

## For publication

### External Communications

---

Meeting:	Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee
Date:	26 November, 2020
Cabinet portfolio:	Deputy Leader
Report by:	Assistant Director, Policy and Communications

---

### For publication

---

<b>Purpose of reviewing the topic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>To review the effectiveness of the Council's external communications, as part of its Communications and Engagement Strategy and how this contributes to the Council Plan priority: 'Providing value for money services' and Council Plan aim: 'Using technology, intelligence and customer feedback to have better conversations and engagement with our customers'.</li></ul>
<b>Objectives of the review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>To review the effectiveness of the Council's external communications, particularly within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to provide opportunity for Scrutiny Members to contribute their and their constituents' experience of this.</li></ul>
<b>Key Issues for review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>How to get messages out to those who don't use technology.</li><li>How best to communicate with young people who may use other apps more than Facebook or</li></ul>

	<p>Twitter.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How successful Covid-19 communications were in ensuring important messages got across and 'fake' news was addressed.</li></ul>
--	--

## 1.0 **Background**

- 1.1 The World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of Covid-19 to be a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020 and on 11 March 2020 declared Covid-19 a global pandemic.
- 1.2 The Covid-19 pandemic brought fast moving and unprecedented challenges to communities and organisations. Chesterfield Borough Council had to quickly reprioritise to ensure core services could be delivered, while supporting additional emergency planning, community response and economic measures.
- 1.3 Staff across the Council were re-deployed to support key Covid-19 response activities including ensuring key services, such as the crematorium, could be maintained, but also to support new areas of work including business grant allocations, food and medicine deliveries, supporting testing facilities, town centre ambassadors and supporting the community and voluntary sector volunteering programmes.
- 1.4 Effective external and internal communications were paramount to the Council's Covid-19 pandemic response work. We also had a major role to play in supporting national Government, Derbyshire Local Resilience Forum, partner agency and community and voluntary sector key messaging.

## 2.0 **Current position and key milestones – Covid -19 Communications**

### 2.1 **Warning and informing**

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council's Communications and Marketing team have engaged effectively with the Derbyshire Local Resilience Forum warning and informing group. We co-developed:

- A safe space where partners could raise communication concerns and challenges. We then work together to mitigate and find new opportunities;
- The bolstering of our joint arrangements as trusted community leaders and information providers;
- Multi-agency, multi-platform campaigns;
- Joint media releases, newsletters, leaflets, social media assets, internal communication mechanisms;
- Plans to make the best use of national level campaign assets e.g. Public Health England messaging;
- Local solutions for national level key messaging – localising and using within style and brand guidelines;
- One voice, where it really counts for example in Cabinet Office Communications meetings.

### 2.2 **Pro-active media and public engagement and reactive activity**

This includes Press releases, website, social media channels, media statements and interviews etc. This is standard day to day activity for any Communications team but during a crisis communications period a strong and clear emergency media protocol is required. This included a triage service to assign resource to priority activity. Key activities included:

- Covid-19 Press release (was daily at the start of the pandemic but has reduced as messaging has become more stable). This gives key information about changes to services or new developments, where we are prioritising resources such as community response and business grants, resources such as online exercise classes. It was also a platform for key campaign messages.
- The protocol was welcomed by media outlets as they knew they would receive good quality, informative content from the Council at a certain time – this has led to extensive social media coverage, print media coverage and also a large number of broadcast interviews.
- Our Key social media messaging is managed effectively alongside warning and informing messaging. We used a mixture of high quality images, infographics, videos, key messages, hashtags #CouncilsCan and working with media packs developed at a national, regional and Derbyshire level to support broader communication aims.
- Our website is also a key information source for our communities for information and support. We developed the Covid-19 hub button on the website frontpage so that it was easy to navigate to the hub. A variety of icons were used to further direct users to different subjects, support and services.

### 2.3 **Internal communications**

The Communications and Marketing team work with services across the council to ensure staff have access to news, policy and procedure changes, 'how to' guides, learning opportunities and support arrangements such as the employee assistance scheme. We quickly introduced weekly management briefings for cascading key messages through one to one and team meetings.

Aspire content has also been key to sharing key information. Popular content includes the Covid-19 staff hub, videos from the Chief Executive and thank you letters from the Leader and the Mayor. We also organise blogs, vlogs and 'a day in the life of' content focusing on staff members and teams – some good examples are staff re-deployed to the Crematorium, our videos from staff delivering prescriptions, Careline staff and more information about the teams that keep everything running in the backgrounds – HR, ICT, Democratic services. This content has really helped to showcase the resilience, flexibility and adaptability of our staff.

Our weekly members e-bulletin provides key information and updates for all our elected members. This is supplemented by member e-mails and communication with group leads.

### **3.0 Scrutiny question - What do we do to reach people who don't have access to technology?**

3.1 The use of digital communication technology has transformed the way we communicate with our residents, members and staff. It presents ever-evolving opportunities for targeted, creative, engaging, timely and cost-effective communications in support of our corporate priorities.

3.2 Internet usage at home – and therefore access to digital channels – is increasing. Last year's Internet access: households and individuals survey of Great Britain (Office of National Statistics) showed that 87% of adults use the internet daily or almost every day. This varies by age group for example 93% of those aged 45 to 54 use the internet daily compared to 83% aged 55 to 64 and 60% aged 65 and over. The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have increased take up even further with many people using social media platforms and virtual meeting software to engage with friends and family.

3.3 However, it is recognised that digital exclusion / disengagement must be acknowledged as an important factor when selecting how best to reach our target audiences and as such, several alternatives are used:

#### Your Chesterfield

Your Chesterfield is a 32-page printed publication which is delivered to all homes in the borough, four times a year. It is a key communication channel to consistently reach residents who do not have access to the internet or choose not to / are unaware of how to engage with the council online.

It features a range of council news and information in support of key corporate priorities and projects. It also incorporates news and information for council tenants.

It should be noted that under the Code on Recommended Practice for Local Government Publicity, council residents' magazines must not be produced more frequently than four times a year.

The next edition of Your Chesterfield will include a feature encouraging people to connect and engage with us online (through My Chesterfield, the website and social media channels) – to raise awareness amongst those who can, but choose not to / aren't aware of how they can access our digital channels.

#### Local print and broadcast media – editorial

The council's communications and marketing team maintain a strong relationship with the local and regional media, as a key channel used by local residents and businesses. This includes grassroots and community printed publications such as Twist and Reflections, and local radio / TV news stations.

Regular press releases are issued, providing updates on council news and projects. Where appropriate, Cabinet Portfolio holders also take part in broadcast media interviews on key council issues. In particular, the media is a key channel for communicating with residents and businesses in emergency situations.

### Annual Council Tax and Business Rates bills

There is the opportunity to include additional printed information within the annual bills which go to all households and businesses in the borough. In 2021, printed material promoting the new My Chesterfield digital hub is planned for inclusion in this mail out – to ultimately support and promote digital inclusion and engagement.

### Posters / flyers / banners etc

The use of posters, banners, flyers and other offline promotional items are considered when planning every communications and marketing campaign – and these are regularly used. These are displayed in a variety of council venues and outdoor spaces, and community / partner buildings, dependant on the target audience. Value for money, environment impact and product 'shelf-life' are also taken into account when considering the use of printed materials.

### Outdoor channels

Signage on council vehicles is used to promote key campaign messages, e.g. 'Hands. Face. Space' message panels are currently being used on some Streetscene vehicles. Other outdoor channels are considered and used in support of key campaigns, e.g. the digital screen on Vicar Lane.

## Paid-for advertising – print / broadcast

The use of newspaper, magazine and radio advertising is considered when planning key campaigns and is used where deemed effective and resources allow.

## Partner printed publications

Council news items are shared with partner organisations for use in their internal and external printed publications, where available and relevant.

### 4.0 **Scrutiny question - How do we communicate with young people using modern apps?**

4.1 The council currently has a range of corporate and satellite accounts (e.g. leisure centres / museum) across a range of social media platforms:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Instagram
- LinkedIn

4.2 These are effective channels which reach and engage adults who directly use council services. In turn this is also an opportunity to indirectly influence younger people in the borough, i.e. the primary audience's children, grandchildren, pupils and students with whom they can share information and encourage behaviour change based on the messages and campaigns they see. However, it is acknowledged that the audience demographic differs across social media platforms, and there are many other new and emerging social media channels favoured by a younger audience (18 and under) such

as TikTok, Snapchat, Reddit / sub-Reddit and Kik (plus the extended use of Instagram Stories).

- 4.3 The communications and marketing team continually monitors the evolving social media landscape for new opportunities and trends. In particular, the use of Instagram Stories, TikTok and Reddit by other local authorities is currently being researched.
- 4.4 The council's social media policy is due to be revised and the communications and marketing team is using this as an opportunity to carry out a social media audit and revisit the social media policy to ensure its use remains relevant and effective. All new platforms will be considered in terms of their effectiveness to reach the intended audience, time and resource implications, together with the safety / data privacy credentials associated with some of the lesser-known and emerging channels.
- 4.5 Where specific campaigns have a younger target audience (e.g. around skills and employability, community safety and behaviour change campaigns where young people are increasingly 'thought leaders' such as climate change) new and innovative ways to reach them by new and emerging apps will be considered. Bespoke digital channels have also been developed to target young people on specific campaigns, e.g. the MyFuture platform.
- 4.6 Paid-for social media advertising is also considered and used where appropriate, which allows for content to be targeted at specific age groups.
- 5.0 **Scrutiny question - What have we done to tackle fake news and misinformation during the pandemic?**
- 5.1 Fake news and misinformation are particularly prevalent on social media platforms and in hyperlocal digital communities,

e.g. Next Door, Facebook. Information is highly visible and quickly disseminated to large groups of people.

- 5.2 Managing this on official council platforms is a fine balance – avoiding unnecessary censorship while ensuring council platforms cannot be used as a platform to spread misinformation. Frequently social media communities ‘self-regulate’ and individuals challenge ‘fake’ news directly and publicly on the platform, which can have a powerful counter effect.
- 5.3 All comments on council social media platforms are assessed in the context of the national Covid-19 policy / legal framework:
- Any carrying what is deemed to be misinformation are hidden from public view;
  - Where a direct question is asked or challenge is posed, the council seeks to answer this with accurate information or signposting links;
  - Where comments have offensive, explicit or defamatory content the comment is deleted, and the user may be blocked;
  - If a ‘fake’ account or individual purported to be the council or a council official online, this would be challenged, blocked and reported.
- 5.4 In the forthcoming review of the council’s social media policy, the Government Communication Service (GCS) RESIST Counter Disinformation Toolkit will be considered.

## 6.0 **Barriers/obstacles**

- 6.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has put a strain on many council services including the Communications and Marketing team. Although staff are trained in emergency communications the Covid-19 pandemic has brought unique challenges including

the longevity of the emergency communication requirement, the impact across all areas of council activity, the complexity of messaging and the changes to guidance at short notice.

## 7.0 **Conclusion**

7.1 Despite the significant challenges so far in 2020/21 related to the Covid-19 pandemic, Chesterfield Borough Council's Communications and Marketing team have utilised an agile and flexible approach to maintain and enhance our communication channels. This has maintained not only vital communications with our residents about accessing our services, but also how to access the range of support available for residents and businesses which are so vital during this period. The council's website and social media accounts continue to be a well-used and trusted information source for our communities and we have effectively engaged with media outlets in our community and place leadership role.

## 8.0 **Suggested scrutiny activity**

8.1 Engagement with scrutiny during the development of the revised social media policy for the council.

### **Document information**

<b>Report author</b>	<b>Contact number/email</b>
<b>Donna Reddish - Assistant Director Policy and Communications</b>	<a href="mailto:Donna.reddish@chesterfield.gov.uk">Donna.reddish@chesterfield.gov.uk</a>
<b>Background documents</b>	
These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when the report was prepared.	
None	

<b>Appendices to the report</b>
---------------------------------

None
------