

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: 19th July 2021

Title: Report to Accompany Draft Communications Strategy

Contact Officer: Communications and Community Engagement Officer - Polly Inness

Background

Witney Town Council's communications need to be fit for 2021 and beyond. Effective communication will be fundamental to fulfilling the priorities of the Council's Strategic plan and achieving its goals.

It isn't just about disseminating information and broadcasting messages. This needs to be a two-way conversation. We need to use these same channels to listen, to gather customer feedback, opinions, desires and ideas. We need to join in the conversations taking place about how we make Witney a better, safer, more inclusive and welcoming place. Ensuring our communications are audience focused will make them more engaging and effective.

We need to embrace digital channels to help get our key messages and information to the right people, at the right time and in the right way, while at the same time recognising that not everyone is comfortable with the internet and supporting them with alternative format choices.

While we must aim to ensure important communications reach those who may not have easy access to technology, or who simply prefer traditional formats, it is evident that we are part of a smartphone society. As such, we need to accept that digital communications are becoming faster, easier and the norm and be agile in meeting this demand.

The following Communications Strategy examines how to improve all our communication activities and looks at resources and responsibilities. It looks at analytics taken from our web and social media sites, and what they are telling us in terms of reach and effectiveness.

It ends with a number of actions designed to address the objectives and aims of the strategy.

Supporting data

Some Key metrics from Ofcom's 2021 report 'Online Nation':

- *Six per cent of households don't have home internet access, and 14% of adults access the internet only infrequently. Older people are less likely to have home internet access (18% of over-64s do not have access), but so too are those in lower socio-economic households (11%).*

- *Even among those who do have access to the internet, 5% say they are not confident in using it, again with higher proportions among over-64s (9%) and those in lower socio-economic households (10%).*
- *TikTok, owned by the Chinese company Bytedance, increased its number of UK adult users from 3.2 million in September 2019 to 11.5 million in September 2020, and this grew further during the winter 2021 lockdown, reaching 13.9 million UK adults in March 2021. It is also particularly popular among teenagers, with more than 37% of 13- to 17-year-olds saying they used it in March 2021.*
- *By the end of the year, about 94% of UK homes had internet access, up from about 89% in 2019. And we spent more time online: an average of 3 hours 37 minutes a day on smartphones, tablets and computers (nine minutes more than in 2019)*
- *In September 2020, UK internet users spent nearly four times as much time on smartphones (an average of 2 hours 19 minutes a day) than they did on computers (37 minutes).*

Communication Section, 2018 Resident's Satisfaction Survey 2018

<i>Website</i>		
<i>55.00%</i>		<i>88</i>
–		
<i>Social Media</i>		
<i>41.88%</i>		<i>67</i>
–		
<i>Local Paper</i>		
<i>56.25%</i>		<i>90</i>
–		
<i>Posters</i>		
<i>20.00%</i>		<i>32</i>
–		
<i>Newsletters</i>		
<i>29.38%</i>		<i>47</i>
–		
<i>Direct Visit</i>		
<i>1.88%</i>		<i>3</i>
–		
<i>Council Minutes</i>		
<i>3.75%</i>		<i>6</i>
–		
<i>Council App</i>		
<i>5.63%</i>		<i>9</i>
–		
<i>Noticeboards</i>		
<i>23.13%</i>		<i>37</i>

Total Respondents: 160

It would be interesting to repeat this communication focus in a future survey, to see if and how, Witney reflects the National trend of a continuing shift to digital channels.

Environmental impact

Making information available to non-internet using households may result in an increase in the amount of ink and paper being used. However some of this may be offset by the development of an e-news subscriber database and a reduction in the number of posted paper versions required. This may prove difficult to administer against the blanket posting to all addresses.

Risk

None

Financial implications

There is no budget in this financial year for the implementation of any items from this strategy, members might like to consider a budget during the budgetary-setting cycle.

Recommendations

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

That the Communications Strategy, subject to any amendments be agreed by this Committee. Delegation being given to Officers, in conjunction with officers to make the amendments before adoption by the Council.