

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 30 May 2022

Title: Communications & Community Engagement Report

Contact Officer: Communications & Community Engagement Officer, Polly Inness

Background

The purpose of this report is to provide a brief update to members on Council Communications and Community Engagement matters.

Current Situation

The current spreadsheet outlining Council press coverage is attached for information as Appendix A. Other items for consideration by the Committee are:

Resident Satisfaction Survey 2022

The survey, posted to every household in Witney and promoted online via Survey Monkey closed on 30th April. There were 307 responses to the survey and the results/answers for each question can be seen on this link https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-G8aJ_2FW3ft4Eln6mQ7cFbZA_3D_3D/

The headlines from the survey are:

- Communication, community events and street furniture are regarded as the poorest services
- Floral Displays, Christmas Lights and Civic Events are regarded as the best services

There are number of comments submitted by residents which echo the above, but also provide valuable information on play parks and open spaces, which will be fed into work being progressed by officers in these areas as part of the ongoing Open Spaces Strategy. With regard to communications, comments in this area will be incorporated into a review of the Council's Communications Strategy later this summer.

There are many comments regarding services provided by other authorities and members may like to consider a formal process of relaying this valuable information to those organisations.

Championing Local

The Communications Officer has explored the possibility of congratulating local sports teams, schools, and organisations when they have been successful to improve community engagement with these organisations.

This would meet objective 4.9 of the Communications Strategy, *'To establish new, and build on existing partnerships with other organisations and community groups'*, and actions EE3 and EE7 of the Open Spaces Strategy.

The Council's Facebook account is however, not set up as a personal one and does not have a newsfeed where posts of those followed can be seen. The Communications Officer would be reliant on members or others advising of this information as scrolling Facebook everyday would not be a good use of officer time. Twitter is better but not all of these organisations use that platform. Any successes could also be reported to Full Council as a communication from the Leader, so they are formally recognised.

In terms of engagement with these groups, members may also like to consider incorporating local 'Sporting Categories' into the annual civic reception/citizen of the year awards, to be reviewed in the next cycle of meetings.

Witney Town Council App

At the last meeting of this committee, it was resolved that the focus of the App should be considered, and usage figures should be provided. 6.13/6.14 of the Communications Strategy cover the future of the App.

6.13 The App has become a little stale since its original launch and would benefit from a substantial rebuild as part of the rebranding exercise. Many of the features are somewhat outdated and it lacks much in the way of interactivity or interest to younger residents of the town. What information will people be looking for, what is useful and current

The App currently provides the following services, mainly as shortcuts to the Council's website: Councillors, Events, Points of Interest, Link to Fix My Street, Messages, council information, directions, contact details and a news feed.

The current figures for users of the App are 2165. Of these, approximately 500 actively use the App and 1500 are 'sleeper' inactive users. Within the last 12 months there have been no photos or messages submitted via the App.

Few Parishes and Town Councils have an App, and although it was publicised on launch, its use and viability has waned in recent years. Larger Councils offer a more substantial product in terms of bin collection notifications, payments, a raft of report it features, and offer links to services which affect them in a more direct way. Members should consider the purpose of the app, which is in effect, for a very small audience – residents and visitors.

For the App to be successful and well-used it would need to have regular, sustained interactions:

Interactive	Healthy/Active lifestyle – walking routes, cycle routes
Transactional	Loyalty Bonus at the 1863 Café Bar, push notifications on events facilitated by the town council or on its land, 'report it' feature
Informative	Guide to Green Spaces, pin-pointing parks/cemeteries, signposting youth services , cycle repair stand locations Signposting of Youth services and events.

Members should note that the more content is added to the App, the more resources will be needed to ensure it remains current.

Environmental impact

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

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.

The main risk is that the Council fails to address the current poor perception of communications and Community Events as evidenced in the survey, due to lack of staff available to cover the broad range of communications it already delivers by 1 f/t officer and 1 shared p/t officer.

Financial implications

The financial implications are as follows:-

- Human resources in looking in regularly looking at user groups Facebook pages to Champion Local and rebuilding and maintaining the Council's App.

Recommendations

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

1. That comments from the satisfaction survey are incorporated into emerging plans from the Open Spaces & Communications strategies
2. That members consider how best to pass on comments relating to other authorities
3. That members consider how best to receive and report organisational successes within current staff resourcing limits; and
4. That these successes are reported to Full Council under Communications from the Leader
5. That members consider whether they would like to incorporate Witney sporting achievements and perhaps best allotment with the annual Civic Reception/Citizen of the Year ceremony and In Bloom.
6. That, the App redevelopment if approved, be scheduled for later this year. Members to decide the content based on the above comments.