



Wellingborough Town Council

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
ADOPTED 25/7/23



1.0 Introduction

Wellingborough Town Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders and to do this it is vital that a communications strategy be developed.

Communications is a complex, multi-dimensional topic and, contrary to popular belief, it is not only about public relations.

This strategy will look at how the Council can develop its communications over the next 12 months.

The overall aim is that Council communications should be a two-way process; to give people the information to understand accurately what the council does, to enable informed decisions, and to get information from residents and stakeholders to understand their needs.

1.1 Why is communication important?

Local government communications have, over the past few years, increasingly focused on reputation. Better communications lead to recognition and respect – reputation **does** matter. Many councils fail to effectively communicate who they are and what they do – and the less people know about an organisation, the less likely they are to rate it highly.

Achieving the Council's aims and objectives requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with, or provide services for.

An important part of any organisation's role is to ensure that the information provided both by and to it is easily accessible, relevant and timely. The Council must recognise the importance of communication and be committed to developing its own services to meet the expectations of the community it serves.

The advances made in information technology offer exciting new ways of communicating. At the same time, for many people, traditional methods – newspapers, telephone, leaflets – still play a fundamental role that must not be undervalued.

1.2 What should we be communicating?

Research by the Local Government Association, states that the most important drivers of council reputation among local residents are:

- perceived quality of services overall
- perceived value for money
- media coverage
- direct communications
- council performance
- clean, green and safe environment
- positive experiences of contact with council employees

If the Council is to build a strong reputation, effectively inform residents, engage and improve customer satisfaction, then these drivers must form the basis of its communications strategy.

There is also a need for proactive and reactive information:

- Proactively – telling people information to influence and change attitudes
- Reactively – giving residents information they *want to know*

1.3 Who should we be communicating with?

The Council's audiences are wide and varied but will typically include:

- Residents
- Town Council staff and councillors
- Hard-to-reach groups, including young people
- The media
- NNC officers and councillors
- Voluntary groups and organizations
- The business community
- MPs
- Other public sector organisations (police, health, fire, PFCC)
- Visitors and those who work in the Town

(Audiences have to be targeted for different initiatives and communicated to appropriately by using the right tools which will be looked at in sections 3 and 4).

1.4 Our aims and vision:

The Town Council's main aim through communications is to '*Put Wellingborough First*' for the benefit of residents, partners, employees, stakeholders and visitors.

The Council's communications work will:

- raise residents satisfaction, trust and confidence levels
- raise awareness of services provided by the Town Council
- raise the profile of Wellingborough for business and tourism
- support elected members in their role as community leaders
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of the Council

Our vision is that our residents will:

- know what services the Council provides and the quality of service they can expect from us
- feel confident and satisfied with our services, and their costs
- understand how to get involved with, or influence, our work

In addition, visitors to the town will see Wellingborough as a destination to live, work and play

2.0 Existing communication methods

Communications within Wellingborough Town Council are currently in their infancy. The Council is a new institution, created in 2021 following local government reorganisation, and as such its communication methods are expanding to establish its brand. Current communications include;

- Press releases to local press and radio stations,
- Council website,
- Council App,
- Walking Trail App,
- Attend and hold networking events,
- Appointments to outside bodies,
- Quarterly Council newsletter,
- Working group meetings,
- Hold twice yearly meetings with local businesses,
- Social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube,
- Corporate Plan and budget consultation
- In person councillor consultations
- Marketing material,
- Annual Report,
- Agendas and public reports
- Customer service via email and telephone
- Partnership relations with North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) to advertise local events through their newsletter, social media, website and Discover NN App
- Providing a monthly newsletter to update members
- Sharing relevant emails with members and officers
- Holding weekly officer team meetings
- Holding weekly meetings with the Leader and Deputy Leader
- Having regular officer communication throughout the day using Teams

The Projects Officer co-ordinates the Town Council's social media accounts, the Deputy Clerk controls the website and quarterly newsletter, the Town Clerk manages relations with the press and media. However, all officers are involved in providing communications using the tools listed above.

A communications policy is in place to govern who is authorised to issue statements and press releases on behalf of the council to ensure one clear message is communicated.

The Council also ensures that all communication activity takes into account the differing accessibility needs, adhering to the accessibility standards for the sector.

3.0. Manage the media effectively to promote and defend the council

The media plays a strong role in shaping perceptions of local government, so informed reporting is vital.

The Communities and Local Government report found people were most positive about their council in areas where the council had a good relationship with the local media.

Our key points for effective management of media relations are to:

- ◆ Respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time
- ◆ Be helpful, polite and positive
- ◆ Never say “no comment”
- ◆ Ensure any statements to hostile enquiries are cleared by the most

- appropriate person and keep written records of responses to journalists
- ◆ Monitor response times to media enquiries and evaluate media coverage
- ◆ Ensure the appropriate council spokesperson is fully briefed and available for interview if required
- ◆ Issue timely and relevant press releases
- ◆ Pre-empt potential stories arising from council agendas/minutes by issuing proactive PR

To enhance the above media relations the 'news' section on the website will include media releases and a selection of photographic material for journalists use. Media training will also be organised for key speakers (Council Leader, Mayor, Town Clerk)

3.1 Publish a regular council newsletter or magazine to inform residents

Research shows that there is a direct link between how well informed the public is about council services and how satisfied they are with them. Therefore, by regularly communicating with our local residents we can engender a more positive ethos and people are more likely to feel that the Council offers value for money and provides a good quality of service.

Regular communication with the electorate also fulfils part of the Communication & Community Engagement criteria for Quality Council Status, should the council strive for this award in the future.

As part of this strategy the council provides a quarterly newsletter to residents. This is available online through the council website and promoted through social media links. 1,000 hard copies are printed and placed freely available in Wellingborough Library, the Castle Theatre, Swansgate Shopping Centre, Wellingborough Museum, Hemmingwell Skills Centre, Glamis Hall and the Victoria Centre.

3.2 Ensure the council brand is consistently linked to services

The Council will look to brand its communications consistently, ensuring a single brand identity by:

- Making sure all officers have access to electronic logos and templates (press releases, letters, etc)
- Using a uniform font type – all printed communication should display the Council logo and should use Arial 11 font
- Developing a photographic library which supports the Council's brand and is available to staff, journalists and partners online
- Ensuring the brand is reinforced through visual media such as advertising

3.3 Carry out regular consultation

The Council is committed to consulting local taxpayers, service users, local businesses, service providers and council officers and members, to identify ways in which to improve the services that the council provides.

Consultation is a key part in the Communications Strategy as it is a two-way exchange of views between local people and the Council. The council is keen to get people's opinions about both the future of Wellingborough and the services they deliver. This will

help to make decisions and allow the council to tell people about why they provide services in the way they do.

At present, most of the Council's consultation is by way of questionnaires and members interaction with the public.

3.4 Maintain and develop website

The Town Council already has a website which is regularly updated and contains key information about the Council, consultations, our services and important events. This information is linked to the council app.

3.5 Work with community organisations

Wellingborough is fortunate to have active community groups and organisations which provide important services to the community. Over the years they have established links with difficult to reach people in the community and are well respected. Two-way engagement with these groups is vital to a thriving town council. Councillors of the town council are active in their communities and already have links with many organisations, through their former roles in the community. To establish the town council's brand councillors are a key link to promote the services the council provides and the differences between the council and the Unitary Authority.

Many organisations and groups provide events as part of their work. Where possible the town council will hold stalls and or participate at these events, to promote the town council and demonstrate the council's commitment to support community groups. Community organisations will be encouraged to respond to questionnaires on council services, through an electronic link and by holding surgeries in their buildings to obtain feedback from both their organisation and the community.

The Town Council encourages all community organisations to advertise their events in their quarterly newsletter, which is provided free of charge. As part of the production of newsletter each organisation is emailed to request a piece for inclusion.

Officers will maintain regular contact with organisations and groups through following them on social media and sharing their posts, emails, phone calls and visits. Community organisations are also invited to participate in working group meetings and be part of the core group to lead on climate change. Any external grant funding opportunities will be sent to the groups via email, as well as encouraging them to apply through the town council's community grant scheme, which is established to support projects in the community to non-profit organisations.

To celebrate the fantastic work that the community provide the town council has established a Community Awards Scheme. This scheme is divided into six categories which best identify the work delivered in our community and award them accordingly.

3.6 Engage with businesses

The council are committed to working with the businesses to support a thriving economy and town centre. Shopping and producing goods locally is an important aspect to

combating climate change and promoting what local businesses provide is an important role of the town council. In 2022 a town app was launched by the town council with a business directory to showcase local offerings. The app is free to download and is free for businesses to list their businesses. As part of the launch officers visited businesses in the town centre and Nene Court to list businesses on the app for them. Further work is required to keep visiting businesses and encourage those not listed to list. New businesses also need to be encouraged to list once premises are occupied.

The Town app is promoted at town council events to encourage the community to download and use the app. Push notifications are regularly issued to those who have downloaded the app to promote our services and business offers. However, businesses are not yet providing any special offers and work need to increase the number of downloads for the app to be more widely used. This will be achieved through bi-weekly social media posts about the apps and their functions, posters with QR codes in windows of willing businesses, banners placed on advertising boards and advertisements in the newsletter.

Numerous organisations provide support for businesses including:

- Evolve Business Coaching-Business Buzz
- Wellingborough and East Chamber of Commerce
- NNBN
- NNC

All the above organisations except NNC are accessible to businesses through a subscription service. The Town Council have appointed councillors to attend and contribute to the Wellingborough and East Chamber of Commerce. Councillors attend meetings to plan each of the Chamber of Commerce meetings and attend the meeting itself. The leader is appointed to a panel at these meetings to answer questions, and officers provide presentations on the work of the council, encouraging engagement from businesses. To improve engagement with businesses the town council has joined the Wellingborough and East Northants Chamber. A part of this subscription the council is able to submit regular items for circulation in their newsletter and push notifications to businesses for sponsorship and stall opportunities at events.

To support businesses further the Town Council holds two business networking meetings to showcase the Town Council's work and encourage engagement. These meetings are free for all businesses to attend.

3.7 Work with the Unitary Authority

A mutual respect and understanding of pressures between authorities is important. To understand these and share our work in the community, quarterly meetings are held between the Leader of North Northamptonshire Council, the Leader of the Town Council and the Town Clerk.

The Town Clerk regularly holds meetings with officers at the unitary authority to discuss linked projects, sharing ideas on future opportunities to work together and enhance services in the community. The Town Clerk also attends a monthly meeting with the liaison team at the unitary authority, inviting different departments as required.

The relationship with ward councillors is also important for multi sector action improvements to drive services and assets, along with exhibiting the Town Council's work to build reputation. We maintain this relationship by inviting ward councillors to all meetings of the council through sharing agendas and reports and inviting them to attend events.

3.8 Noticeboards

The Town Council has a noticeboard sited outside B&M in the town centre. This noticeboard is used to promote local events, town council services and meetings.

There is also a noticeboard unlocked, available for public use at Swanpool pavilion, which has also been used to display notices. As this building is not currently in use the effectiveness of displaying notices at this location is unknown.

The town council is also pursuing the transfer of existing noticeboards from NNC, which were formally owned by the Borough Council of Wellingborough.

4.0 Further engagement

The Town Council has formed a working group focusing on events in the town centre. This working group consists of officers, members and the public. This group has identified the need to establish greater links with businesses, so they feel supported. In an environment which challenges with the high street and retail industry, understanding the changes in this sector and how a thriving high street can be maintained is vital to the town.

The market has been identified as requiring support to promote its market days, stall holders and how to obtain a stall. The market is operated by NNC, but the profile can be raised locally, in conjunction with NNC for the benefit of the town.

Social media posts are scheduled using social pilot to avoid the need to manually input posts at key times each day. However, an ideal situation would be to visit each social media platform at regular points during the day to repost and share local posts and respond to comments. Current resources do not allow for this, so this could be something to build into the council's future strategy.

Press reports are created before and after events to submit to the local newspapers and radio. Press also attend council meetings, to report on items of particular interest. Further engagement could be to write reports to the press with updates following working group meetings, particularly on Swanspool assets, which generate public interest.

Investment in a trained marketing person to raise the profile of the council and its activities would be beneficial to increase the council profile, regular visit social media accounts and focus on generating a greater income for events through sponsorship and stall bookings, however the council have no plans to commit further funds.

5.0 Evaluation

It is extremely important that the Council measures the success of this strategy so that it may inform any future plan.

What can we measure?

- Raised awareness of the Town Council and the services it provides.
- Attitudes towards the town council
- Participation and engagement with Council projects, initiatives and consultation processes

How will we do this?

- Consultation with residents – perception and satisfaction surveys
- Measure press coverage for saturation and against press releases for content usage
- Hits on website and downloads on apps
- Number of Friends and Followers on Social Networking sites (if applicable)
- Members survey