
Agenda Item:	Communications Report
Meeting Date:	Monday, 15 th June 2026
Contact Officer:	Communications and Community Engagement Officer

The purpose of this report is to update councillors on various communication matters.

Current Situation

2026 Spring Newsletter and Survey

The decision was taken that the invoice from the distribution company should be paid in full. They had cooperated fully throughout the process, providing tracking data and regular updates. Overall, performance was considered comparable to last year's Royal Mail distribution, while achieving a more targeted delivery to households within Witney's boundary and avoiding unnecessary distribution to business premises.

Survey response levels were slightly lower than in 2025. This was largely due to significantly fewer responses being received via schools, with approximately 50 returned this year compared with around 200 in 2024 and 100 in 2025. The Administrative Assistant Communications and Engagement has collated the survey returns from under 18s and these are presented in **Appendix A**

It is also likely that survey fatigue contributed to reduced participation, as two separate surveys were included within the same newsletter, which may have discouraged some recipients from completing either.

The lower response rate highlighted limited engagement from younger age groups. The C&CE Officer has explored ways to improve engagement with residents aged 18–30, who are most effectively reached through digital channels and social activities. This demographic generally responds best to concise, accessible communications and consultations that clearly demonstrate how feedback will influence decisions.

Consideration could be given to a retro and contemporary gaming event with a community engagement element. This could provide an opportunity to gather feedback on Council priorities and the types of events, performances and screenings younger residents would like to see. As many residents in this age group are also parents, family-friendly and accessible formats should be considered.

Previous engagement activities at the Carnival had successfully used coloured stickers to gather feedback on preferred options for the Splash Park redesign. This approach proved highly inclusive, enabling even very young children to participate and express their preferences. Similar simple, visual engagement methods could be considered for future

consultations to encourage participation from a wider range of age groups, and we recommend using this as the most likely to engage way of presenting this year's survey there. No questions will be changed as this would skew results.

We do also have VEVOX but with no power supply this could only be presented as a QR code.

WhatsApp channel proposal

Councillors will have received a link to our proposed WhatsApp channel. The link is below and the information we will use to launch the new social media feed, if adopted, is also presented.

<https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VbCs9wh4Y9IjF515Jv24>

We're now on WhatsApp Channels!

Want important council updates delivered straight to your phone? Follow our new WhatsApp Channel to stay informed quickly and easily.

What is a WhatsApp Channel?

A WhatsApp Channel is a one-way broadcast feed. This means:

- Your information remains private – no one can see your phone number or personal details.
- You can follow and view our updates.
- Only we can post messages.
- You cannot reply or message us through the Channel.

It is designed to provide simple, reliable updates – no chats, no group messages, and no spam.

What we'll share:

- Urgent service updates and emergency notices
- Important local announcements
- Meeting dates and agendas
- Community events and consultations
- Local roadworks and service updates

All delivered straight to your phone in real time. To follow us, simply click the link below and select Follow.

Town Guide (Biannual)

Until around 2011, Witney Town Council commissioned an externally produced Town Guide through Local Authority Publishing (despite the name, this was not a government-backed organisation, but a commercial publisher). The arrangement was subsequently discontinued by the Town Council.

Over the past year, we have been working on developing a similar resource for the Council's website. This was originally proposed as a paper project. Progress has been slower than anticipated, as considerable time is needed to ensure the format is appropriate, user-friendly, and of a manageable size for online storage and display.

Officers have just received a new proposal for an official Town Guide from an established publisher that provides a number of these nationally. This proposal outlines how town guides can be produced and distributed to promote local communities, with zero cost (advertising is intended to pay for the production) and flexible involvement. Please see below and in full detail in **Appendix B**.

- The publisher is responsible for generating the advertising revenue. Guides are free to the town council; advertising covers production costs.
- 50 years' experience in publishing local guides and newspapers.
- Two bi-annual A5 town guides with essential contacts, attractions, maps, and history.
- Online digital copies and social media sharing to enhance accessibility.
- Councils can choose their level of content input. Maybe we could include the precept information, Who does What, or a What's On in here.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

2. An Engaged & Supported Community

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 – The newsletter and survey should be distributed as widely as possible to ensure an inclusive approach. The WhatsApp channel and Town Guide may also help extend reach across different audience groups. Providing the Communications Preference Survey in both paper and online formats will help reduce digital exclusion, particularly for older residents and those without regular internet access. Targeted engagement will also be undertaken with less frequently heard groups, particularly residents aged 18–30, including at the Carnival and through other appropriate opportunities as they arise.
- b) Biodiversity – no direct impact.
- c) Crime & Disorder – Improved communication and community engagement may contribute to greater awareness of community activities and indirectly support community cohesion, helping to reduce anti-social behaviour
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – While print production has some environmental impact, efforts will be made to minimise waste, use sustainable materials where possible, and promote digital communication channels in line with the Council's Climate Emergency declaration.

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.

There is a risk that, if the survey is not widely accessed or completed across all age groups, the Council may not capture the views of a significant proportion of the local population.

With regard to the Town Guide, Witney has not had an official guide for several years but other publishers are operating in the community offering a similar output.

Social Value

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

Using multiple communication channels such as a survey, WhatsApp channel, and town guide increases inclusivity and ensures engagement reaches a wider and more representative cross-section of the community. This helps reduce digital exclusion, particularly among residents who are either less digitally connected or prefer non-digital formats, while also improving participation from harder-to-reach groups. As a result, the Council is better able to capture a more accurate and balanced view of local opinion.

Financial implications

- The addition of a survey at the carnival and the WhatsApp channel are able to be funded from existing budgets and resource capabilities.
- The guide as presented indicates there is no cost to the Town Council (but this would need to be explored further).

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider;

1. The best option for presenting a survey at the Carnival;
2. Whether the Council wishes to continue with a WhatsApp channel as part of its Communications resources;
3. The option of investigating further or signing up for a biannual town guide.