

Communications Strategy 07/08



Facts and stats:

Communications

Over 200 media releases issued a year.
100% usage for all media releases.
3 magazines a year for all residents.
Monthly staff newsletter
Fortnightly Jack's round up to members
Parish Matters newsletter
And much more!

Staff satisfaction rates:

93% of staff enjoy their job
97% of staff are aware of the council's vision, aim, priorities and promises
87% of staff have enough information to their jobs properly
91% of staff read aspire newsletter

Resident satisfaction rates:

78% of residents are satisfied with the local area
64% of residents feel informed about what we spend their money on
61% of residents feel informed about our services and benefits
48% of residents find out about us through our leaflets and magazines
29% of residents find out about us through the local media

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Communications Strategy

1. Summary

For the past five years we've built capacity and activities within communications and are in a position where we have great communications that are nationally recognised.

The importance of communications, we often think goes without saying, and while we could write a whole document on this, the bottom line is – the more people that know about us and our services, the more satisfied they are and this has to be a biggest driver within any organisation.

Communications is a two-way process –it is about giving people the opportunity to express their views and opinions as well as providing information. Good communications lead to more effective services, a better reputation, and stronger and more positive relationships. Communications need to be driven through an explicit strategy and senior leadership.

Successful organisations, like us, know the importance of aligning communications with every aspect of their work and we are continuing to ensure that we review and develop communications. We need continued commitment from every level of the organisation – from officers and members.

In this strategy you will find information on our current activity and where we plan to go in the future. On the whole we will look to continue with our successful communications and up our game with greater planning and development, reviewing and refreshing current products.

One of the biggest new areas of work this year will be in revisiting the Wychavon brand.

We will run sessions at the away day in September to discuss our brand and how we can develop it in the future – through visions, values and the actual visual look of our logo and what our strap should be.

2. Why are communications important?

What people see, the services residents get and the information they read influence perceptions. It's from every call to every contact to every experience. Managing these well improves reputation and resident satisfaction rates.

We are recognised as a market leader on communications with various awards for internal and external communications and we are invited to share our work on communications at conferences and with other councils. However, we know we can always improve and the reputation review has helped us to do this but this strategy will further focus us to take the best and make it better.

The more we tell people the better they feel. Informed people are happier with services and the Council overall – proving just how important communications are this is why we give them such a high profile.

3. Background

In 2005 we carried out a communications review against the reputation themes (a nationally recognised set of best practice guidelines) and this strategy pulls together our resulting actions and highlights where we're taking communications in the future.

We've learnt that there is a strong relationship between information and satisfaction – if people understand what we do people feel more satisfied with services and the Council overall. We also know that we perform well compared to other similar councils. During the reputation review the representation survey by RBA demonstrated increased rating from an already top quartile position on service satisfaction scores, VFM perceptions and feeling informed ratings.

4. What is Wychavon?

Wychavon District Council is one of the top performing Councils in the country and LGC Council of the Year no less. We take all areas of its work seriously from the hard edge of service delivery to the essential work of reputation management and communicating with residents.

It also takes on huge challenges most councils only dream of like building a hospital, but ensures this high flying is not at the expense of the essentials, like clean loos.

Both internal and external communications are of the highest importance to Wychavon District Council and while we're enormously successful at what we've done so far – the art of communications is a job never done.

We know there are improvements to be made, which came out of the Reputation Review, and we want to set out in this strategy where we are, where we're going and how we're going to achieve our future goals.

5. Priorities for this Strategy are:

- To increase access to our services.
- To improve resident satisfaction with our services – by keeping them well informed.
- To ensure we get credit for our work through good brand management and guidelines on how to use the Wychavon brand.
- To be more organised and proactive in all areas of communications.
- To review and refresh what we're already doing well.
- To keep internal communication high on the agenda especially in light of the shared services developments.

6. Communicating with our diverse communities

Recognising diversity when communicating with residents is vital. We take diversity into account in our communications, by having a flexible approach and having awareness to meet the needs of different audiences.

In particular this includes young people, old people, men and women, people with disabilities and also our ethnic minority communities including our Polish community and Gypsy's and Travellers.

We believe the most successful way to communicate with our diverse communities is by ensuring our publications are available in a variety of formats including different languages, large print, braille and audio format. We have a commitment to include the access panel on all our publications.

7. Key message

We aim to show Wychavon District Council as an excellent authority that always goes above and beyond the norm at an affordable council tax rate.

Audiences

Residents, staff, members, partners, tourists, local government community, opinion leaders and stakeholders.

8. Principles of communication

Communication is: sending, receiving and understanding information, attitudes and feelings through words, actions and symbols.

Both internal and external communications affect all aspects of our day-to-day business. It's the customer chatting to one of our advisors, it's the council tax leaflet. It's the way managers interact with staff and the way we interact with one another.

This Communications Strategy is key to helping us achieve our vision and priorities and has major link to priority two.

9. Vision, aim and priorities

Our vision:

Healthy, safe, vibrant and diverse communities, living in a clean and green environment.

Our aim:

To deliver excellent services and work with partners to improve quality of life for everyone in Wychavon.

And our three priorities:

1. Healthy and safe communities with a good quality environment
2. Reaching out to everyone
3. An excellently run Council

Communications is the responsibility of everyone who works at Wychavon, not just Strategy and Communications. If we continue to take it seriously and work together, we can carry on improving and developing communications.

10. Where are we now?

Our Aim: To improve resident satisfaction by making sure our customers, staff, Members and communities are informed about the services, facilities and projects we deliver through clear, concise and innovative methods of communication and to increase access to services.

11. Current work

Regular publications to get our message out to the communities

- The Wychavon Magazine - three times a year
- Media liaison through media releases, statements and briefings to make sure the stories in the newspapers are fair and accurate.
- Council tax leaflet each year with our promises and where the money goes.
- Corporate publications e.g. Community Plan, Annual Report to partners and Statement of Accounts and Summaries
- Business Briefing – for all businesses
- Targeted products for other audiences e.g. sports newsletter, arts events etc
- Postcards for key messages e.g. benefit fraud, recycling, elections.
- Revamped website with improved accessibility for users
- A to Z showing essential District and County services
- “Reaching out to Everyone” – presentations on what the council does – taken out to community groups (around 100 delivered to date by Robin Mace and local members)

Keeping our staff informed and happy in their jobs

- Monthly magazine *Aspire*
- *Aspire.gov* – an interactive Intranet with a regularly updated news box
- Jack’s weekly message
- *Aspire Staff Briefings* – twice a year

- Aspire Staff survey every year
- All Staff e-mails to be used only for urgent and immediate messages

Products to get important messages to Members

- Jack's Round up every two weeks
- Information Pack

12. Where are we going?

Aim

To have proactive, timely and well organised communications activities that gain us local, regional and national recognition.

Wychavon wants to maintain these high standards but also to keep learning and developing its methods and approach. We need to keep our eyes and ears open to ensure we're continuing along the right path, there is always more to do.

Therefore we will be introducing some new methods of communication and monitoring arrangements for some of the activities we already carry out.

These will focus on reviewing, refreshing and updating a lot of what we do already and bring in a lot of new ideas and communication methods.

The focus will initially be to become more proactive and timely. If we instigate a properly co-ordinated and monitored annual forward plan we will be much more organised and exploit more opportunities.

13. How are we going to get there?

Key actions for this year under the reputation themes:

Media

- Target of 20 media releases a month achieving 100% usage
- Aim for 1 national or trade press article a month
- Meet editors once a year and seek feedback on our media approach
- Identify key staff who have regular contact with the media and have monthly meetings to identify up and coming stories.
- Media monitoring system to be reported to SMT monthly
- Media briefings with Jack and Paul before every Exec Board.
- Set up a group of staff to be Key Communicators – their purpose will be to identify media opportunities within their service.

Internal communications

- Develop a new Wychavon Way – behaviours we expect of our staff and what we stand for
- Revamp ASPIRE.gov
- Develop the Staff Sounding Board as a forum for constructive cross council improvement

- Develop the role of web champs or a new group – to include intranet updates
- Introduce podcasts for Jack’s message
- Increase staff satisfaction with “having enough information to their jobs properly” rate currently at 87% to increase to 90% in the next survey.

A-Z guide

- Deliver a new A-Z as part of our magazine and stand alone with partners to all homes
- Target and segment products further to reach key groups

Branding

- Audit our current brand – by collecting together publicity, taking photos of our buildings and signage.
- Review of our current brand and look to the future
- Review our strapline and look at new logo options
- Develop values that will sit behind the brand and discuss how we represent this throughout the organisation.
- Roll out new brand and ensure it is consistently applied.

TWM (The Wychavon Magazine) and other publications

- Baseline residents satisfaction postcard in the October TWM
- Parish Matters – a newsletter for parish councils to keep them up to date on our work.
- Recommend disbanding the Editorial Board in its current form in favour of consultation on future content with Executive Board, Group Leaders, Middle Managers and SMT.

New web solutions – our own theme!

- Wychi-pedia - forum that allows customers to give their own definitions of how the Council works and offer no non-sense definitions.
- Continue to be recognised as transactional and aim to increase our SOCITM (Society of IT Management) rating to excellent status.
- Web pages for members

Training

- Media training for key staff and members annually
- Plain English training for key staff

Targets and further smaller actions are held by the Communications Manager, these create the basis of the communications team’s work plans.

14. Guidelines appendices (some to follow):

Appendix 1 – The Team

Appendix 2 – Graphics guidelines and proforma

Appendix 3 – Media guidelines

Appendix 4 – Internal Communications guidelines (to follow)

Appendix 5 – Brand guidelines (to follow)

Appendix 6 – Emergency and Crisis communications (to follow)

Appendix 7 – Using Plain English (to follow)

Contact Officer:


Emma Wild – Communications Manager


01386 565102 - emma.wild@wychavon.gov.uk

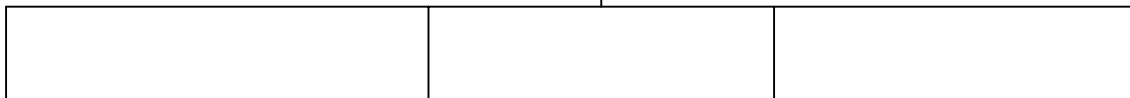
Appendix 1 - The Team





While we want everyone to be communicating well with residents and staff – a lot of the day to day chats with journalists, briefing notes, design work and web updates tend to fall the dedicated Communications Team, who drive excellence and co-ordinate projects. We're very proud of this award winning team and hope that this strategy will ensure continued success.

Have a look at our structure and see who you should talk on any communications issues – if in doubt ask!

 <p>FIONA NARBURGH Head of Strategy and Communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic direction • National brand and reputation management • Overall responsibility for communications • Conference presentations on Wychavon • Embodiment of the Wychavon brand!
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 <p>EMMA WILD Communications Manager x 5102</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media liaison • Advice and help with communications and marketing solutions • TWM (magazine) • Branding and reputation management • Plain English advice • WCCG* member • Overall management of the Communications Team
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 <p>SPENCER WINNETT Communication Officer x 5585</p>	 <p>LISA GARDNER Graphic Designer x 5445</p>	 <p>HELEN KEEGAN Graphic Designer x 5445</p>	 <p>ROB SIMMONDS Web Developer x 5106</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal communications • Aspire and .gov • Media releases • Jack's message and round up <p>Page 10. Strategy and Communications August 2007</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative and innovative design solutions. • Co-ordinating best value printing • Guardians of the brand! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the website and aspire.gov • Webchamps • Digi TV • Working with other organisations on web development
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Appendix 2 – Working with Graphics

Using creative and inspirational design is very important to Wychavon. We have an award winning team creating innovative design solutions for our publicity.

It's important that staff and services get the most out of Graphics, therefore we have put together some guidelines and a timeline to help you.

Starting the process:

Before coming to Graphics

- Check the timeline to ensure you have enough time to do the job. If time is short speak to Graphics to how they can help.
- Think in broad terms about your requirements
- Consider your budget.
- Involve any of your colleagues who may need to see the design before it goes into production.

What to tell Graphics

Once you have considered the above, make an appointment with either Lisa or Helen.

Tell Graphics:

- About your service.
- The aims of the publicity.
- Your target audience.
- What's unique about what you're promoting.
- Format and style in mind.
- How you wish to distribute (this can effect size, weight and you might be able to link up with another publication)
- Photos you might need – we have a photo library available. If considering your own photos ensure you have the relevant consent forms – ask Emma Wild if in doubt.
- Your schedule and deadlines.
- Who will provide sign off and liaise with them.
- Your budget.

To avoid delays and costs:

- Restrict the number of people involved in approving and liaising with Graphics to one or two people maximum.
- Ensure those people will be around to sign off work.
- Keep the brief simple and, ideally, inspirational!
- Leave room for the designer's input – that's what they're there for.

- Stick to the brief, once agreed – mid-project changes can incur delays and costs.
- Supply text electronically and in its complete form.
- Avoid leaving anything to the last minute.
- Think beyond posters and leaflets – ask Graphics or the Communications about other options.
- Plan ahead – book your job in with Graphics in advance.
- Use plain English and keep your text short and sweet – ask Communications for help with editing if you need it.

Graphics Checklist

All products must comply with the following guidelines:

- The Wychavon Logo
- Date
- Minimum Font Size
- Cost Code
- Plain English
- Ethnic Access Link

Graphics Contacts:

Helen Keegan – Graphic Designer – x 5445

Lisa Gardener – Graphic Designer – x 5465

Emma Wild – Communications Manager – x 5102

Timelines and deadlines

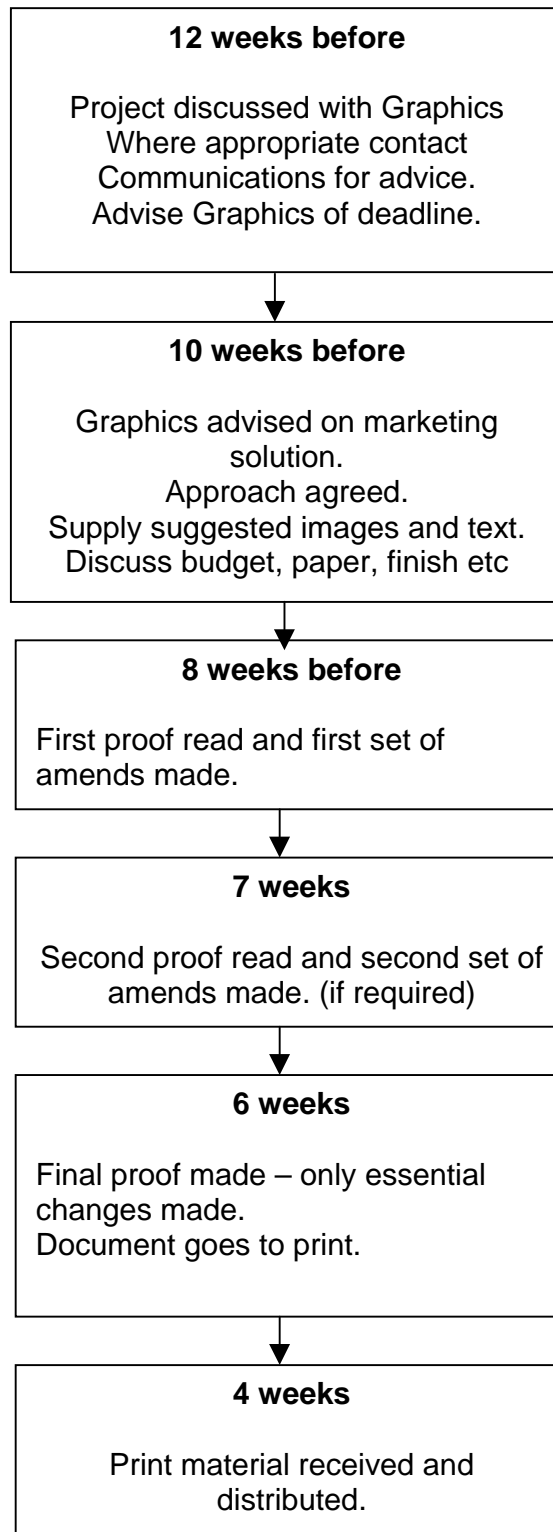
We want you to get a great service and to do this Graphics need as much notice as possible. Graphics understand there are occasions when there will be last minute or rush jobs, however the majority of jobs can be planned for, so please do take the time to think about your requirements and lead in time.

Some jobs are very quick and much quicker than the timeline suggests, but be mindful that Graphics may be working on jobs that are already booked in.

The timeline below is a good guide and will help you get the most out of from your products.

For smaller projects contact Graphics and see what they can do.

Design Timeline – major project
(change to a service, promoting a large event requiring a number of leaflets etc)



Appendix 3 - Media Guidelines

Wychavon has a good reputation and this is something we want to uphold. The media provides one of the best and most important ways of getting our messages out to residents – this policy provides details on our procedures, as well as some helpful hints on how to get the most from the media.

Golden Rules

If you remember anything let it be these golden rules:

- 1) Take journalists seriously. Understand the pressures under which they work and try to anticipate their needs. Above all, keep in mind the tyranny of the deadline and the appetite for fresh copy.
- 2) Don't have favourites. The disfavoured will get even with you sooner or later.
- 3) If you want coverage, make news and think about what's attractive to the reader.
- 4) Don't waste time remonstrating with reporters when they have failed to write/broadcast it exactly as you would have wished. Only gross acts of bad faith, inaccuracy and unfairness merit a complaint.
- 5) Don't talk off the record. Assume that anything you say has the potential to be printed.
- 6) Never say "No comment".
- 7) Be proactive – always think 2 weeks in advance.
- 8) If in doubt get in touch with Strategy and Communications.

The aim of Media Relations

- To increase access to our services.
- To increase understanding of our work and to make sure we get the credit where it's due.
- To increase satisfaction with our services.
- To enhance our reputation, by promoting and celebrating our successes and achievements.
- To defend us from unfounded criticism, by ensuring that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts.
- To take a proactive approach to media relations by planning promotion in advance to exploit every opportunity to the fullest.

Who are the media?

Below are the media we target.

Local media we target

Evesham Journal
Evesham Observer
Droitwich Advertiser
Droitwich Standard
Worcester News
Worcester Standard
Worcestershire Gazette
BBC Hereford and Worcester
Touch FM
Wyvern FM
About my area (website)

Regional

Gloucestershire Echo
Birmingham Post
Birmingham Mail
Stratford Radio and press

Local Government

24dash.com
LGA
LGN Early Riser
Local Government Chronicle - LGC
Municipal Journal – MJ

Getting organised

Where possible try to get up and coming promotional opportunities into service plans – this information then goes into the annual forward communications planner – which helps us to get more organised in promoting your services.

Media releases

Media releases are a quick and free way to get your key messages across to residents.

- Identified your story – ideally two week's before the event or decision
- Advise Communications Manager or Communications Officer
- Write down the who, what, where, when and why
- Identify an officer or a member to provide a quote
- Identify an officer to provide further information on the story
- Send all details to Communications Manager or Communications Officer
- Approve final version and quote if necessary
- Media release will then be issued

Giving interviews to unsolicited calls

- On the whole all media enquiries should come through Strategy and Communications, so they will undergo the process listed below – however – if you find yourself with an unsolicited call from the media – follow the guidelines below.
- Never provide comments or interviews off the cuff. Always give yourself time before answering any questions.
- Find out as much as you can in advance – who have they had comments from already, what is the angle of the story, what exactly do they want to find out?
- Are you the right person to give a comment? Comments and interviews are usually restricted to managers who've been on media training. If in doubt check with your line manager or Communications Manager.
- Advise Communications Manager of any unsolicited calls as soon as reasonably possible.
- Before you provide an interview have a clear idea of your key message.
- Never talk 'off the record' – always assume what you say to a journalist has the potential to be printed.
- Maintain political impartiality and integrity at all times.

Radio

For radio interviews talk to Communications Manager

Television

Television interviews and filming opportunities tend to be a rarity. If however, they do arise get in touch with the Communications Manager ASAP.