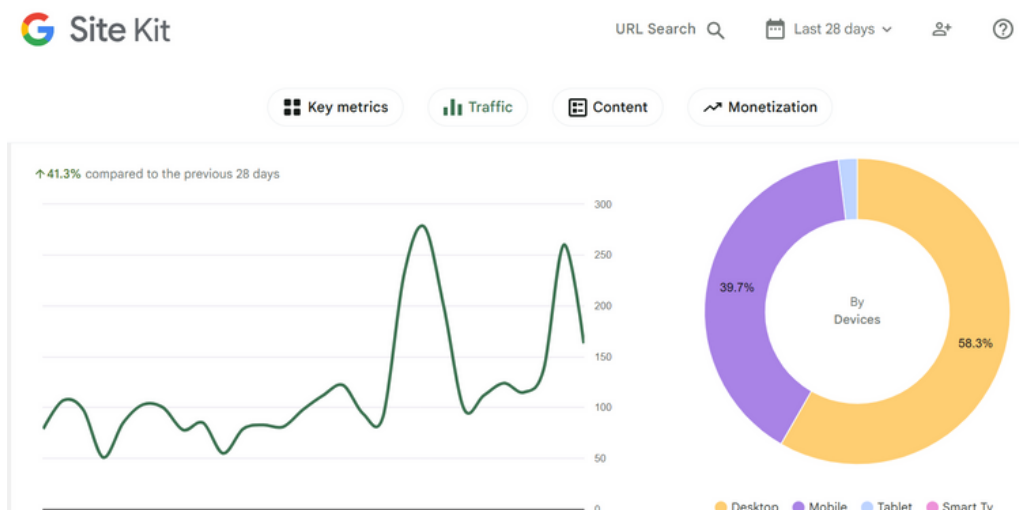
Witney Town Council's website was built in house by the Communications and Engagement Officer, using WordPress, and is hosted by Fasthosts. Fasthosts has been a very satisfactory supplier with an excellent level of service and support. The site has recently been updated to be more accessible.

The Corn Exchange website was built by Rumbi. The website content is managed by Venue & Events Officer and the Venue & Events Co-ordinator.

Content on the WTC Council website is currently managed by the Communications and Engagement Officer, Administrative Support Assistant - Communities and Planning and Administration Assistant - Communications & Engagement.

Content often reflects what is shared on social media but sometimes these differ according to audience and relevance. Pages are usually added as an action arising from a Council decision. Mod Gov is embedded in the website, and the content for this is managed by the Democratic and Legal Services Officer. The software appears to function well within our site.

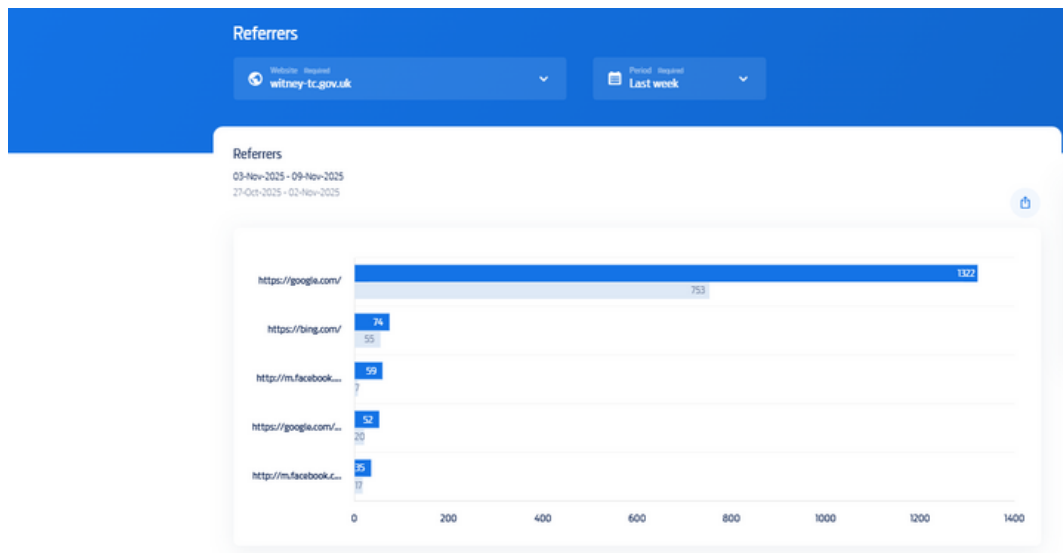
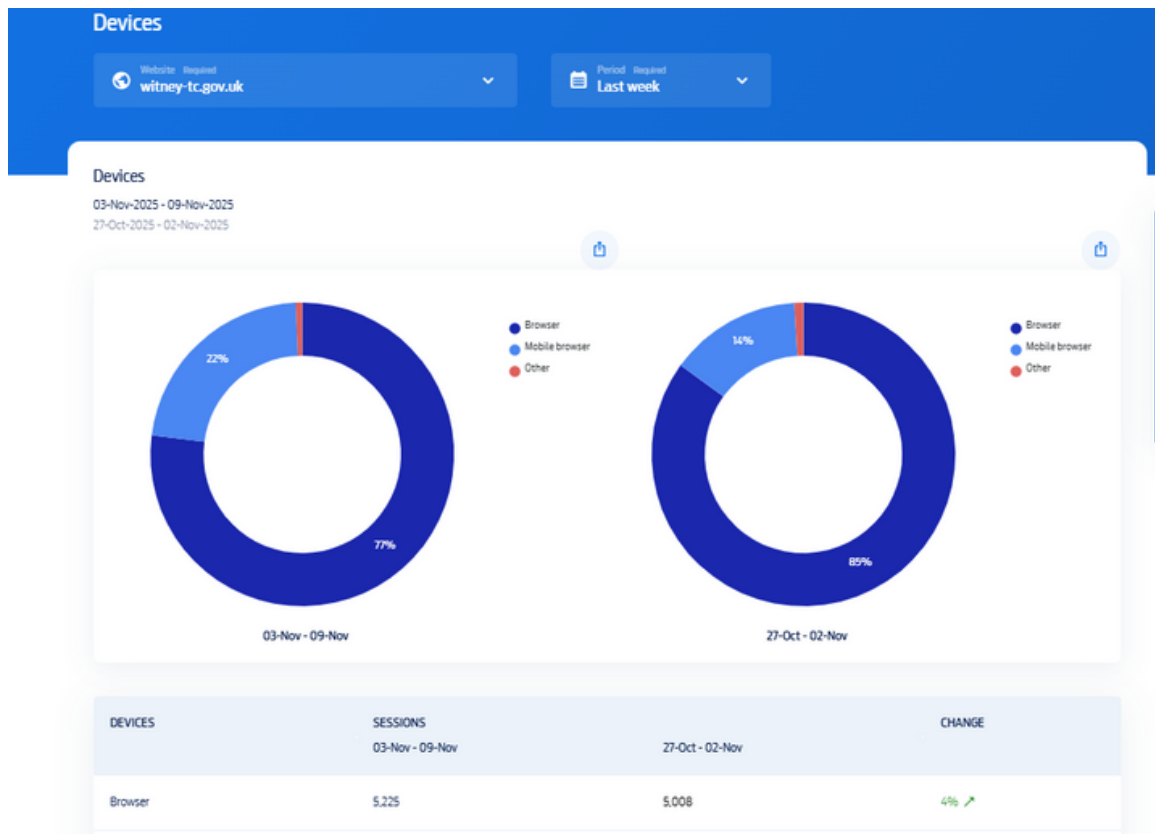
The Google Site kit generates plenty of anonymous website visitor data and we also get regular insights from our hosting company. We regularly review these and it is easy to see how visitors fluctuate from month to month.



We can see how people are accessing the site and how long they spend there, which pages they visit and the most popular pages.

1.	Witney Town Council – Official Site of Witney Town Council	1,026	799	57.07%	1m 36s
2.	What's On at Our Venues – Witney Town Council	279	261	63.98%	59s
3.	Christmas Lights Sponsorship 2025 – Witney Town Council	214	206	58.25%	39s
4.	Remembrance Sunday – Witney Town Council	203	199	36.68%	1m 5s
5.	Temporary Road Closure – Downs Road, Witney – Witney Town Council	132	112	71.43%	1m 16s
6.	Contact Us – Witney Town Council	87	84	67.86%	3m 6s

Digital - Analytics -Website



Our hosting company also provide useful analytics such as Referrers which lets us know how people were directed to our site for example, as the result of a google search or from a link through Facebook etc. We can also view the terms visitor used to search for us, and this is linked to an increase in site traffic at certain times of the year when people are searching for information on Witney Feast or Remembrance

Social Media

The Council has the following corporate social media profiles and followers:

Facebook: @WitneyTownCouncil - 3607(June 2021) currently **6200 (Nov 2025)**

Instagram @witneytc -115 (July 2021) **currently 836 (Nov 2025)**

X: @WitneyTownCounc – 3409 followers (June 2021) **currently 3459 (Nov 2025)**

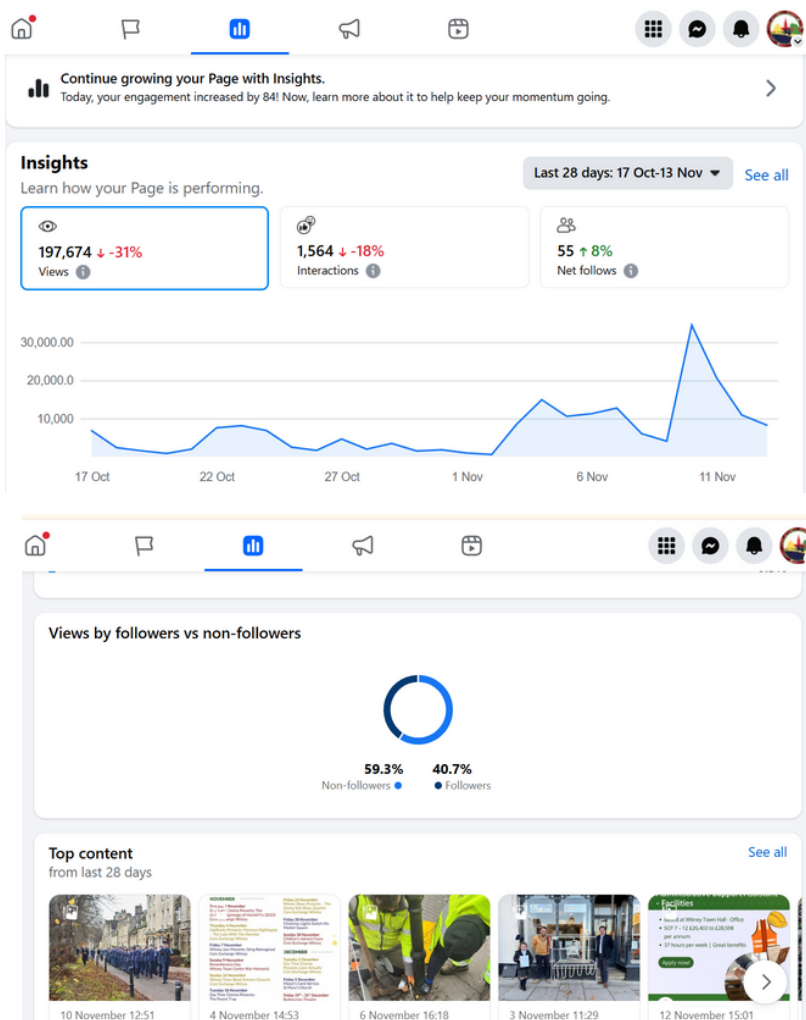
We also have a You Tube Channel, LinkedIn and Tik Tok which are still slowly growing – These are all administered, and content uploaded, in the main by the Communications and Community Engagement Officer , Administrative Support Assistant -Communities and Planning and Administration Assistant - Communications & Engagement.

The Corn Exchange has its own social media accounts..

The Youth Council also has an Instagram account.

The various analytics dashboards do throw up some useful insights into the type of content that performs well. Videos and images generally reach larger audiences than text-only posts and we are using more of these although they can be more time consuming to create. Content that really matters locally and is important to residents can provoke a response and is shared rapidly, reaching a significant number of people.

Officers are making efforts to include more video but captioning is quite time consuming.

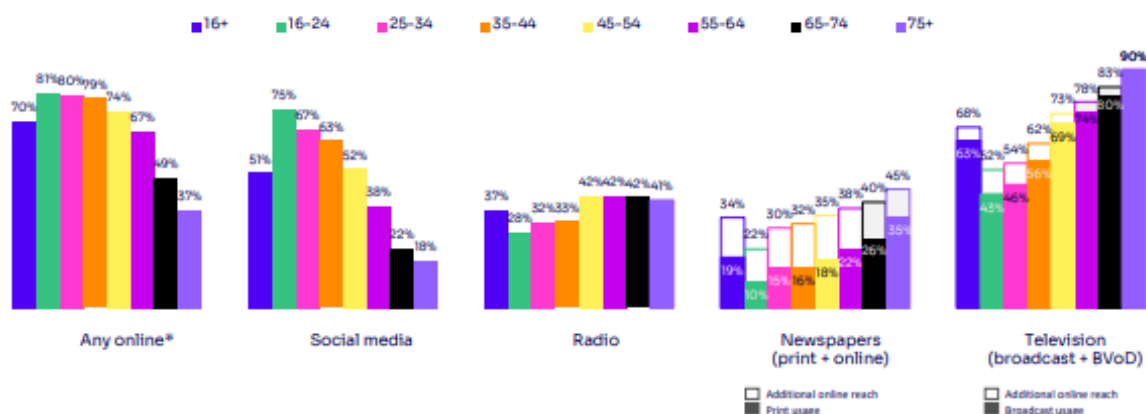


Social Media National Statistics

More people consume online than through any other platform for news

While online news consumption (70%) is on a par with watching news on TV, including on-demand (68%), it is significantly higher than linear broadcast TV channels (63%). Social media is a significant element of online news consumption and half of UK adults (51%) now use it as a source of news. Television (including on-demand) as a source of news skews towards an older demographic, with 90% of those aged 75 and over using it, compared to 52% of young people aged 16-24. The reverse is seen in the use of online for news – 81% of 16-24s are using online services, compared to only 37% of adults aged 75 and over. Just under four in ten people use the radio for news, and about one in five adults say they get news from a printed newspaper. In both cases, this is highest among older age groups.

Figure 5: Platforms used for news 'nowadays', by age: 2025



Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2025 Question: C1. Which of the following platforms do you use for news nowadays? Base: All Adults 16+ 2025 – All adults 16+=4573, 16-24=585, 25-34=770, 35-44=787, 45-54=741, 55-64=587, 65-74=628, 75+=472 *'Online' includes social media, podcasts, other websites/apps.

When asked about trustworthiness, 68% of those who use TV for news, and 67% of those who use radio for news, rated these highly for trustworthiness. In contrast 44% of those who use social media for news rated social media highly for trustworthiness.⁴ For further detail on how people in the UK access and consume news, please see our recently-published News Consumption in the UK report.