



Corporate Communications Annual Report 2014/2015

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, coordinating and promoting targeted communication campaigns
 - Further enhancing 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 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 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.
- 1.4 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 continue to see a rapid rise in the use of social media and online tools. This trend is expected to continue and increase in the future.
- 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 2014/15 campaigns.

2. External communications

Media Coverage

- 2.1 Positive media coverage across multiple channels continues to rise. A willingness to be proactive, helpful and to go the extra mile to build relationships with reporters enables us to showcase the achievements of the organisation.
- 2.2 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, Swadlincote Post and Melbourne Village Voice. Each week for the past five years, a 600-word 'Leisure' article has been provided to the Mail for publication in its Saturday 'Weekender' supplement. It is estimated that a paid-for advert occupying the same space would cost around £20,000 per annum.
- 2.3 Officers and Members have consistently promoted Council and community events on radio stations such as Radio Derby and Touch FM, with particular highlights including coverage of the Council's remembrance solemnities at the refurbished War Memorial gates at Eureka Park and Swadlincote Farmers' Market's success in winning through to the national final of the BBC's Food & Farming Awards in the 'Best Food Market' category.
- 2.4 A significant project to update local media and parish council contacts has been undertaken, facilitating a more dedicated service to community publications.
- 2.5 During 2014/15, a typical month has seen between 15 and 20 press releases issued, each backed up by links to information on the Council's website through social media channels. A large proportion of the subsequent media coverage has been positive, with only a tiny fraction of negative stories reported. Taking March as an example month, 336 separate articles relating to South Derbyshire and the Council appeared in the press. Just four of these were negative in tone.
- 2.6 A concerted effort is being made to provide as much information as possible to the journalists working in a hard-pressed industry, maximising the potential for positive stories about the Council. A raft of information is circulated through our various social media channels, painting a comprehensive picture of the work we do and the services offered.
- 2.7 Regional publications too show a growing interest in South Derbyshire and, thanks to our extensive media contacts and network of communication channels, we are in a prime position to take advantage.

Web

- 2.8 Online access channels are being increasingly used by residents and groups to access information. Table 2 reveals that during 2014/15 there was an average of 30,880 visits per month to our website – www.south-derbys.gov.uk - an increase of 4.9% on the previous year. On average, there have been 92,609 page views a month, 2.8% higher than last year.

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
2014/15	30,880	50.32%	92,609	78.42%
2013/14	29,437	69.6%	90,082	76.2%

2.9 During 2014/15, 43.44% of visits to the Council’s website were made via mobile platforms (such as phones or tablets) rather than the more traditional method of access by a desktop PC.

2.10 The most viewed sections of the Council’s website during 2014/15 are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 – Popular Sections of the Council Website 2014/15

Popular Sites	Nr. Page Views (PVs) 2014/15	% change of PVs compared to 13/14	Rationale	Link to PR activity
Community & Living	51,538	19.95%	Community events / grants	Heavy promotion of events through social media
Council & Democracy	145,164	1.93%	Council Tax, Benefits / Press releases	Reflect economic situation and press coverage
Environment & Licensing	114,286	-1.97%	Waste and recycling Licensing information	Linked to the refuse and recycling service
Housing	52,693	9.54%	Tenancies, tenant participation etc	Dreamscheme, Can You Dig It? competitions
Leisure, culture & tourism	114,940	-9.15%	Walking Festivals, play schemes etc	Wide ranging marketing material to publicise events
Planning & Development Control	227,753	31.99%	Planning policy	Reflects size of planning applications and work on the Local Plan

- 2.11 Table 3 reveals that during the year, there has been a general increase in the number of page views across the majority of the Council's website compared to 2013/14. The exceptions are Environment and Licensing and Leisure, Culture and Tourism. This will continue to be monitored moving forward.

Social media

- 2.12 The level of engagement through social media channels is ever-increasing as they continue to be an additional form of customer service. People are choosing more and more to interact with the council at the touch of a smartphone or tablet, providing an opportunity for us to be even more innovative in the way that information is presented. As a result we've continued to develop the following:
- 2.13 **Twitter** – with almost 5,000 followers, we are easily the most popular District or Borough Council in the county. Conversations on a range of subjects are common, from the Swadlincote Christmas lights switch-on to fly-tipping to community safety matters.
- 2.14 The popularity of Twitter as a way for individuals, businesses and organisations to keep up to date with Council news shows no sign of relenting - in the past six months around 550 new accounts have signed up to follow @SDDC.
- 2.15 All posts uploaded to the Council's various Facebook accounts continue to appear on Twitter, adding depth and detail and increasing click-throughs. This method has been particularly effective in areas like community safety and environmental health, with vehicle numberplate security events and food hygiene inspections gaining significant traction.
- 2.16 In an effort to educate this growing audience about some of the lesser-known services offered by the Council, Hootsuite has been used to schedule tweets weeks and months into the future, encouraging interaction on a 24/7 basis as appropriate.
- 2.17 The use of hashtags to link and track conversations, such as #Swadpancakeraces, has resulted in our messages reaching wider audiences and attracting a new community of followers.
- 2.18 We never rest on our laurels in terms of social media, appreciating that its potential for improving the way we work is huge. Monthly Social Media Breakfasts are held for Council employees to share ideas, best practice and potential pitfalls.
- 2.19 **Facebook** - The Communications Team has worked with service delivery areas to develop their presence on Facebook. There are pages for The National Forest Walking Festival, Housing Services, the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership, Environmental Health's Commercial Team, South Derbyshire Sport and the Environmental Education Team. Each is developing its own follower base, but all follow each other and share certain posts to ensure messages are communicated as far and wide as possible.
- 2.20 It all means that residents of South Derbyshire have greater options to find out what family activities are on in the school holidays, for example. They can also

learn the food hygiene rating of their favourite restaurant, track what is being done about litter or find out when the next Council tenants' meeting is taking place.

- 2.21 Talks are also under way to create Parklife Project and Building Control Facebook pages, with consideration also being given to how all of these might eventually link in to a central Council Facebook page.

Channel Shift

- 2.22 A rapidly expanding population and an increasingly complex benefits system have both contributed to a 34 per cent increase in all customer contacts.
- 2.23 Support is being provided through a comprehensive 'channel shift' strategy, under which a dedicated team known as the 'Media Forum' is working hard to utilise the latest technology to help move customers towards self-service and a model that is fit for purpose in the future. This has involved finding out not only where most face-to-face customers come from, but also their propensity to change – or shift channel – and engage with the Council in a different way. That will allow these people to be targeted with specific strategies.
- 2.24 The first phase of self-service will be the introduction of payment machines and the end of face-to-face payments at the Council offices. As well as improving online services, a new 'Keep it Clean' smartphone app that will allow residents of South Derbyshire to report issues with dog fouling and fly-tipping, among other things, is currently being piloted. Discussions about how to best use intelligent voice recognition for phone customers, as well as social media channels, are ongoing.

Print & Design services

- 2.25 We use strong corporate branding on all of our major publications. The photos used within our 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.

Corporate campaigns 2014/15

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

Promoting the district and supporting economic growth

- 2.27 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 £547,000 refurbishment of Eureka Park have received wide-ranging media coverage;
 - Raising the profile of the South Derbyshire Business Advice Service and highlighting the achievements and contributions of companies of all sizes.

Improved Value for Money

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

- Showcasing key successes, from securing RoSPA to achieving Investors in People.
- 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.

Improved lifestyles built on the legacy of the Olympics

2.29 Supporting sporting, leisure and cultural activities. Key achievements include:

- Continuing to provide a weekly Leisure article for the Burton Mail to highlight upcoming events;
- Providing a sustained output of information to inspire and motivate residents to get fit, healthy and active;
- Highlighting how we are keeping the Olympic legacy alive by obtaining external funding for projects such as refurbishment works at Eureka Park, Green Bank and Etwall leisure centres, 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, International Women's Day and the creation of a mural at Swadlincote Skatepark, while providing information about the services and products available to help protect against crime;
- Illustrating how individuals are being made accountable for their anti-social actions and the role the public can play in bringing perpetrators to justice.
- Celebrating the sixth anniversary of the Friday Night Project - a youth project set up to combat problems of anti-social behaviour in Woodville.

Improved Recycling

2.31 Educating residents about our recycling collection service. This includes articulating the vision for the service by managing short-term messages whilst focusing on the longer-term goal. Activities include:

- Publicity drives being undertaken at seasonal periods to ensure residents do their bit for the environment. This included education on how to recycle paper, bottles, packaging and more besides at Christmas, the World Cup and Easter.
- Providing proactive updates via the website and social media during inclement weather to ensure householders are kept fully informed of potential changes to refuse and recycling collections and the steps they need to take.

- Continuing to bang the drum for the Easy Green Recycling Scheme, educating residents on what waste should go in which bin.

Celebrating 40 years of South Derbyshire District Council

2.32 Pride in the past and excitement for the future were the prevailing feelings as South Derbyshire hit the big 40. Highlights include:

- Launching a special edition of the internal staff magazine Better. This included a nostalgic look back at how the Council was formed, family connections and what lies ahead. Copies were made available for guests attending the Civic Council.
- Two extensive features appearing in the bygone sections of the Burton Mail and the Derby Telegraph to highlight how far the District has come. A landing page was set up on the website and residents were encouraged to share their memories.

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 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
- Social media breakfasts
- Inductions for new starters

3.2 One of the biggest undertakings of the year has been the launch of the new look Intranet, which has attracted a wealth of positive comments. The design is fresh and modern, with interactive features, such as a rolling news channel and a Twitter Stream. All documents have been updated and streamlined.

3.3 The internal staff magazine Better was revamped to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. New sections include a 'Month in Pictures' page, a 'Day in the Life' feature and success story snippets to highlight the achievements of staff.

3.4 Social Media Breakfasts are now held once a month to share examples of best practice, create new ideas and discuss potential pitfalls. Departments have embraced this, with turnout consistently high.

3.5 Blogs have been distributed on a regular basis to cover time sensitive topics that require greater elaboration, such as the Local Plan, our financial position, the vision for the Green Bank Leisure Centre and more besides.

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 2015/16 is attached at Appendix 2.