



Corporate Communications Annual Report 2013 / 2014

1. Background

- 1.1 We continue to work in partnership with Northgate's Communications Team to provide a proactive and reactive communications service. This includes:
- Identifying, developing, coordinating and promoting targeted and measurable communication campaigns
 - Improving our reputation
 - Increasing resident satisfaction with the services we deliver
- 1.2 The Communications Team offers wide ranging support in delivering our [Corporate Communications Strategy](#), which aims to ensure high levels of understanding that we are:
- Providing value for money
 - Informing and engaging both our residents and staff
 - Building trust and confidence in what we do
 - Doing more with less and improving key services
 - Focusing on changing lives for the better
- 1.3 Each year we deliver evaluated campaigns based on our Corporate Plan. This provides linked activities to promote a shared goal of further enhancing the public's perception of the Council over the short and long term.
- 1.4 It should be noted our Communications Strategy links closely with our [Consultation & Engagement Strategy](#) to provide an all encompassing approach to engagement and communication with residents and communities.
- 1.5 During the year, our internal and external campaigns have been highlighted using marketing, graphics, branding, press management and online tools. This informs residents, businesses, tourists, partners, employees, members and stakeholders about the services we deliver, including levels of performance.
- 1.6 We have seen a rapid rise in the use of social media. This trend is expected to continue and increase in the future. As a result, a Social Media Strategy will be developed during 2014/15.
- 1.7 This annual report outlines the achievements of our approach to both internal and external communications, along with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the 2013/14 campaigns.

2. External communications

- 2.1 The Council's reputation has been promoted using targeted campaigns linked to Corporate Plan priorities.

Media Coverage

- 2.2 Positive media coverage continues to rise. Our proactive nature, and willingness to go the extra mile to build relationships with reporters, enables us to showcase the achievements of Members, officers and the organisation.
- 2.3 Regular articles and features have appeared in local magazines and newspapers, such as the Swadlincote Times, Melbourne Village Voice and Derby Telegraph. We have written a 600 word piece in the Burton Mail every Saturday for the last four years, outlining up and coming events in South Derbyshire. If this was a paid for advert, it would cost the Council just under £20,000 per annum.

This has been supported by a more dedicated service to community newsletters, with a concerted drive to meet deadlines and supply relevant material. Officers and Members have also promoted Council and community events on radio stations like BBC Radio Derby and Touch FM. Particularly impressive was the extensive TV coverage given to the rise of Swadlincote on the BBC's Inside Out programme.

- 2.4 During 2013/14, on average, 18 press releases were issued each month. This has resulted in even higher levels of positive media coverage. Of the 4,000 plus news stories published about the Council, 60.6% were positive (compared to 59.5% in 2012/13, while negative stories remained at 0.4%.

As a result of the constraints currently placed on journalists, we try and put as much information at their fingertips as possible. For example, if a new What's On guide is published, we distribute to all media outlets. The amount of data being circulated through our various social media channels is also helping to paint a bigger picture of the work we do.

Our reputation with regional publications also continues to go from strength to strength, as exemplified by the three page feature on how South Derbyshire is open for business in the popular Derbyshire Life magazine. Our national profile also continues to increase, as exemplified by the in depth profile of Swadlincote Market by the Market Trader magazine.

Web

- 2.7 Online access channels are increasingly being used by residents to access our information. Table 2 reveals that during 2013/14, there was an average of 29,437 visits per month to our website, an increase of 7.5% on the previous year. However, the proportion of unique visitors (visits by different users) has remained similar to before. On average, there've been 90,082 page views a month - 10.6% higher than last year. The proportion of page views remains consistent.

Table 2 – Online access to Council information

	Monthly Average - Nr. visits to Council Website	Proportion of visits which are unique	Monthly average – Nr. Page views	Proportion of page views which are unique
2013/14	29, 437	69.6%	90,082	76.2%
2012/13	26, 608	69.2%	83,817	78.2%

2.8 Table 3 below reveals that during 2013/14, 35.4% of the visits to the Council’s website were made via mobile platforms (such as phones or tablet devices) rather than the more traditional method of access by a desktop PC.

2.9 The most viewed sections of the Council’s website during 2013/14 are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 – Popular Sections of the Council Website 2013/14

Popular Sites	Nr. Page Views (PVs) 2013/14	% change of PVs compared to 12/13	Rationale	Link to PR activity
Community & Living	42,965	1.3%	Community events / grants	Heavy promotion of events through social media
Council & Democracy	142,405	12.4%	Council Tax, Benefits / Press releases	Reflect economic situation and press coverage
Environment & Licensing	114,286	24.6%	Waste and recycling Licensing information	Linked to the roll out of the new recycling service
Housing	52,693	-15.6%	Tenancies, tenant participation etc	
Leisure, culture & tourism	243,567	92.9%	Walking Festivals, play schemes etc	Wide ranging marketing material to publicise events
Planning & Development Control	172,548	18.3%	Planning policy	Reflects consultation exercises on Local Plan

- 2.10 Table 3 reveals that during the year, there has been a general increase in the number of page views across all sections of the Council's website compared to 2012/13, with the exception of Housing. Leisure, Culture and Tourism pages have seen a 92.9% increase in page views compared to the previous year.
- 2.11 There are several factors which may have contributed to this. Everything we do, whether it is publicity, social media or marketing material, links back to the website. It is also indicative of the changing pattern in people's behaviour and the insatiable appetite for instant, accessible information.
- 2.12 The proportion of 'contact us' pages viewed on our website increased 28.9% over the year. This coincides with the increase in call volumes experienced by our customer contact centre as a result of changes to the welfare benefits system.

Social media

- 2.13 Such is the level of engagement that we are experiencing on these channels that they are becoming a mini form of customer service. Rising expectations to access the council, make comments and receive answers at the touch of a button has resulted in innovative ways of presenting information and engaging with the public. As a result we've continued to develop the following channels:
- 2.14 **Twitter** – With more than 4,000 followers, we are easily the most popular local authority in the county. Quantity is being matched by quality output, with two, three and four way conversations now commonplace. New followers continue to engage with us on a variety of hot topics – such as expressing their views on community safety matters to supporting events such as school holiday activities.
- 2.15 In a significant development, all of the posts uploaded to the Council's various Facebook accounts now appear on Twitter. This adds depth and detail, allowing us to present information in different ways. It enables us to stay one step ahead of the game, and we have used this successfully on several occasions, most notably to offer updates on the work being done on Swadlincote's emerging new golf course.
- 2.16 The development of hashtags to link and track conversations, such as, #FF and #EastMidlandsHour, has resulted in our messages reaching wider audiences. The use of analytical tool Hootsuite has enabled us to scheduling messages more often, which means that our presence can be maintained 24/7 as appropriate. Adding followers linked to specific initiatives such as the Farmers' Market has also helped develop engagement and reach new and wider audiences.
- 2.17 One of the reasons we have accrued a large following is that we never rest on our laurels. After the success of the Local Plan social media campaign last year, we continued to innovate and educate. An example of this is the 'Twitter Parliament' held in partnership with Pingle School to mark Local Democracy Week. This encouraged students to debate whether the voting age should be lowered.

Table 4 shows that during 2013/14 there was on average 191 tweets per month (536% higher than last year).

Table 4 – Average number of tweets, re-tweets, mentions, conversations and followers (2013/14) compared to the previous year (12/13)

	Monthly Average - Nr. Tweets	Monthly Average - Nr. Re-tweets	Monthly average – Nr. SDDC mentions	Monthly average – Nr. Conversations	Monthly average – Nr. Followers
2013/14	191	127	100	37	3,437
2012/13	30	12	N/a	N/a	N/a

2.18 **Facebook** - The Communications Team has worked with service delivery areas to develop their presence on Facebook. There are now pages for The National Forest Walking Festival, Housing Services, the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership, Environmental Health’s Commercial Team and South Derbyshire Sport. Each is developing its own follower base, but all follow each other to ensure messages are communicated as far and wide as possible. For instance, by sharing updates on school holiday activities before the event and throughout the week, the number of people who ‘liked’ our page went up from a few hundred to over a thousand.

2.19 There were two reasons why this happened. First the information was useful - people wanted to know as soon as possible when an event was being held and if there was an activity for their child locally. Secondly, these people were already on Facebook catching up with friends and family checking out the school holiday activities. They did not have to pick up the phone to the Council’s contact centre, or listen to the radio to find out what they wanted to know.

Social Media Training

2.21 To embrace democracy in the digital age, and to maximise opportunities that come our way, we have tried to engage Members and officers wherever possible. Strong turnouts were witnessed at two rounds of social media training, designed to offer an introduction to the different channels available and the Council’s approach. What was clear was a desire to ensure the momentum continues. More advanced training will be made available in the future.

Print & Design services

2.21 We use strong corporate branding on all of our major publications. The photos used within the publications showcase South Derbyshire in all of its glory, in terms of locations and people. Design projects throughout the year have supported both our statutory and non-statutory functions. Publications include the Housing News, the Annual Report and the What’s On guide. We also produced ‘South Derbyshire: Discovering our District’, a 28 page look at the work of the Council and the various treasures that the area has to offer.

Corporate campaigns 2013/14

2.22 During the year, activity has been focused around seven corporate campaigns to support the delivery of the key priorities identified in the Corporate Plan 2009-16. The campaigns include the following:

Promoting the district and supporting economic growth

2.26 Promoting the opportunities provided for tourism, economic development and job creation across the district. The main focus areas include:

- Enhancing South Derbyshire's growing reputation as a vibrant tourist destination in the heart of The National Forest
- Promoting the work to help make the district 'a better place to live, work and visit.' Developments like the up and coming golf course in Swadlincote have received wide ranging media coverage
- Raising the profile of the South Derbyshire Business Advice Service and highlighting the achievements and contributions of smaller companies

Improved Value for Money

2.27 Communicating the message that arrangements are in place to enable resources to be used efficiently and effectively. Highlights include:

- Showcasing our award winning activities, such as Swadlincote scooping the best small outdoor market award from The National Association of British Market Authorities
- Producing an Annual Report outlining how we spend our share of the Council Tax and celebrating some of our key achievements
- Recognising ways we are doing more with less during this period of economic austerity, such as obtaining grants and delivering services innovatively. We have also highlighted the praise this has gained in external audit reports

Improved Recycling

2.28 Educating residents about the changes to our recycling collection service. This included articulating the vision for the service by managing short-term messages whilst focusing on the longer-term goal. Activities included:

- Providing extensive support to document the roll out of the new service. This included publicising the scheme, overseeing brand design and compiling leaflets that were delivered to every household
- Honing effective mechanisms to alert residents about the impact inclement weather has on the waste and recycling collection service. We use Twitter and our website to offer real time information
- Working in partnership with Derbyshire County Council to promote the ease of recycling and the importance of diverting waste from landfill

Improved lifestyles built on the legacy of the Olympics

2.29 Supporting sporting, leisure and cultural activities following the Olympic Games. Key achievements include:

- Continuing to provide a weekly leisure article for the Burton Mail to highlight up and coming events
- Providing a sustained output of information to inspire and motivate residents to get fit, healthy and active following the Olympics

- Highlighting how we are keeping the Olympic legacy alive by obtaining external funding for projects such as restoration works at Eureka Park and enhancing leisure facilities in Melbourne

Improved feeling of safety and security

2.30 Sending out a message that South Derbyshire is a safe place to live. This includes supporting planned activities across the district to promote community cohesion, crime deterrence and anti social behaviour. For instance:

- Showcasing key events, such as Liberation Day and community road shows, while providing information about the services and products available to communities and individuals to help protect against crime
- The Communications team provided assistance to the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership in setting up its Facebook page
- Illustrating how individuals are being made accountable for their anti social behavioural actions and the role members of public can play in bringing perpetrators to justice

Democracy in the 'Digital Age'

2.31 The aim of this new campaign was to explore all communication methods to ensure residents are fully involved in the democratic process. For example:

- Offering real time updates at key events such as the Festival of Leisure and the Christmas Lights Switch On to promote activities and encourage invaluable feedback
- Putting together a social media campaign to support Local Democracy Week. As well as the Twitter Parliament mentioned in this report, leading Members and Officers wrote blogs to urge involvement in the democratic process
- Improving our transparency and accountability by placing more information datasets online
- Enhancing the aesthetics and presentation of popular content through graphics and pictures designed to gain people's attention
- Improving the 'search' functions of our website, including tagging and cross referencing material, to enable users to follow certain key phrases or words in order to facilitate better access for those interested in specific subjects

Celebrating 40 years of South Derbyshire District Council

2.32 Pride in the past and excitement for the future are the prevailing feelings as South Derbyshire hits the big 40.

Since being formed in April 1974, the area has gone from strength to strength and is now officially one of the fastest growing in the country.

As a result, this campaign aims to:

- Celebrate the evolution of the Council
- Recognise how far the district has come over the past 40 years
- Look ahead to a bright future

With the anniversary falling in April 2014, much of the work during the year has been preparatory. We have been exploring how best to mark the occasion with the Magic Attic Archives in Swadlincote.

Working with the Burton Mail, we produced a four page 'Mail Remembers' feature to mark how the district has moved from pits and pots to parks and woods over the past four decades.

A special commemorative edition of Better, the internal magazine, was produced to pay tribute to the role staff have played.

On top of this, displays will be set up at annual events such as the Festival of Leisure, in Church Gresley, while Members and officers hope to bring the past to life with pupils during Local Democracy Week.

3. Internal communications

3.1 A great deal of research, planning and thought goes into looking at how we can further improve communications for employees. The reason for this is that staff are the most valuable asset of our organisation. The internal communication channels currently used include:

- Intranet
- Better, the internal magazine
- The Hub, the internal magazine for Northgate staff
- Blogs
- Noticeboards
- Email bulletins
- Team/unit meetings
- Planning for the Future
- Staff briefings – as and when required on key issues
- Inductions for new starters
- One off events – lunch with the Chief Executive

The latest Internal Communications Survey was conducted in late 2013, with the answers collated in the early part of 2014. 103 staff members took the time to answer questions about how useful the key channels are and what can be done to further enhance internal communications.

A total of 75 per cent feel extremely or very well informed about activities, with Better and team briefings viewed as the best way to receive updates. On the back of this, an internal communications action plan has been compiled. More information is provided on this in Appendix 2.

4. Looking ahead

4.1 Work will continue to focus on the achievement of key priorities in the Corporate Plan. Additional focus will be placed on measuring the effectiveness of campaigns and communication channels used.

4.2 An action plan for 2014/15 is attached at Appendix 2.