



# Communications Strategy 2016 – 2021

# Ahead of the Game

Effective communication is key to the success of any business or organisation.

Establishing a two-way conversation that engages stakeholders, informs about services, celebrates achievement and creates a culture of openness, honesty and trust is crucial to long-term prosperity.

However, in a crowded marketplace of social media and digital channels at the centre of a world with information available on tap, standing out from the crowd can be far from easy.

South Derbyshire District Council prides itself on its track record of delivering high-quality services to those living in, working in and visiting one of the fastest-growing areas in the country.

Like all local authorities, though, it is facing up to the tough task of further developing and improving these services against a backdrop of reduced core funding, financial pressures, a changing media landscape and soaring expectations.

The Council must find budget savings in its General Fund of up to £1.5 million by 2018, together with savings within its Housing Revenue Account of £19 million over the next 10 years. Never has its mantra of 'doing more with less' been so relevant.

In its previous Corporate Communications Strategy, the focus was put firmly on moving away from traditional reactive communication to a pro-active online approach. During its lifespan the Channel Shift Strategy was launched, while internally a new intranet was designed and implemented.

The trend is reflected across the local government sector. Research into the communications practices of other authorities has shown a clear evolution towards digital methods across the board.

While the work of the Communications team is central to keeping residents, customers, stakeholders and other parties informed, it is not exclusive to it. Consistency of message both internally and externally, to and from all staff and Elected Members, will be pivotal in achieving high levels of performance.

This strategy maps out how, in line with its Equality Policy and against the priorities laid down in its Corporate Plan, South Derbyshire District Council will embrace the fast-changing world of communications to stay ahead of the game for the benefit of those it serves.

# Communications Priorities

## Our Top 10







# Day-to-day Communications

**Promoting and raising awareness of what the Council does**

**Promoting the Council's values and priorities**

**Demonstrating how the Council spends public money**

**Publicising Council events, activities and opportunities**

**Upholding and playing a key role in the democratic process**

**Helping to deliver digital services and solutions**

**Developing channels for effective engagement**

**Highlighting partnership and community working**

**Maximising commercial opportunities**

**Creating modern and consistent branding**

**Doing more with less**

**Supporting staff and Elected Members in communicating effectively**

Aim

'To deliver consistently high-class, effective, efficient and measurable communications across all channels to support the priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan, ensuring stakeholders are well-informed and satisfied.'

## How We Communicate

**Social Media**

**SDDC Website**

**The Media**

**Better Online (the intranet)**

**Housing News (quarterly)**

**Face-to-face Customer Services/ Councillor Surgeries**

**Internal Communications Staff briefings, Email, One-to-ones**

**Council / Committee Meetings**

**SMS & IVR Messages**

**Consultation Exercises and Events**

**Reports and Policy Documents**

**Branding Posters, Leaflets etc**

## Our Stakeholders

- South Derbyshire residents
- Service users
- Council staff
- Elected Members
- Parish councils
- Local businesses
- Visitors/tourists
- Local, regional and national media
- Derbyshire County Council and neighbouring authorities
- Partner organisations
- Community organisations/the third sector
- D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership





# Here is a closer look at our key communications channels:

## The Media

While the Council's long-established strong relationship with the local media continues, the landscape has changed considerably in the past decade – particularly with regard to the written press.

The ever-increasing popularity of the internet and digital world has hit circulation figures hard.

However, local titles can now boast a bigger audience than ever before thanks to their daily website visitors and social media followers.

The Trinity Mirror-owned Burton Mail, for example, currently attracts around 25,000 unique visitors (UVs) to its website each day, with more than 73,300 page views, while its Facebook page has in excess of 16,500 'likes.' The Derby Telegraph has around 75,000 UVs to its website, with 200,000 page views, and has more than 42,500 Facebook page 'likes.'

This has led to a 'reverse publishing' model where news is shared through digital channels before it is even considered for print, with members of the public encouraged to be content providers or 'citizen journalists.' It is this group of activists, armed with the tools and ever more keen to play their part in local life, that the Council must consider how best to engage.

The Council's Communications team distributes on average 12 to 18 press releases and deals with between 20 and 40 media queries in a typical month, with statements issued where necessary to uphold the authority's reputation and radio/television interview opportunities arranged as requested.

While times have changed, a significant proportion of residents still rely on newspapers, radio and television for their news in South Derbyshire, a predominantly rural District where for many outlying villages broadband speeds are a major issue.

The Council's model of distributing press releases, uploading them to its website and backing that up with promotion through social media channels to drive web traffic, is still a relevant one. Research has shown that it reflects the media practices of 15 'most suitable groups' - other local authorities of a similar size to South Derbyshire District Council and with similar characteristics in terms of their populations and urban/rural mix.

Strong content, complemented by images and video where appropriate, is crucial to positive engagement.





## The Website

Around 33,000 web sessions are currently taking place each month at [www.south-derbys.gov.uk](http://www.south-derbys.gov.uk), which has increased by more than 40 per cent since the beginning of 2010.

In recent times a review of content and web traffic has taken place to help us understand what information people are looking for and areas of particularly high contact.

The data established that 40 per cent of all contacts handled by Customer Services staff concerned Council Tax and Benefits enquiries.

Based on the findings, and to improve website functionality, two home page buttons linking to Council Tax and Benefits landing pages were introduced, literally 'channel shifting' people away from phone and face-to-face contact by allowing them to more easily access the information they need online. A third 'Pay for it' button was introduced soon after.

The Council recognises the power of its website as a one-stop shop of services and information and plans to launch a new site before the end of the 2016-17 financial year, satisfying Corporate Plan aims of maintaining customer focus and advancing digital inclusion.

The ambition is to establish and maximise transactional, task-oriented online services which are flexible, accessible and easy to use.

A comprehensive tendering process has taken place and Web Labs Ltd has been appointed as the provider to help deliver the project.



## Social Media

A simple and cost-effective way to reach a wider audience, the Council has seized the opportunity that social media presents.

Our Twitter account (@SDDC) has more than 6,500 followers, which has increased by around 1,900 since January 1, 2015 and compares well with neighbouring authorities.

Though we do not currently have a central corporate Facebook page several departments run their own, with regular support and annual training provided.

The Council also has a YouTube account (South Derbyshire DC).

According to UK communications regulator Ofcom the social media scene continues to grow quickly - more than seven in 10 adult internet users now have a social media profile and ownership of smartphones and tablets is booming.

We are reaching a huge audience via social media and, in a June 2016 survey, 76 per cent of people listed it as their preferred option for keeping in touch with Council news and information.

In a Twitter poll, 54 per cent of respondents thought the Council's current social media content was 'good' or 'excellent' with only eight per cent saying it was below average.







## Internal Communications

Our Internal Communications Strategy identifies the way forward for engaging and communicating with employees, setting out the aims, aspirations, channels and action plan to achieve this.

Our internal communications efforts strive to unite our staff and Elected Members, create a sense of pride, instil our values and reflect the aims of the Corporate Plan, demonstrating to everyone the part they play.

The current channels include team meetings, team briefs, one-to-ones, email, Better online (the intranet) and noticeboards. A recent survey was conducted to help understand the quality of these channels, in which 91 per cent of people said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with internal communications overall.

The very latest trends and influences are being considered, alongside the needs of staff, as the Council looks to review and create a quality system of internal communications with the following objectives:

- Improve the flow of communication between the leadership team, Elected Members and staff to ensure team members understand key messages and the impact of them.
- Allow questions and feedback to be shared between directorates and up and down the communication chain.
- Define and promote the internal communication channels available, including the purpose and audience for each channel.
- Increase the use of Better online by educating users, developing new features and promoting content to users.
- Embed the Corporate Plan 2016-21 and ensure that staff understand their role in delivering it.



## Branding

With the introduction of the Corporate Plan 2016-21, the Council's approach to branding is evolving.

Using pre-existing corporate colours the design style has been modernised and refreshed to demonstrate a new direction for the Council.

A Venn diagram watermark is being used to link the Corporate Plan and branded materials together, the key elements of the new design style being:

- The Venn diagram watermark;
- Primary colours including specific shades of purple and green;
- A new set of secondary colours to be used that complement the primary colours;
- Use of photographs to showcase the District; and
- Use of icons and vectors to illustrate or add visual impact.

The refreshed look is to be introduced across the Council throughout official documents and digital channels, with a new, consistent style for promotional materials to be devised to complement the new brand.

With local authorities under increasing pressure to deliver more with less, branding and its use in terms of innovation, commercialisation and marketing is perhaps more important than ever.



## Consultation

The Council has a statutory duty to consult on various matters affecting the community and its focus is on creating a culture of empowerment and engagement in public services, by ensuring that people have more opportunities to have their say.

This change is reflected in the Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy, which aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities who are informed and involved in decision-making, with the ultimate aim of enhancing the quality of life across South Derbyshire.

Media relations and communications play an important role and help ensure that residents are kept up to date with services, as well as being informed about all Council consultations and community engagement events.

Each year a Consultation Annual Report is presented to Elected Members, detailing how consultation activities supported the delivery of key priorities.







## Channel Shift and a Digital Future

It has been a time of unprecedented change for local authorities. In South Derbyshire, where there are now more than 41,000 homes registered to pay council tax and a population approaching 100,000, the demand on services is higher than ever before.

Customer Services has borne the brunt of this demand and, faced with an increasingly complex and fast-changing benefits system to administer, staff were typically handling between 6,000 and 7,000 face-to-face contacts each month by the end of 2014, with an average handling time of seven minutes per customer.

Aside from the lengthy queues and waiting times, face-to-face contact is expensive.

Set against a national Government agenda of digital inclusion, something had to give – and the Channel Shift Strategy was born.

Aiming to get customers ‘online, not in line’ and fitting hand in hand with the ethos of doing more with less, a process of gathering, processing and analysing information begun. The end goal was to not only provide customers with the means to self-serve, but positively encourage them to do so by designing services so good that they would prefer to.

Analysis of the data gave a clear picture of the face-to-face customer demographic, as well as an indication that a high proportion would be more than happy to use the internet, via mobiles and tablets, to access services.

Armed with the information, a specialist team known as the Media Forum has been developing intervention strategies to ensure that not only would demand be met, but that essential resources in customer services would be freed up.

These have included redesigning the Council’s website based on traffic trends, introducing new telephony systems and payment machines, designing an online guide to council tax bills, creating a recycling video to help reduce waste and piloting a ‘Keep it Clean’ smartphone app that allows people to report incidents like fly-tipping, graffiti and dog fouling.

**6 in 10**

UK mobile users (61%)  
browsed the internet  
on their mobile  
phone in 2016

The driver behind it all is the Government’s Digital Inclusion Strategy, which aims to make services ‘digital by default’ by increasing online access and giving people the necessary skills to use the internet.

The requirement for councils to fall in line with this strategy is compelling. Both nationally and locally there is a need to work more efficiently, while satisfying customer demand for quick and convenient access to services, at times and in ways that suit them.

Social media will play an important role as our audience continues to grow organically, attracted by strong content and the opportunity for instant and meaningful engagement with the Council.

However, the Council’s new website is our opportunity to achieve true channel shift by creating a transaction-led resource that will change the way people in South Derbyshire access information and conduct their business indefinitely.

It must become our primary customer information source and number one contact mechanism, a ‘shop window’ for all Council services including everything from recycling collection dates and paying council tax to checking business rates and looking at leisure activities.

Everyone within the Council needs to take ownership for the upkeep of the website, which will demonstrate the vision for South Derbyshire and highlight the District’s desire and plans for growth.

**76%**

of local people surveyed  
said social media was  
their preferred option for  
receiving Council news  
and information

There were  
**378,637**

hits on the current Council  
website in 2015-16

**99%**

of 16 to 24-year-  
olds in the UK  
now use social  
media

The total UK digital  
audience (active on laptops,  
desktops and mobile devices)  
is now more than

**50 million**



# Our Objectives

Set against the Corporate Plan objectives, a series of communications objectives have been agreed to reflect the Council’s current focus. These objectives will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure they remain relevant.

## People

Organisational objective	Communications objective
Enable people to live independently	Celebrate success stories, such as maintaining grant funding to the voluntary and community sector. Publicise outcomes of the Supported Housing Service review and the availability of new and adapted developments. Promote the role of Careline with health professionals and support a review of existing marketing materials.
Develop the workforce of South Derbyshire to support growth in relation to aspirations, employability, skills and travel to work	Continue to help build on the success of the Swadlincote Jobs and Skills Fair, with a focus on human interest stories. Support efforts to raise aspirations of youngsters and promote employability and entrepreneurship. Raise awareness of volunteering opportunities/training and promote the Modern Apprentice scheme.
Protect and help support the most vulnerable, including those affected by financial challenges	Work with partner agencies including the CAB to further push initiatives that help drive down poverty and support the vulnerable. Continue to promote and celebrate the success of the Community Food Hub programme, our bid to become a Dementia-Friendly Community, our work to attain the NPSS Standard for Homelessness and the ongoing roll-out of Universal Credit. Promote the Safer Homes and Safer Homes Plus schemes, as well as sports and leisure activities for targeted groups. Help to develop internal/cross-departmental processes to ensure effective shared knowledge and good practice.
Use existing tools and powers to take appropriate enforcement action	Publicise successful prosecutions and enforcement actions supported by or initiated by the Council, as well as partnership campaigns and initiatives with the police and other agencies. Assist with statutory consultation where appropriate, eg on PSPOs.
Increase levels of participation in sport, health, environmental and physical activities	Focus on the wide variety of facilities, activities, opportunities and events in South Derbyshire for people of all ages. Target younger audiences through social media engagement. The new-look website will offer ease and convenience for booking activities, as well another platform to celebrate key events in South Derbyshire.
Reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill	Targeted campaigns across all channels to reach new audiences and educate residents on the importance of recycling and reducing contamination. A concerted campaign will concentrate on raising awareness of the red sack, with many residents unclear as to its purpose. Raise awareness of good recycling practices and share top tips, particularly at peak times such as Christmas. Our quirky recycling video, describing what goes into which bin, forms an important part of this. Continue to play a key role in the Waste less, Save more initiative in conjunction with Sainsbury’s.





# Place

Organisational objective	Communications objective
Facilitate and deliver a range of integrated and sustainable housing and community infrastructure	Support the completion of new Council housing developments and the aspirations to build more. Wide-ranging consultation will take place with regard to the Local Plan Part 2. Support will also be given to promoting, marketing and building a lasting legacy for infrastructure projects including the Midway Community Centre and the Cockshut Lane Sporting Hub in Melbourne. Complement efforts to bring the District's empty homes back into use and identify the best communications methods for contacting those involved. Support the delivery of outcomes from the Housing Strategy 2016-21.
Enhance understanding of the planning process	Deliver a website that contains clear information and helps to simplify the planning process for members of the public. SDDC is consulting with interested parties on developing Neighbourhood Plans, while a series of in-depth parish council briefings are due to be held to enhance understanding of the planning process.
Help maintain low crime and anti-social behaviour levels in the District	Promote events and outcomes that build on the District's reputation as a safe place to live, work and visit (in the financial year 2015-16, the District had 33.79 crimes per 1,000 population, compared to 79.98 in Derby City and 67.97 in Derbyshire as a whole). Keep the public informed of local crime issues and hotspots, while helping to educate youngsters on issues including hate crime, drugs and sexual exploitation. Publicise the positive and diversionary activities taking place.
Connect with our communities, helping them feel safe and secure	Publicise Area Forums and other opportunities for community/tenant liaison, while supporting staff with the knowledge of how to reach residents and volunteers through digital/social media channels. Offer appropriate crime prevention advice in response to spikes in crime, while celebrating community cohesion through initiatives like the Dreamscheme. Promote events around responsible dog ownership and littering and raise community awareness of microchipping laws, utilising digital channels to spread the public health message where necessary. Celebrate significant security investments in the Council's housing stock.
Support provision of cultural facilities and activities throughout the District	Work closely with Swadlincote TIC and other organisations to promote the area's rich and diverse culture. Capitalise on interest in the opening of the Apex Climbing Centre at Grove Hall. Continue to gauge online feedback on the National Forest Walking Festival and raise awareness of the facilities and activities available at Rosliston Forestry Centre.
Deliver services that keep the District clean and healthy	Raise awareness of both new PSPO powers and the public health impacts and interventions around improving air quality.





# Progress

Organisational objective	Communications objective
Work to attract further inward investment	Build on the District's positive reputation of being 'open for business,' celebrating the success of both large and small enterprises. Herald the creation of new jobs and businesses in South Derbyshire, as well as support efforts to keep unemployment rates low.
Unlock development potential and ensure the continuing growth of vibrant town centres	Promote events and initiatives that help town centres to thrive. Further expand the use of the Swadlincote Town Team's social media offering to educate people of its purpose. Work with businesses where necessary to share key success stories and encourage their participation in initiatives like the Swadlincote Pancake Races. Consultation will be undertaken to look at initiatives under the Swadlincote Townscape Heritage Scheme.
Work to maximise the employment, training and leisure uses of The National Forest by residents and increase the visitor spend by tourists	Focus on South Derbyshire's unique position at the heart of The National Forest, working with the National Forest Company, Swadlincote TIC and partners to market it as a facility that can encourage sporting participation and promote health. Raise awareness of activities in the What's On guide through the website and Twitter and continue to use the #SDwhatson hashtag to build a brand. Continue to support tourism growth by promoting events such as the Festival of Leisure.
Help to influence and develop the infrastructure for economic growth	Keep the community up to date with progress on delivery of key infrastructure projects.
Provide business support and promote innovation and access to finance, including in rural areas	Support the South Derbyshire Business Advice Service and the training opportunities it provides, using case studies and targeted social media campaigns to promote potential opportunities. Celebrate business growth created through good environmental practices and positive regulation.





# Outcomes

Organisational objective	Communications objective
Maintain financial health	Continue to purvey the Council's ethos of doing more with less and play a key role in utilising marketing techniques to maximise commercial income. Create a more transactional website that supports this aim. Assist with campaigns to minimise rent arrears and clamp down on benefit fraud.
Achieve good Corporate Governance	Produce the SDDC annual report to demonstrate key achievements and promote the Council's Annual Governance Statement. Ensure compliance with the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance and maintain an effective work programme.
Maintain customer focus	Through the new website and Channel Shift Strategy, focus on shaping and improving services around customer demand and expectation (around 33,000 web sessions are currently taking place each month, which has increased by more than 40% since August 2010). Undertake a phased roll-out of new branding, creating a clear corporate identity and focusing on reputational excellence.
Be aware of and plan for financial, legal and environmental risks	Pro-actively prepare for risk scenarios and focus on upholding the Council's reputation at all times. Increase social media following and create and promote an emergency situation website banner. Support work internally to educate staff on anti-fraud processes and strengthen resilience.
Promote and enable active democracy	Help to maintain a culture of openness and accountability through continuing good relations with residents and the media. Promote democracy with schools and young people and encourage voter registration on a continual basis.
Enhance environmental standards	Support the development of public spaces, District-wide climate change action and the work of Environmental Health in fighting environmental crime and raising environmental/sustainability standards. Help implement and maintain the process(es) needed for internal and external communications relevant to the ISO14001 environmental management system. Facilitate the consistent and reliable communication of compliance obligations, awareness and competency requirements and respond to relevant environmental communications, subject to the needs and expectations of interested parties. Focus on flooding awareness and educate residents on managing emergency incidents/building resilience.
Maintain a skilled workforce	Communicate clearly with staff through a range of internal channels, celebrating their achievements, providing regular and useful information and highlighting training/learning opportunities. Develop an Internal Communications Strategy to unite staff, create a sense of pride, instil the Council's values and ensure the system is fit for purpose going forward.
Promote inclusion	Promote the wide variety of activities taking place across the District aimed at people of all ages and backgrounds. Appreciate different audiences and the channels best suited to communicating with them. Build on the themes of our Corporate Equalities and Safeguarding work and focus on key projects like the Community Food Hub and Dementia-Friendly District bid. The new website must offer accessible online services and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, meeting a range of accessibility standards including translation services, compatibility with screen readers, speech recognition software and meet Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

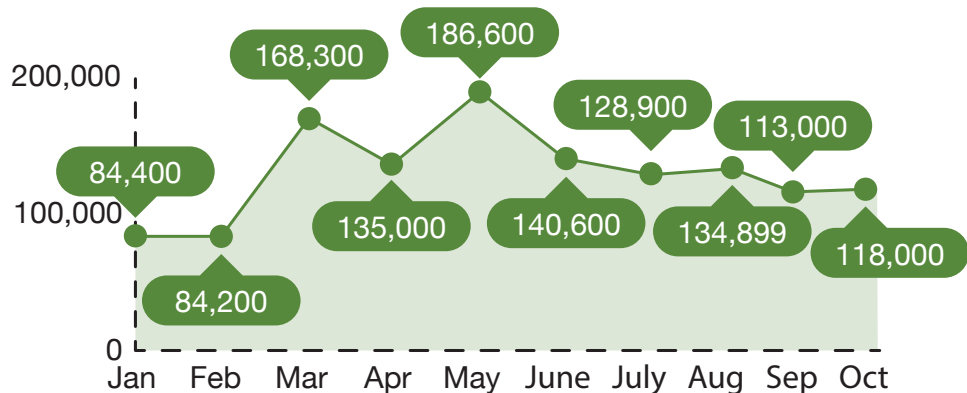




# Communications Dashboard

Our Communications Dashboard has been designed to reflect our performance in terms of media coverage, social media, the website and Better Online, as well as key communications projects. It will be updated monthly and be presented to the Council's Performance Board quarterly to help inform future communications activities and priorities. The version below is indicative of the month of October 2016, as an example.

## Social Media - Twitter Impressions



■ Impressions

Number of times a tweet is seen in a timeline



6,500  
Followers

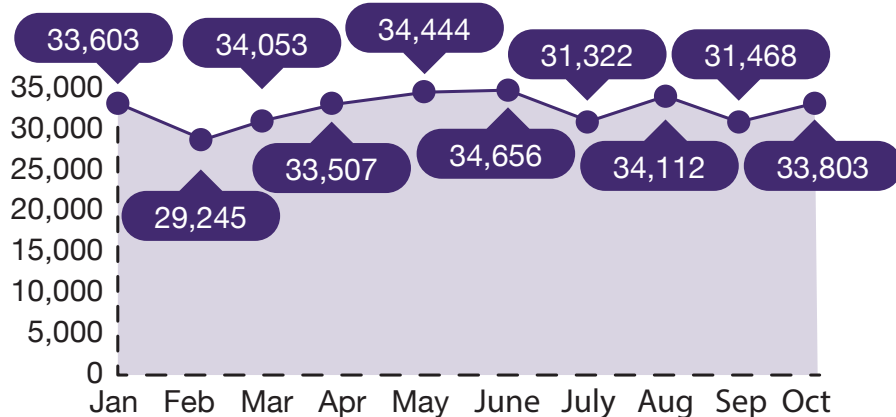
↑  
0.87%



6,178  
Likes

↑  
4.3%

## Website - Sessions



■ Sessions

Number of website visits

23,709  
Users

↑  
8.3%

96,563  
Page Views

↑  
4%

## Projects and Campaigns

### Internal Communications Strategy

The draft Internal Communications Strategy has been approved by Directors and a report is due to be presented to committee in December. Rolling news stories posted on Better online in October attracted 1,405 hits, up from 830 in September.

### Communications Strategy

The final draft is back from the graphic designer and the document is being reviewed by the Council's Corporate Management Team. The aim is to bring a final version to committee in December.

### Social Media Training

Training session delivered to 11 Council staff in the Council Chamber on Friday, October 7, covering advice on best practice and examining the changing digital landscape.

### SDDC/NPS Partnership Report

The report was approved by all relevant parties and is now completed. It can be found on the Northgate Public Services website.

### Mouldy Matters

A communications campaign was put into action on October 31 to launch and promote this new video, which offers people advice on how to reduce condensation and mould in their homes.

### Channel Shift

The initial website designs have been approved and production of pages has now begun. Content creation has started, with the aim to cut content by 75%.

## Better Online

6,203  
Sessions

↑  
0.7%

### Top Search Terms

Pay | Leave | JEQ | Car |  
Overtime | Sickness | ID  
Badge | Better

12,473  
Page Views

↑  
4.6%

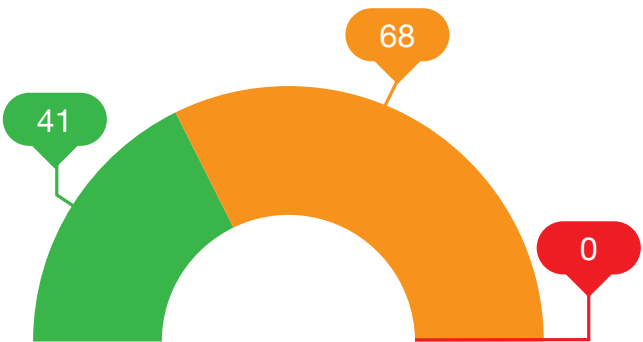
### Most read articles

Tim shares his jungle experience  
Just the Job - Corrinne Bird  
Fresh Faces - New Apprentices  
Just the Job - Fran Hall

63.2%  
Bounce Rate

↑  
-1.6%

## Media Coverage - Tone



■ Positive (37.61%) ■ Neutral (62.39%)  
■ Negative (0%)

15  
Press releases

15  
Media enquiries



# Positive Transformation

Little over 25 years ago, the World Wide Web was born.

Today it has around 2.5 billion users across the globe, having transformed almost every aspect of public, private and work life, underpinning the economy, creating entire new industries and changing the way we all talk to each other.

The world of communications never stands still. While people's demand for news, information and services remains undimmed, the way they choose to access them has altered almost immeasurably.

Newspapers have long realised it. With print sales in sharp decline their focus has turned to an online audience which is often just as keen to share and participate in the news process as the paid employees of the media.

This strategy sets out a clear direction for the Council - while press releases will always have their place, digital communications is now king.

More than seven in 10 adults now have a social media profile. Smartphone users spend nearly two hours a day using the internet on their mobile phone. Almost 40 million mobile users could access 4G services at the last count.

The statistics are undeniable.

We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that five million UK adults today have still never used the internet. With research suggesting that possessing basic digital skills can help the average UK household save more than £700 a year, local authorities have a duty to ensure these people are not left behind.

Shaping digital services is about understanding customers' needs rather than wants. That means an 'inside out' approach, where the most successful councils are able to put themselves in a service user's shoes and create solutions that work for them.

With a new website just around the corner and increasingly popular social media channels to boot, South Derbyshire District Council is well placed at the forefront of the digital revolution. It is ready to engage with a modern audience and, based on their desires, to offer them what they want – news, information and services at their fingertips.

People, Place and Progress - this is a communications strategy that will help to engage residents fully with the vision to make South Derbyshire a better place to live, work and visit.

