

**Notes from scrutiny working group visit to Derbyshire County Council
Friday 15 November 2012 – visit by Councillor Howard Borrell and John
Fern, communications and marketing manager.**

Their set up

This is under review but they currently have:

- A director of communications
- A director designate of communications (previously known as assistant director)
- Two communications managers
- Eight senior communications officers
- Eight assistant communications officers
- Seven strong website team
- Call centre is also managed by their department

Digital first

The council has a digital first approach to communications. The expectation is that digital (eg website, social media, email campaigns) will be the primary method of communicating messages to identified audiences.

This doesn't mean that paper based communication is not used but it is a way of changing the mindset of staff requesting communications support so that instead of saying 'they want a leaflet or a poster' or 'they want a press release' they are thinking about the whole communications mix (ie the communication tools available). It is also enabling the council to implement its channel shift strategy, moving people to cheaper and easier ways of contacting the council electronically rather than in person, by phone or by post.

Intranet

They are currently looking to replace their intranet – called Dnet - as the content management system is an old one. Currently out to tender.

Internet

Their internet is hosted internally and currently uses the Tridion content management system.

They have seven members of staff in the web team who manage 16 websites, including the main www.derbyshire.gov.uk and their intranet (DNet). One of the team is a GIS (geographic information system) officer and the rest are developers/content editors.

They also host various partnership websites eg Derbyshire Sport, Safer Derbyshire, although many are fairly static sites (ie need little updating).

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They view it as critical from a reputation management point of view that they have direct control over the content of these websites.

The web team is currently working on a single website for young people to replace the various sites for them at the moment eg b_line, Connexions etc.

In addition to the main web team of seven people the news desk team (see media relations section) play a key role in approving content written by different authors.

There are 100 people who use the content management systems (CMS) on these various sites, although that includes all the communications team so the figure in other teams is really less than 80 people.

These 80 people in departments are trained to use the CMS as part of their job. The copy they write is then checked centrally to ensure spelling, grammar etc is right and that it is the right style and length for websites and takes into account search engine optimisation (ie making sure the headline and copy have the right terms in them to get picked up by search engines like Google).

Around 30% of their web traffic currently comes from mobiles and that figure is growing fast. So they recently moved to responsive design so that their website will automatically resize according to the device you are on (eg laptop, tablet, mobile phone).

They don't use mobile apps due to the cost and work involved. They concentrate on responsive design as everyone benefits from that and it means you only have to manage one site instead of several.

Their web developers spend much of their time concentrating on producing online forms that enable data to be collected and integrated straight into back office computer systems. This means data doesn't have to be manually input again after the user has done it eg if a parent updates information about their child that automatically changes the schools database. In the past that would have been a huge admin job. The same applies to trading standards databases, child minder databases, reporting potholes etc.

It saves the council time and money and is more convenient for the customer.

No computer software or hardware can be bought in the council without the manager of the web team discussing it with the IT team and approving it. This ensures that anything bought is a corporate system that will work with the website and not create integration problems or produce something that is bad for the customer.

Social media

They have just moved much of the day-to-day management of social media from the communications service to their call centre.

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The communications team still post pro-active communications messages to social media but the call centre deal with most of the responses and general questions as these are nearly always customer service related and that trend will continue to grow in the future.

Setting this up requires close teamwork between the two departments as the social media account still has to speak with 'one voice' and in one style. You also need to avoid posting the same things or posting different things but at the same time.

They have about 40 social media sites covering a range of topic areas with most managed day-to-day by frontline staff BUT communications has to:

- 1) agree to it being set up.
- 2) Give them advice on how to do it and ensure they are aware of the risks (IT, legal and reputational) and also show them how to write in the right style
- 3) Communications has access to all the accounts so they can take control if someone is doing something wrong or there is an emergency situation.

They monitor all the accounts using a software programme called Crowd Control and this has proved a very good investment.

Email/website led communication

They have 2,500 people signed up to receive updates though the Gov delivery email service.

800 people have signed up to receive their cabinet papers.

800 people have signed up to receive details of their consultations each time a new one is launched or results are announced.

3,000 people are signed up to receive school closures information in bad weather.

Video

An area they are looking to really expand because video really works in getting communication messages across in a simple and accessible way.

YouTube is the second biggest search engine in the world and younger people in particular are big users of video content.

They are currently focusing on doing short video clips of 10 to 30 seconds. Sometimes the clips are used to explain the background to something eg the video might explain the level of cuts the council is facing so that the accompanying information about what is being cut is set in context.

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They shoot the video themselves. They have bought a proper video camera but also use Flip cameras for shorter clips.

Editing is what takes the time with video and is labour intensive. But the results are worth it.

The other major issue is having the IT storage space needed to store the edited and unedited video footage. They are very large files and you can need multiple files in existence during the editing process.

Media relations

They have a news desk staffed by four people a day to manage media calls - two senior communications officers and two assistant communications officers.

One of the senior communications officers manages the team with all media calls going to one single number instead of individual phone lines.

This team also plan the pro active news release distribution for the week, carry out some basic content management of the website and put their press releases online.

Campaigns

They have pots of money funded by departments to run publicity campaigns on key corporate issues. They pick five key issues and run the campaign using research into the issue and the communication challenges eg Yuk campaign to stop dog mess.

Print approval

Anyone who wants to produce any printed material has to produce a short business case to the communications team on why they need it and what corporate objective it will help deliver.

Unless the business case stacks up they aren't allowed to go ahead with it. This enables them to police the digital first approach to communications (see above) and importantly also stops unnecessary expenditure on printed materials that doesn't meet a communication objective but is being done for vanity publishing (ie someone thinks it makes them/their team look good but it actually doesn't meet any customer requirements).

Evaluation

They are putting more effort and time into evaluation as it is more critical than ever in these tough financial times.

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They use the Government Communication Network document *Evaluating Government Communications Activity* as the basis of this work.

It can be seen here.

https://gcn.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/GCN-Evaluation-Book_v5a.pdf