



**Committee and Date**

**Communities Overview  
Committee**

**24 February 2020**

**Item**

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**Public**

**Working with Shropshire communities: Communicating with Shropshire people**

**Responsible Officer**

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**1.0 Summary**

1.1 This report outlines the different ways that Shropshire Council communicates with people in Shropshire. It also discusses different models for organising communications in a large, customer-facing organisation such as Shropshire Council.

**2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 Members should:

- read this report
- prepare any questions they may have with regard to communications
- request further information and an update on progress in using the digital transformation programme to enhance customer communications and
- consider how the council might develop its communications strategy further.

**3.0 Opportunities and risks**

3.1 As Shropshire Council is a highly customer-facing organisation, how we communicate with people is critical to the effectiveness of our work.

3.2 The rapid developments in information technology provide considerable opportunities to provide timely, responsive, personalised communications with people in Shropshire.

3.3 A single strategy for communications could help to ensure that people in Shropshire receive relevant information about services, as well as supporting closer working between services to enable joined-up services for people who need them.

**4.0 Financial assessment**

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications to making recommendations to services. However there may be financial implications to any recommended courses of action that Shropshire Council agrees to put into place. These implications should be considered by Cabinet or Council when agreeing any course of action.

## **5.0 Report**

- 5.1 As a customer-facing organisation, Shropshire Council communicates with people in Shropshire in a number of ways.

## **6.0 Social Media**

- 6.1 Shropshire Council currently has 98 approved social media accounts across the council at this time, covering Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn (limited use). We also have one-off accounts with Nextdoor (representing the council on the platform, but the account is not in active use), Glassdoor (used by HR), and Flickr (used by Communications).

Over three months (1 November 2019 to 1 February 2020), the main council Facebook and Twitter accounts put out 918 posts, equating to just over one post per hour. These are a mixture of campaign messages and alerts, cross-promotion of other accounts. The accounts had 4,538 interactions with customers over this period, covering customers either commenting on these posts or directly contacting us through the accounts.

The main council website is largely maintained by a central team (Digital Services), with content updated by request from service areas. This allows for a tighter control over the writing style and “voice” of the content, using Plain English instead of potentially confusing terminology.

News is a mixture of service-specific content and the broader council news that is presented on the separate Newsroom website, with the latter managed by the Communications team. Both news feeds are presented on the homepage of the website and drive the public to the relevant section of the website or Newsroom as appropriate. Work is underway to consolidate this further by having all news presented via the main Newsroom website, and fed back into the council website on the relevant services.

Some services have their own website, usually for more commercial and marketing needs, such as Shrewsbury museums, Theatre Severn, Shropshire Fostering, Shropshire’s Great Outdoors amongst others. These are expected to follow our branding requirements (i.e. a council logo must be clearly visible) and clearly state they are operating within Shropshire Council.

Services also have their own social media in order for them to provide more targeted messages and engagement for their particular target audiences. The avatars for these accounts follow a set design scheme with the council logo visible above their own service logo.

## **7.0 Customer services**

7.1 The Customer Service function includes the Customer Service contact centre (CSC), our face to face offices in our largest market towns and the Welfare Support/Homelessness contact team which between them handle around 280,000 contacts via phone, e mail, webchat and in person. Customer Services also handle the corporate social media accounts through Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook has 12,500 followers; Twitter has 22500 followers however the ripple effect of posting messages on can reach a far greater audience particularly with good news stories. The competition to name Shropshire's gritting lorries ended up reaching millions of people.

There are two other contact centres in the council, in Revenues and Benefits and Public Protection, these services handle their own phone, e mail or webchat contacts but their in-person customer contact is handled by Customer Services through our offices in the community.

The extent to which Customer Services fulfil the customer's need at first contact varies according to the service that the customer needs. As a result, the customer's experience also varies.

For example, concessionary travel applications are devolved entirely to Customer Services and processes for the customer have simplified to the extent that 70% of renewals for older people happen automatically, without application. Likewise, digital transformation has enabled Customer Services staff to directly access Veolia's IT systems to fulfil waste service requests with no further action required.

In contrast, there are still some services that retain responsibility for initial contact meaning customers need to contact them directly and separately from other needs they may have.

There is real opportunity for more collaborative working between services to shape the customer's experience of contacting the council. Key to this is the willingness of services to review their work processes and move more of their functions and resource into front door operations. A good example is the model developing between the Welfare Support Team and Housing Options homelessness team which is seeing increased front-end triage resulting in more being done at initial contact across both services, making our welfare fund part of the solution but most importantly, sees staff not just co-located but working together cross-service both with information taking and sharing and with access to systems for joint solutions.

Such developments are key to making things easier for our customers and are part of the end-to-end service redesign of the Customer Experience Project.

The project aim is to make the customer transaction easier and do more for them in that one contact, however that is made.

Early achievements for this project include a very smooth transition onto the new single contact platform for customer enquiries that brings together contact through telephone, e mail and webchat. This platform is used by all three of our contact centres which eases transfer between these services a little.

The project is also handling the design and implementation of the new Dynamics Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which handles front-end customer information for the CSC. This is the way into services that gathers the information needed, pushing it through to back office systems. Implementation of this front-end system is a key step to being able to redesign and simplify the end-to-end processes that services use, all of which have developed in isolation, thereby improving the experience for the customer and maximising what is achieved through that contact however made.

The project is currently concentrating on transfer of services from the old CRM system onto the new so that the old system can be retired as soon as possible to release savings. Some redesign has resulted naturally along the way, most noticeably with Waste and Highways services and for the customer, the development of the MyShropshire portal which will build into a simpler and more interactive way for residents to do business with us.

The ideal remains for the customer to have to make only one contact, give information only once (with permission to share information across services) in order to either provide for those needs there and then or at the very least, trigger all the actions required to fulfil them.

System redesign, working hand in hand with Business Analysis, could design the customer facing end for collaborating “clusters” of similar services and provisions so that information and customer needs are viewed across those services and not singly within our traditional work “silos”. For the customer, more is dealt with in one go, for the council, lines between traditional services are blurred, and provision concentrates instead on what the customer needs, with teams using one another’s systems for joint solutions across services and not simply within their own. The prototypes of these already exist in both our First Point of Contact for Adult’s Services and the Welfare/Homelessness team.

The ability to develop and configure the new Dynamics CRM using our own in-house developers gives us flexibility to develop what we need as well as respond and change and involve our customers as stakeholders in future development.

The same cross-service provision can be mirrored through face to face access to services in our communities, where working together as much as possible from one place means customers have just one place to access as well as giving the Council the opportunity to introduce new technology that would cost-effectively

broaden the offer of such venues. This would include using innovative technology for example using video link technology allowing smaller, centrally located teams to still have face to face contact with their customers in the community. For this reason, and as the trusted front door into most Council services, Customer Service Points are now starting to co-locate with clusters of other provisions including adult services Let's Talk Local meetings and Early Help Hubs, Mental Health social work drop in sessions and some NHS health teams. Examples of this are in Market Drayton's Raven House and shortly at Old Street in Ludlow.

## **8.0 Digital Transformation**

8.1 Shropshire Council's digital transformation programme provides opportunities to automate personalised customer service messages, particularly with regard to

- MyShropshire
- Highways incident reporting
- Street scene and waste
- Complaints

8.2 At a meeting of the Place Overview Committee in November 2018, officers provided examples of how this technology could be used, for example providing updates to customers who had reported potholes, or broadcasting messages to customers living near to planned roadworks or street works.

## **9.0 News and campaigns**

9.1 Shropshire Council's communications team issue daily press releases on the Shropshire Council Newsroom.

Press releases are then picked up by media organisations and residents and organisations that sign up to our Newsroom. News stories are also automatically tweeted out to over 22.5k followers via the Council's Twitter account. We encourage communities to sign up to the Newsroom at

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSHROPSHIRE/subscriber/new>

We also encourage all councillors and staff to adhere to the council's Media Protocol

### **Planning News output**

There are various approaches to why and when we issue news. Press releases are issued as part of a planned campaign we're promoting for a particular service, event or project.

We also issue press releases in response to council decisions (eg Cabinet, scrutiny, change in service etc).

Press releases are also issued in response to emergency situations.

### **Disseminating news to town and parish councils**

News stories are often sent to SALC to distribute to Town and Parish Councils.

We have also encouraged town and parish councils (via Shropshire Association of Local Council (SALC) to sign up to the Shropshire Council Newsroom. This enables them to get up to date news on what's happening across the council so they can cascade to their local communities.

There are further plans to develop a campaign to encourage more communities to sign up to the council's Newsroom.

### **Using communications in campaigns**

We try to adopt a proactive 'campaign-led' approach. This is where we work with the service areas to identify their key objectives, outcomes and communication needs (both current and long term), and ensure that these all link back to the council's vision and priorities.

From this, we produce communication plans in collaboration with our services, which detail how we will effectively communicate campaigns and projects.

Communication officers also attend DMTs to receive regular updates from management and discuss any communication requirements.

### ***How does the communications team and the customer service centre work together to ensure consistency of message?***

The communications team have a close working relationship with customer services and the digital services team. This joined up approach offers a more holistic approach to how we communicate to our communities.

All the teams liaise daily with regards to campaigns, reactive communications and, if need be, will provide copies of our campaign plans and communication toolkits, which will include key messages and timings.

Weekly meetings are held with team managers to discuss current projects/campaigns and issues that need addressing.

### **What we do**

Shropshire's communications team provide help and advice on:

#### **Internal communications**

- Prepare content for staff newsletter, councillors bulletins, all-staff emails, Intranet, computer lock screens and TV screens

#### **Campaign planning**

- Creating communications and marketing strategies and plans (including social media campaigns)

- Campaign evaluation
- Social marketing and insight

### **Media and PR**

- PR advice and support
- Preparing press releases and press packs
- Organising media briefings
- Responding to media enquiries
- Media training
- Media monitoring
- Emergency/crisis communications
- Editorial articles for newsletters, magazines, journals and specialist publications

### **Branding and marketing**

- Brand development
- Development/creation of print and digital material which is on brand
- Creation of organisational annual reports and strategic documents
- Copywriting
- Proof reading

### **Photography/videography**

- Event photography and videos
- Live video feeds
- Documentary video and photography
- Promotional and editorial photography
- Motion graphics and animation

### **Our approach**

We need to ensure the way we communicate with the people and organisations we come in to contact with is effective, and that all communications activity we do supports the delivery of the council's vision and Corporate Plan, as well as the needs of our local communities.

To help us achieve this, we need to consider the following principles

- One Organisation, **One Voice**

We have a clear and consistent brand and tone across the council so we communicate in **one** voice as **one** organisation.

- Communicating our **Vision**

Internal and external stakeholders understand and believe in our vision and how we are going to achieve it.

- Communications is **Everyone's** responsibility

Staff understand that we **ALL** have a responsibility for communications, and that we have the right tools to deliver them.

- Communication is **Two-Way**

We need to demonstrate we are a 'listening' and 'responsive' council, where our communications presents opportunities for conversation and engagement.

- Our communications are **Fit for the Future**

Our communications should continually adapt to new challenges and technologies. We should also consider cost effectiveness and ensure that our communications practices are in line with the council's Climate Change Strategy.

### **Code of practice**

Like all councils we must adhere to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011. It states that publicity, local authorities should:

- be lawful
- be cost-effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

You can read the full Code here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recommended-code-of-practice-for-local-authority-publicity>

### **Intelligence, data and technology**

As a council, we gather data about our customers every day. And the digital transformation programme has now given us the tools to be able to decipher this into usable, tangible and evidence based information. Using tools like Power BI, we can channel this information to develop and deliver proactive outcome- based campaigns that provide a real difference and contribute to the successful delivery of the Corporate Plan and other key high-level strategies.

We now have access to a great range of technology solutions that enable us to change how we use data to inform and drive our communications. For example:

- Microsoft packages
- The new CRM system



- Integrated Business Solutions
- Single point of entry for the customer

Access to this vast intelligence, aligned with the technology we now possess can help us run campaign that are based on local trends. We can more highly refine them, target them better and pre-empt customer engagement to help and encourage our customers to self-serve, achieve channel shift and become a digital council.

### **Communication channels**

Below is an example existing communications channels and networks we use This isn't an exhaustive list, as we always continue to review and look at more effective channels. We understand that staff know their customers best, and we encourage staff who have an alternative and effective way to reach communities to let us know.

#### **Internal**

- Staff newsletter
- Intranet
- Yammer
- Microsoft Teams
- Microsoft Stream
- All-staff emails
- Lock screens
- TV screens in Shirehall and other council buildings
- Councillors bulletins
- Council buildings

#### **External**

- Shropshire Council Newsroom
- Local, regional and national media, including specialist publications.
- Shropshire Council website
- Branding all of the services we deliver as Shropshire Council
- Printed material – such as posters, leaflets, brochures, livery etc
- Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn
- MyShropshire
- Partners – we have a comprehensive list of partners and stakeholders that we cascade information to share via their comms channels and networks. This helps us reach those who otherwise may not come into contact with the council. Partners include, but are not limited to:-
  - Town councils and parish councils
  - Voluntary and community sector
  - NHS, police, ambulance service, fire service
  - Business communities

- Housing associations
- Interfaith/ethnic groups
- Community and hyper-local groups

## **10.0 Print, design and post**

**10.1** BluPrint is Shropshire Councils internal print & design and post team that are key enablers for the production of digital and physical marketing and promotional materials as well as documentation and information for Shropshire Council events, promotions, awareness campaigns and initiatives. The team are there to support Shropshire Council service areas and partners with the creation and production of physical products. These include posters, leaflets, signage, branding, bespoke personalised materials, banners and display exhibition stands for a number of activities and events.

BluPrint are able to co-ordinate cross-promotional literature to maximise effectiveness and efficiency in terms of both budgets constraints, methods for delivery and reach i.e. a posted physical item, or an emailed document, which allows the Council to communicate with residents in their preferred format.

A key service that BluPrint provide is the support to Revenue & Benefits. For example the annual statement is sent to over 150,000 households and businesses in Shropshire. It is processed from raw data and BluPrint create multi-channel (postal and electronic) output so this is a mix of print and post bespoke bills, as well as emailed bills with encrypted attachments only accessible by the intended recipient. Part of this allows us the opportunity to promote other services and initiatives, for example the Police and Crime Commissioner include a leaflet. This year we have also included a section to promote the Digital Skills for Shropshire initiative.

Another example is Right Home Right Place where BluPrint created the document and mailout to residents in specific areas of housing development. The service supported the engagement of residents by producing various marketing formats including competitions, posters and questionnaires for use within the communities. This has proven to be very successful in its levels of engagement and a notable outcome was a prize giving ceremony for a community Bake off event, again where BluPrint provided branded marketing materials.

## **11.0 Communicating with town and parish councils and councillors**

**11.1** Shropshire Council's principal vehicle for communicating with town and parish councils is Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC), a not for profit membership organisation representing, training, informing and advising parish and town councils in both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin local authority areas.

SALC manages a database of parish and town clerk contact details for all of the 153 town and parish councils in Shropshire and the 27 councils in Telford & Wrekin. In addition there are 9 Parish Meetings in Shropshire and 2 Parish

Meetings in Telford & Wrekin. This database forms the primary means by which Shropshire Council communicates with the town and parish councils within its local authority area.

Its main means of communicating are:

- A weekly newsletter to all councils. This contains a mixture of national and local news pertinent to councils. The newsletter is kept short and is edited heavily to ensure that the news is directly relevant to councils and councillors. Topics include pay negotiations, emergency planning, finance settlements plus community news.
- Executive and area committee meetings. These are mainly information meetings, and are a useful opportunity for Shropshire Council officers to brief town and parish councils on issues such as highways and planning pertinent to their area. These meetings are also a useful opportunity to town and parish councils to express concerns directly to senior officers from the council. These committees also occasionally carry out task and finish group work to co-ordinate joint work, such as tree planting or maintaining public rights of ways in a local area.
- Ongoing review of the Shropshire Council Charter for town and parish councils.

SALC maintains good working relations with officers and elected members of Shropshire Council, which helps with enabling direct contact between officers, Shropshire Council elected members, and town and parish councils. This has become more important following the reduction in financial and staff support for local joint committees.

<p><b>List of background papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b></p> <p>None</p>
<p><b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</b></p> <p>All</p>
<p><b>Local member</b></p> <p>All</p>
<p><b>Appendices</b></p> <p>None</p>