

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Corporate Communications Annual Report 2016/17**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The overarching aim of our Communications function is 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.'
- 1.2 We work both proactively and reactively to achieve our key objectives, which include:
- Upholding and strengthening the Council's excellent reputation
  - Demonstrating the success of our work
  - Working across multi-channels appropriate to different stakeholders
  - Ensuring people understand what we do and how we continue to deliver value for money
  - Effectively engaging residents and encouraging two-way conversation
- 1.3 Like all local authorities, we must be mindful of working effectively against a backdrop of reduced core funding, financial pressures, a changing media landscape and soaring expectations. The Communications Strategy guides how we do this.
- 1.4 Each year we deliver strategic campaigns, which provide linked activities to promote a shared goal of further enhancing the public's perception of the Council over the short and long term.
- 1.5 During the year our internal and external campaigns have been highlighted using marketing, graphics, branding, media management and digital tools. This informs residents, businesses, tourists, partners, employees, members and stakeholders about the services we deliver, including levels of performance.
- 1.6 We continue to see a rapid rise in the use of social and digital media, and in particular video. It is a trend that is expected to continue and increase into the future.
- 1.7 This annual report outlines the achievements of our approach to both internal and external communications. The Communications Dashboard, which is produced on a monthly basis, provides an insight into current communications trends and allows us to analyse the effectiveness of our work.
- 1.8 Everyone within the organisation has a responsibility to ensure the delivery of effective communications, with the Communications team at the centre of these efforts.

## **2. External communications**

### **Media coverage**

2.1 The Council continues to enjoy positive media coverage across multiple channels, both traditional and digital. A willingness to be proactive, helpful and to go the extra mile to build relationships with reporters enables us to showcase the many achievements of the organisation.

2.2 Local media and parish council contacts have been kept up-to-date, facilitating a dedicated service to community publications.

2.3 Regular articles and features on a whole range of subjects continue to appear in local magazines and newspapers such as the Burton Mail, Derby Telegraph, Swadlincote Times and Melbourne Village Voice. Recent examples to have gained significant positive exposure are the tribute exhibition to late boxer Jack Bodell at Sharpe's Pottery Museum, the opening of the Apex Climbing Centre at Green Bank Leisure Centre and the unveiling of Melbourne Sports Park.

2.4 During the past year the Communications team has played a key role in supporting Sainsbury's on its Waste less, Save more campaign, which saw £1 million invested in Swadlincote to reduce food waste. This has resulted not only in extensive local coverage for the town but also national exposure in The Independent, The Guardian, The Grocer and the Evening Standard, to name but a few, as well as via television.

2.5 Officers and Members have promoted Council and community events on radio stations such as Radio Derby and Touch FM, with highlights including our proactive approach to tackling Benefit fraud and the launch of a 'Mouldy Matters' video designed to help residents tackle condensation issues.

2.6 The use of video and website content in 'digital first' newsrooms is now prioritised above print by local newspapers, whose online audiences continue to grow rapidly. Video footage has been recorded at events such as the Swadlincote International Food and Drink Festival, the launch of the Council's Economic Development Strategy and the construction of new Council homes.

2.7 During 2016/17, an average of 15 press releases per month have been issued, each backed up by links to information on the Council's website through social media channels. As is evident on the Communications Dashboard, a large proportion of the subsequent media coverage has been positive – of 1,486 newspaper stories relating to the Council and South Derbyshire in the year, just 16 (1.08%) were negative in tone.

2.8 There were 243 media enquiries received in the year, down by 36.4% compared to 2015/16. The figure is indicative of the change in media working practices and its increasing reliance on social media and digital channels for sourcing information. Stories about tackling fly-tipping and changes to Easter recycling collections, for example, were both recently published by the press based on information released by the Council on Facebook and Twitter.

2.9 These changing trends mean we must carefully consider our future tactics in terms of how we supply information to journalists. For a hard-pressed media industry where resources are reducing, a digital approach is crucial. Thanks to our extensive media contacts book and network of communication channels, we are in a prime position to further promote the Council in a positive way.

## **Website**

2.10 An increased demand to access Council information and services via online channels continues. During 2016/17 there were an average 32,855 visits per month to our website ([www.south-derbys.gov.uk](http://www.south-derbys.gov.uk)), an increase of more than 4% on the previous year. On average there have been 98,605 page views a month, up by 1% on 2015/16 and up 9.46% compared to just three years ago.

2.11 During 2016/17, and for the first time, more than half (52.75%) of all visits to the website were made via mobile devices (phones or tablets). This was up from 49.11% in 2015/16.

2.12 The most viewed sections of the Council's website during 2016/17 were Planning/Building Control (178,947 page views), Council and Democracy (155,359), Environment and Licensing (137,498) and Leisure, Culture and Tourism (88,248). The 'Contact us' page was viewed 30,535 times in the year – 2.58% of all website traffic.

2.13 Of the 394,261 visits to the Council's website in 2016/17, just under 70% lasted fewer than 60 seconds.

2.14 The Communications team, supported by a project board made up of staff across the authority, plans to deliver a new Council website in the 2017/18 financial year with appointed developer Web Labs. The aim is to establish and maximise transactional, task-oriented online services which are flexible, accessible and easy to use.

2.15 The project will see refreshed content moved away from departmental silos and instead be shaped around customer demand. The website must become the Council's primary customer information source and number one contact mechanism, a 'shop window' for all Council services.

2.16 The website will be controlled and maintained in-house, rather than via Derbyshire County Council as is currently the case. The impact of the new website will be monitored and analysed on an ongoing basis.

## **Social media**

2.17 With official figures suggesting more than seven in 10 adults now have a social media profile, it is little surprise that levels of engagement with the Council via this method continue to increase. In a June 2016 survey, 76 per cent of people listed it as their preferred method of keeping in touch with Council news and information and it continues to act as an additional customer services tool.

2.18 More than 6,800 individuals, businesses and organisations now follow us on Twitter, up by 14.4% compared to the previous year and helping us to maintain our position as the most followed district or borough council in the county.

2.19 Queries and conversations on a range of subjects are common, from waste collections and environmental issues to council tax and highways matters. As shown on the Communications Dashboard, more than 1.52 million Twitter impressions (the number of times a tweet is seen in a timeline) were achieved in 2016/17.

2.21 The Council currently controls or has administration input into 11 Facebook accounts, ranging from Housing and the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership to Swadlincote Town Team and the Environmental Education Project. 'Likes' across these accounts have risen by almost a quarter to 7,080 in 2016/17.

2.22 Posts uploaded to some of the Facebook accounts are automated to appear on Twitter also, adding depth to our offering and 'cross-pollinating' key messages. This has worked effectively on subjects such as food hygiene inspections and appeals for information following criminal acts, for example.

2.23 We continue to use the social media management tool Hootsuite to schedule tweets weeks and months into the future, encouraging interaction on a 24/7 basis as appropriate. Our social media channels are continuously monitored.

2.24 The use of hashtags to link and track conversations, such as #SDwhatson and #swadfoodfest, has resulted in our messages reaching wider audiences and attracting a new community of followers.

2.25 The Council's YouTube channel has been utilised in the past year to promote a Mouldy Matters video, an information animation put together to help people avoid condensation in their homes. It has been viewed more than 700 times to date.

2.26 We appreciate that social media has huge potential for improving the way we work and how residents and the media interact with us. In 2017/18 we plan to create a social media strategy that will harness this potential and drive forward our approach.

### **Channel shift**

2.27 In recent years, a rapidly expanding population and an increasingly complex benefits system have both contributed to a major increase in all customer contacts.

2.28 The Communications team has implemented and is leading a 'Channel Shift Strategy,' under which technology is used to help move customers towards self-service and a model that is fit for purpose in the future.

2.29 Examples of this work have included implementing payment machines at the Civic Offices, revamping the Council's existing website home page and creating a virtual Council Tax bill.

2.30 The new Council website will afford us the opportunity to drive this work forward further and to create a lasting legacy in terms of broadening and improving online services.

### **Print and design services**

2.31 We use strong corporate branding on all of our major publications. This has been modernised during 2016/17 to tie in with the Corporate Plan. All internal documents now carry the Venn watermark, while external publications contain banners reflecting our core themes of People, Place and Progress. The photographs used within our publications showcase South Derbyshire in all of its glory, in terms of both location and people. Design projects throughout the year have supported both our statutory and non-statutory functions. Publications include the Council's Annual Report, the What's On guide and various strategic documents.

### **Corporate campaigns 2016/17**

2.32 During the year, through the Communications Strategy and closely aligned with the objectives of the Corporate Plan 2016-21, activity has been focused around corporate campaigns to support the delivery of key priorities. Some examples, under the themes of the Corporate Plan, are as follows:

#### **PEOPLE**

- Working with partner agencies to further push initiatives that help drive down poverty and support the vulnerable, such as the Community Food Hub.
- Publicising successful prosecutions and enforcement actions supported by or initiated by the Council, especially with regard to fly-tipping and Benefit fraud, as well as partnership campaigns and initiatives with the police and other agencies.
- Focusing on the wide variety of facilities, opportunities and events in South Derbyshire for people of all ages, such as school holiday activities, and targeting younger audiences through social media engagement.
- Targeting campaigns across all channels to reach new audiences and educate residents on the importance of recycling and reducing contamination. This includes heavily promoting our animated recycling video.

#### **PLACE**

- Supporting the promotion, marketing and creation of a lasting legacy for infrastructure projects including the Midway Community Centre and Melbourne Sports Park.
- Promoting events and outcomes that build on the District's reputation as a safe place to live, work and visit. I.e. Liberation Day.
- Supporting staff with the knowledge of how to reach residents and volunteers through digital/social media channels. Suitable training has been provided.
- Promoting events around responsible dog ownership and littering, such as the green dog walker pledge.
- Working closely with Swadlincote TIC and other organisations to promote the area's rich and diverse culture. E.g. Heritage Open Days.



## **PROGRESS**

- Building on the District's positive reputation of being 'open for business,' celebrating the success of both large and small enterprises.
- Promoting events and initiatives, including the new Swadlincote Makers Market, that help town centres to thrive.
- Raising awareness of activities in the What's On guide through the website and social media.
- Continuing to support tourism growth by promoting events such as the Festival of Leisure.
- Keeping the community up to date with progress on the delivery of homes and key infrastructure. This has included extensive consultation and publicity for the Local Plan.

## **OUTCOMES**

- Continuing to purvey the Council's ethos of doing more with less and playing a key role in utilising marketing techniques to maximise commercial income.
- Producing the SDDC annual report to demonstrate key achievements and promoting the Council's Annual Governance Statement.
- Through the new website and Channel Shift Strategy, focusing on shaping and improving services around customer demand and expectation.
- Supporting work internally to educate staff on anti-fraud processes and strengthening resilience.
- Helping to maintain a culture of openness and accountability through continuing good relations with residents and the media.
- Helping to implement and maintain the process(es) needed for internal and external communications relevant to the ISO14001 environmental management system.
- Communicating clearly with staff through a range of internal channels, celebrating their achievements, providing regular and useful information and highlighting training/learning opportunities.
- Building on the themes of our Corporate Equalities and Safeguarding work and focusing on key projects like the Dementia-Friendly District bid.

### **3. Internal communications**

3.1 Our Internal Communications Strategy sets out the aims, aspirations, channels and an action plan for effective engagement with employees and Elected Members. Our goal is to unite our team members, create a sense of pride and instil our values, all the time reflecting the aims of the Corporate Plan.

3.2 Internal communications channels currently used include:

- Better online (the intranet) and its rolling news section
- Noticeboards
- Email bulletins
- Team/unit meetings

- Team briefs
- Staff briefings (as and when required on key issues)
- Inductions for new starters

3.3 Having been relaunched in March 2015 with a fresh, modern look and interactive features, the Council's new-look intranet (now called 'Better online') has really made an impact on staff's day-to-day work. In 2016/17, there were 75,092 sessions on Better online - up by 12.5% on the previous year - and 146,229 page views, an increase of 22.9% compared to 2015/16.

3.4 In line with industry trends moving towards digital workplaces, the monthly internal staff magazine Better was migrated onto the intranet in April 2016 and has become a one-stop shop of news and information for staff who want and expect information at their fingertips 24 hours a day. A monthly printout summary is produced for employees and Elected Members without access to the intranet.

3.5 Between September 2016 and March 31, 2017, there were more than 8,500 clicks on news stories on Better online. Blogs, features about new members of staff and celebrations of individual/team achievements are among the most widely read.

3.6 A Better online focus group was held in March 2017, with subjects discussed including features, design and the rolling news channel. The results will be used to inform an action plan to steer phase two of the intranet project.

3.7 Having been reviewed and improved to reflect the branding and themes contained within the Corporate Plan, team briefs continue to play an important role in communicating key internal messages. Work is due to take place to consider how best to create a council-wide team brief moving forward.

3.8 Efforts have been made to standardise branding in line with the Corporate Plan, helping to ensure consistency of message. A review of the current arrangements for sending out internal emails will be considered in 2017/18, with the same purpose.

## **4. Looking ahead**

4.1 Work will continue to focus on the achievement of key priorities in the Corporate Plan. An agreed list of communications objectives, published within the refreshed Communications Strategy (see **Appendix C**) and set against each Corporate Plan objective, will help to target our efforts.

4.2 Through the Communications Dashboard, additional focus will be placed on measuring the effectiveness of campaigns and the communications channels used.