



WHITCHURCH TOWN COUNCIL

Communications and Marketing Policy (August 2013)

1. Introduction

This Policy is designed to guide the Town Council's Communications and Marketing activities over the coming months and years. Communications activity is a key driver in public perception of overall Council performance. Research suggests that keeping residents informed, listening to their concerns and involving them when making decisions has a significant impact on their satisfaction with the Council and its services.

Marketing techniques are an integral part of a forward looking communications strategy. If it is to be meaningful and have some longevity, the Communications and Marketing strategy must reflect the corporate aims and priorities of the Council. It will also reflect the principles set out in the Equalities Policy, Information and Data Protection Policy and Customer Care Policy, as well as being a vehicle for the delivery of other Council policies.

The Council's first Corporate Strategy is now formally adopted following public consultation. Entitled "Time to lead the Community", it acknowledges the Town Council has had issues in the recent past which have inevitably concentrated focus away from core business. The Strategy states "the Council has been getting some poor press and its image has suffered significantly. This must be tackled in a positive way on several fronts. The Council must articulate a clear direction, when it will then begin to have more good news stories to tell. Robust policies and governance documents will set the rules about who can speak on behalf of the Council and what information can or can't be released. It is important to build up good relations with the local media and to issue press releases on important matters. It must also be clear who will be allowed to answer press enquiries and for them to be well prepared to do so".

There are a considerable number of actions in the Strategy which relate to communications and marketing, including:

"We will work with partners to develop a brand for Whitchurch and to promote Whitchurch Town as a place to live, work, shop and visit."

"We will promote tourism and Whitchurch as a destination not to be missed, capitalising on our heritage and location to visit places of interest in the locality."

"We will operate openly and share information through our website, community newsletter, notice boards and the media".

"We will provide up to date information on transport services available on our website and in printed form"

To have excellent communications and transparency

- We will improve the content of the Website.*
- We will issue a quarterly newsletter to each house and business to keep everyone informed*
- We will review our Publication Scheme and publish an Information Guide*
- We will publish an Information and Data Protection Policy*
- We will review how residents can become more involved in our decision making*
- We will report to each meeting on any decisions which have not been implemented*
- We will report progress on our business plan to each meeting cycle*

2. Key Areas

Whitchurch Town Council's main areas of promotion are:-

The Town - Promotion of the Town to attract day visitors, shoppers and tourists
Promotion to attract people looking to live in the Town
Promotion to businesses looking to invest in the Town

The Council- Raising the image of the Authority
Statutory and other information to help residents and businesses understand its decision making, policies and priorities.
Marketing of its services to ensure accessibility for all

The Council will promote the Town on its Web-site, by improving signage, by supporting local events, by supporting local tourism and business initiatives and by helping local organisations with media articles and press releases. It will also use social media to engage with and keep its communities informed. It will in partnership, develop a new logo for the Town which readily identifies its character and uniqueness.

The Council will market its services and promote local governance through its website, through social media, by providing a newsletter and notice boards and by supporting promotions of other public bodies and the voluntary and community organisations. It will adopt the new Town logo as part of its corporate image, which firmly roots the Council at the hub of the Town and its community. It will however retain its Coat of Arms to reflect the Council's unique position as the elected body for the Town.

The Council will investigate the need for translation of information into other languages or for the visually impaired, how to access the hard to reach groups and will promote Whitchurch as "disability friendly".

People are an organisations biggest asset

- The reputation of Whitchurch Town Council lies in the hands of councillors and staff
- They meet the local people and visitors daily
- They know more about the town than anyone!

3. Objectives

Marketing and promotional activity for the Town Council must achieve at least one of the following:

- Improve public and community relations
- Drive income for WTC
- Raise the Council's profile
- Impart essential information
- Improve two-way communication with stakeholders, to help understanding of what they want.
- Increase recognition received for the Council's achievements.
- Increase involvement & interest in Council activities and engage people in the democratic process.

Marketing activity for the town must achieve one of the following:

- Drive footfall into the town from the community
- Drive visitors into the town
- Increase consumer spend in the town
- Support local businesses
- Raise money for local charity
- Raise the town's profile in Shropshire and across the UK

These objectives will inform the Council's approach to public relations, design, marketing, customer care, consultation, website and social media.

Key performance Indicators (KPIs) will be put in place to measure the extent to which marketing and communications activity meets each one of the objectives. This will be fed into the Council through the Business Plan.

4. Principles

The following principles will be adopted in all communications:

- Integrity and honesty
- Clarity
- Openness and accessibility
- Inclusiveness
- Listening and responding
- Accountability
- Consistency
- Accuracy
- Compliance with legislation & guidance.

5. Stakeholders/key audiences

The stakeholders/key audiences of Whitchurch Town Council are:

- Residents
- Members
- Partners within the public sector (Shropshire Council, NHS, Police etc)
- Special interest groups including those with language or disability needs
- Business community
- Voluntary/community organisations and groups
- Schools
- Press/media
- Town Council employees
- Potential user groups
- Visitors & Tourists

6. Back to Basics-Whitchurch the Brand



Develop a logo for the town in partnership, based on what it's famous for (possibly clocks), and a supporting slogan or strapline- something short, snappy and catchy. e.g.-“Clocktown, a great place to spend time”. This could even become a registered trade mark.

- Organisations and businesses could adopt this to show they are part of the Whitchurch “family”, but also keep their own identity. For example the Town Council would be identified by both the existing crest and the Town logo. It would be good to stick to the colour-ways where possible.
- Commission or design locally and narrow it down to 3-4 Logos and let the public vote for their favourite via the website?
- A consistent look and feel based on the colourways, logo and slogan should then be applied across all town and town council communications which includes; signage, job adverts, websites, business cards and letter headed paper, leaflets and brochures, staff uniforms and badges, posters and banners and literally everything
- Promoting Whitchurch is about “sweating the assets” and there is no shortage of assets to sweat. Historic buildings, parks, events, markets, voluntary groups, nature features, the refurbished Civic Centre, Museum, niche shops.

7. Back to Basics-Websites

There are three websites serving Whitchurch:

www.2shrop.net/whitchurchtowncouncil; www.gowhitchurch.co.uk , & www.whitchurchshropshire.org.uk

Some clubs and organisations also have their own websites including the Farmers Market.

- Too many websites! Generally dated feel- go.whitchurch.co.uk most up to date.
- www.whitchurchshropshire.org.uk has between 50-100 hits per day, that's between 1400-2800 visits a month.
- New look and feel, town logo and strapline should be applied to both the Town Council and the Whitchurch website. Joint redevelopment will be cost effective and ensure common design themes
- Advertise- sell space to advertise on the site and either a) donate the fee to charity or b) use the fees to pay the website agency to manage and keep improving.
- Mutual links- from Shropshire Tourism and Virtual Shropshire websites. Also, create a list of websites from local businesses and charities in the area, to put links to the website.
- Try to avoid duplication on the sites, define clearly what each is for.
- Add in social media, it is the fastest growing communications and sales media.
- Add apps for Town Centre information and send out latest news.
- The website addresses should be at the bottom of every brochure, leaflet, press release and advert created.

8. Back to Basics-PR and Communications

- Turn this Policy into a smart PR & Communications Plan, and include in the Council's Business Plan.
- The Plan will be both PROACTIVE and REACTIVE
- PROACTIVE: Plan ahead for positive PR opportunities that we want to tell people about- tell them about the new objectives and services.
- REACTIVE: Plan for responding to unforeseen events QUICKLY
- Introduce Newsletter in to every house & business relatively cheaply, via permanent space on a quarterly or monthly (the maximum allowed under the Code) Whitchurch Gossip magazine and/or local paper. Include articles and events calendar.
- NETWORKING with local press to build a rapport and trust.
- Media train individuals within WTC to get the message across
- Take out advertising in the local press, but not too often as it may breach the value & objectivity parts of the Code. Also filling it with un-newsworthy articles could be more damaging and could look contrived. Instead, use the media plan and events calendar to book space and where relevant send in press releases regularly.
- Network within the community, it is a powerful tool.
- Make Website interactive for receiving views, bookings etc.
- Produce information leaflets for distribution in Reception.

9. Whitchurch Tourist Passport Promotion

- Data Capture-Visitors to Tourist Information Office could be given the advice they need and then asked if they will give their name, email and address in return for some coupons and offers to use in the town during their visit. (Remember DATA CAPTURE IS WORTH £1.25 PER PERSON!)
- They will also be entered into a free prize draw- 1 prize per month donated by the local shops/ restaurants or hotels.
- Team up with local businesses to offer a booklet of coupons containing special offers for them to use such a free desserts if they buy main courses at a particular pub or restaurant, £5 off in X store etc...
- Once we have a database of names and addresses we can start emailing/ mailing individuals to get them to return to the Town by offering further discounts.
- We can also send them friends and family coupons to give out which drives more visitors into the town.

10. Friday and Farmers Markets –up to capacity?



next 4 weeks.

- If they sign up for a stall for 12 months and pay in advance, they'll discount off the overall fees.
- Council Facebook to promote markets.

- Carry out desk research into any type of produce that isn't currently represented on the market and look on line for businesses to target in the area.
- Produce a leaflet about the market. Call the business and explain the benefits of trading via your Farmers Market. Send them a leaflet in the post with an introductory offer- first week free, reduction for the

11. Other Council Facilities

The Civic Centre will be a great public service hub for the Town Council and the re-launch should be seen as a key event. It will be vital to establish a vision of what the Civic Centre is for. Strategy consultation responses have suggested more theatre events, film nights and live concert streaming, and "night club" type events would be welcomed.

A face lift for the Main Hall and changing facilities would give something positive to promote. It is a major asset which is currently well used, but poorly marketed. Once a vision is determined, a more detailed refurbishment can be developed and funding bids made.

Research into similar halls to establish best practice must be undertaken. Future potential markets for the building also need to be considered, as will local competition, pricing policies, promotions, improvements to the product and concessions.

A customer satisfaction process should be developed to better understand the current and recent users needs and expectations.

Weddings & Parties

- Weddings are big business and people are looking for good value reception venues and is worth focusing on.
- A Wedding Receptions and Parties brochure should be created with photographs of what the Civic Centre can offer.
- Team up with local cake makers, bridal wear, flower shops and accommodation providers to produce the brochure, put links on their websites with details about receptions at the Civic Centre.
- Obtain a marriage licence for the centre also team up with local churches.
- Seeking a commercial partner to cover bar & food franchises, joint promotion of events, marketing and possibly capital investment would be advantageous before the next major refurbishment is finalised.
- Attend wedding fairs in the area to promote the Civic Centre and BETTER STILL- RUN A WEDDING FAIR AT THE CENTRE with an offer of book the venue as a reception at the fair and receive discount.

12. Getting the product right.

The most important thing in improving the Council's image or when marketing services and facilities is to get a good product.

- Improving the Civic, Museum, markets, Sports Hall, Parks, car park etc
- Having great customer care.
- Appearing professional in the way we deal with people
- Making a difference to the appearance of the Town
- Having slick and interesting Council meetings

13. Primary publications and Communications media

The following are the primary publications and communications media which can be used by Whitchurch Town Council

Publications

Newsletter; Can get into 4000+ homes and businesses. Increasing in line with SAMdev development.

Agendas, reports and minutes: Are sent to the press, and councillors. Public copies are available in the Civic Centre and website.

Town Guide: produced every other year. Whitchurch Town Council retains editorial control.

Publications/leaflets: Annual Report, Strategy Documents

Noticeboards: Civic Centre and each Ward.

Media Relations

Press releases and feature material: Produced through the Town Clerk's office,

Media statements: These are mostly reactive and cleared with the Town Clerk

Advertisements: produced for information, promotional and recruitment purposes and to meet statutory requirements (e.g. public notices).

Communication

Town Council Website: www.Whitchurch-tc.gov.uk. This will be a major vehicle for informing local people about local events.

The town council also provides Town Website with information

E-mails: We have a growing database of groups and organisations and this can be an effective method of getting out messages quickly.

Apps for Town Centre news.

Social media.

Face to Face

Annual Town Meeting: Chance for residents to hear an update on events for the town and to give comments. Once a year before the end of May

Surveys and Market Research: Not often used by Town Council

Through Close working with Whitchurch organisations

These include:

Whitchurch Tourism Group

Whitchurch Town Plan Implementation Group

Chamber of Trade

Friends of Whitchurch Heritage etc

Events/Opportunities

Party in the Park, Christmas Lights Event, Blackberry Fair etc

Ongoing

Giving Grants – (could ask organisations to try and gain publicity and name check WTC)

Events with partners

Branding

The following should be clearly identifiable as Whitchurch Town Council:

- Whitchurch Town Council website
- Letter headed paper
- Compliment slips
- Purchase orders
- Business cards for Councillors and key staff
- Fax header sheets
- Public notice advertisements
- Staff Uniforms
- Signs on facilities such as Civic Centre or Parks

Accessibility

Our contact details should always be kept up-to-date and freely available to make it as easy as possible for people to contact us via email, phone or fax. The office is staffed Monday – Friday 9-5pm.

13. Dedicated Marketing Budget

As part of implementing the Policy, a marketing and communications (MARCOMs) plan, will be included within the Business Plan. A dedicated MARCOMs budget should be created. The approach to creating this budget should be a 'bottom-up' approach which will involve looking at each of the elements of the marketing plan and assigning costs against these. Costs should be verified and kept as low as possible by seeking competitive quotes from suppliers (for things such as leaflet design and print and other areas where third parties are used).

Once committed to, the marketing budget should be managed by the Assistant Town Clerk and should be spent accordingly.

14. Standards

The Council has adopted a **Protocol on Communications** (Appendix A), in support of the Council's Communication and Marketing Policy. Members must abide by this and a breach may also be a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct.

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011, applies to local councils as well as principal councils. Local authorities are required by law to have regard to the contents of this Code in coming to any decision on publicity. Publicity means "any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public". The code therefore applies in relation to all decisions by local authorities relating to paid advertising and leaflet campaigns, publication of free newspapers and newsheets and maintenance of websites –including the hosting of material which is created by third parties.

Nothing in this code overrides the prohibition on the publication by local authorities of material which in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.

Publicity by local authorities should be :-

- lawful
- cost effective
- objective
- even-handed
- appropriate
- in accordance with equality and diversity rules
- issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Paid for advertising must comply with the Advertising Standards Authority's Advertising Codes.

In relation to all publicity, local authorities should be able to confirm that consideration has been given to the value for money that is being achieved, including taking into account any loss of potential revenue arising from the use of local authority-owned facilities to host authority publicity.

In some circumstances it will be difficult to quantify value for money, for example where the publicity promotes a local amenity which is free to use. In such a case authorities should be able to show that they have given thought to alternative means of promoting the amenity and satisfied themselves that the means of publicity chosen is the most appropriate.

If another public authority, such as central government, has issued publicity on a particular topic, local authorities should incur expenditure on issuing publicity on the same matter only if they consider that additional value is achieved by the duplication of that publicity.

The purchase of advertising space should not be used as a method of subsidising voluntary, public or commercial organisations.

Local authorities should consider whether it is appropriate to seek advice from economic analysts, public relations experts or other sources of expert advice before embarking on a publicity campaign involving very large expenditure.

Local authorities should ensure that publicity relating to policies and proposals from central government is balanced and factually accurate. Such publicity may set out the local authority's views and reasons for holding those views, but should avoid anything likely to be perceived by readers as constituting a political statement, or being a commentary on contentious areas of public policy.

Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy. It is acceptable for local authority publicity to correct erroneous material which has been published by other parties, despite the fact that the material being corrected may have been published with the intention of influencing the public's opinions about the policies of the authority.

Where paid-for advertising is used by local authorities, it should be clearly identified as being advertising.

Advertisements for the recruitment of staff should reflect the tradition of political impartiality of local authority employees.

Where local authority publicity addresses matters of political controversy it should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner.

In most circumstances it is acceptable for local authorities to publicise the work done by individual members of the authority. This might be appropriate, for example, when one councillor has been the 'face' of a particular campaign. If views expressed by or attributed to individual councillors do not reflect the views of the local authority itself, such publicity should make this fact clear.

Maintenance by a local authority of a website permitting the posting of material by third parties constitutes a continuing act of publication by that local authority which must accordingly have a system for moderating and removing any unacceptable material. Where local authorities provide assistance to third parties to issue publicity they should ensure that the principles in this code are adhered to by the recipients of that assistance.

Local authorities should not incur any expenditure in retaining the services of lobbyists for the purpose of the publication of any material designed to influence public officials, Members of Parliament, political

parties or the Government to take a particular view on any issue. Local authorities should not incur expenditure on providing stands or displays at conferences of political parties.

Local authorities should not publish or incur expenditure in commissioning in hard copy or on any website, newsletters, news sheets or similar communications which seek to emulate commercial newspapers in style or content. Where local councils do commission or publish newsletters, news sheets or similar communications, they should not issue them more frequently than monthly. Such communications should not include materials other than information for the public about the business, services and amenities of the council or other local service providers.

Publicity about local authorities and the services they provide should be freely available to anyone who wishes to receive such information in a format readily accessible and understandable by the person making the request or by any particular group for which services are provided.

All local authority publicity should clearly and unambiguously identify itself as a product of the local authority.

Publicity by local authorities may seek to influence positively the attitudes of local people or public behaviour in relation to matters of health, safety, crime prevention, race relations, equality, diversity and community issues. Local authorities should consider how any publicity they issue can contribute to the promotion of any duties applicable to them in relation to the elimination of discrimination, the advancement of equality and the fostering of good relations.

Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums.

Appendix 1 Protocol on Communications

Introduction

This protocol was adopted by Council on 29th August 2013, in support of the Council's Communication and Marketing Policy. It is based on a model by the National Association of Local Councils, but tailored to the needs of the Town Council.

A. Parish Council Correspondence

1. The point of contact for the town council is the Town Clerk, and it is to the Town Clerk that all correspondence for the Town Council should be addressed.
2. The Town Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
3. No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Town Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. In particular, councillors and officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/ documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
4. All official correspondence should be sent by the Town Clerk or another officer authorised by the Town Clerk to do so, in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper. Emails are to be treated as other correspondence and may only be sent by authorised officers, on matters which are within their job descriptions and delegated authority.
5. The Mayor may sign letters prepared on his/her behalf by staff, but only on matters directly related to the role of Mayor.
6. Where correspondence from the Town Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX). No blind email copies should be used.

B. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

1. Agendas should be clear and concise. Reports are to be attached where appropriate, which should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting. Significant background documents should be circulated to Councillors.
2. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda, and will normally be contained in Members Briefings, which are to be circulated at least once each month.
3. Where the Town Clerk or a councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for “information only”, this information will be circulated via the Town Clerk, or with the Town Clerk’s agreement.

C. Communications with the Press and Public

1. The Town Clerk will clear all press reports on behalf of the Council, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Mayor, or the Chairman of the relevant committee when appropriate.
2. Press reports from the Council, its committees or working parties should be from the Town Clerk or a delegated officer or via the reporter’s own attendance at a meeting.
3. Unless a Councillor has been specifically authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should refer them to the Town Clerk. Even if authorised, it is usually safer not to make an immediate comment and to phone back having thought about the matter. This gives time if necessary to seek advice from the Town Clerk.
4. Councillors have a right to express personal views but must make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view. Unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
5. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public about an action of the Council or lack of action, this should be dealt with under the Council’s adopted complaints procedure, or via a council agenda item. This does not limit a councillor from carrying out his or her normal caseload on behalf of members of the public which they represent.

D. Councillor Correspondence to external parties

1. As the Town Clerk should be sending most of the council’s correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies, it needs to be made clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Town Council. Councillors may write letters as individual members concerning ward or Town matters as long as they make it clear they are acting as an individual councillor and do not commit the Council.
2. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor’s role within it, should, out of courtesy, be sent to the Town Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. “copy to the Town Clerk” so that the recipient is aware that the Town Clerk has been advised.

E. Communications with Parish Council Staff

1. Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a committee or sub-committee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council). The Town Clerk however would encourage councillors to speak directly to relevant members of staff about issues, but to keep the Town Clerk advised.
2. No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Mayor, or the Chairman of a committee, may give instructions to the Town Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
3. Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council. Again, individual councillors must not appear to represent the Council as a whole, unless authorised to do so.
4. E-mails:
Instant replies should not be expected from the Town Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated;
Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Town Clerk or other authorised officer;

E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Town Clerk;
Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.

5. Meetings with the Town Clerk or other officers:

Wherever possible an appointment should be made;

Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;

Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

F. Councillors seeking information from outside bodies, organisations or individuals

1. Councillors must not seek information from outside bodies, organisations or individuals on behalf of the Council unless authorised by the Council. They may of course do this as an individual Councillor.
2. Chairmen and other councillors may be authorised to seek information on behalf of the Council to take some work load off the Town Clerk or because of their individual experience or skills. Any form of negotiation, must always be undertaken when accompanied by an officer so that the Councillor is not compromised.
3. Councillors may only represent the Council on outside bodies if authorised to do so.