

Policy and Finance Committee

Date: 22 February 2021

Title: Communications Update

Purpose of the Report: To provide Committee with a six-monthly update in respect of Town Council Communications.

Contact Officers: Amy Holden, Senior Administration Officer
Sue Perry, Administration Officer (Fixed Term)

Corporate Objective/s	Leighton-Linslade Town Council Five Year Plan: Objective #1: to regularly review how we communicate and seek to embrace new technologies.
Implications:	
Human Resources	None
Operational/Service delivery	None
Procedural/Legal	None
Financial	None

1. RECOMMENDATION

Should Members be minded, the proposal is:

- 1.1 To note the information regarding Town Council communications.**

2. CONTEXT

- 2.1** As a publicly funded body, Leighton-Linslade Town Council has a duty to actively engage with the local community, providing information regarding its activities and proposed future projects, seeking feedback from residents and raising awareness of the Council and its remit within the parish.
- 2.2** Regular community engagement takes place through a variety of platforms including a printed newsletter, email campaigns, public consultation exercises, websites, social media platforms, Apps, market stalls and community events.

- 2.3 In line with the Localism Agenda and e-Government and rapid developments in technology, the Town Council continues to increase its investment in electronic media, using multiple channels to continue to engage as much of the community as possible.
- 2.4 We continue to develop our communications using the LLTC Website, Market Website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Mailchimp, Survey Monkey, YouTube and the LLTC app, to make information accessible to all.
- 2.5 Our ongoing commitment to ensure we still maintain print-based communication channels for those without online access proved all the more important this summer, where printed communications were the key to ensuring vital information was received by every household in the parish.
- 2.6 Over the past year Covid-19 has dominated our communications, both in terms of method and content, and continually revising our process has been critical. Our multi-faceted approach was essential to ensuring communications reached all corners of the community and that clear, strong, aligned messages were sent by the Council, using all available methods, to inform residents during an unprecedented crisis.

3. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- 3.1. During a year of remote home-working we have also continued to develop our internal communications, benefitting hugely from the timely purchase of Microsoft 365 with its cloud-based functionality, including Teams, Sharepoint and OneCloud.
- 3.2. In accordance with the Covid-19 guidance, the majority of the workforce continue to work remotely using a VPN link into the server and Office 365 applications.
- 3.3. Meetings between staff, councillors and external associates continue to rely on online platforms to facilitate remote meetings. We have also recently added three more mobile phones and two laptops to the Council's assets to facilitate remote working.

4. WEBSITE

- 4.1. During Covid-19 our website became one of the most powerful tools we had for communicating with residents and providing up to date information about local support available to them.
- 4.2. Due to changes in Government guidance at different times, there have been a lot of changes in messaging - including the closure of the Market, postponing (and subsequent cancellation) of town events, the closure of

playgrounds and outdoor gyms, closure of our venues and changes to the way TACTIC are delivering their services to the community.

- 4.3. The delivery of our events programme was carried out online, including weekly virtual band concerts, a virtual Proms in the Park, interactive online fundraising events hosted by the Mayor.
- 4.4. Our annual Living History event was replaced with a Living History Shop Trail, with interested parties invited to follow the trail around the town centre to learn the history of some of our oldest buildings and the businesses that now occupy them. This event involved more work for the administration team due to videos being uploaded at the same time each week over a nine-week period.
- 4.5. We worked in partnership with All Saints Church to deliver 2020's Mayor's Christmas Carol Concert virtually and hope to deliver the 2021 Civic Service in the same way.
- 4.6. The new and improved LB Market website is now live and has been well received. Within the last Communications update report it was advised there had been a delay due to limited resources. Therefore, a decision was made to launch the site in two phases, which means there is still some work to be done on the site going forward. The new site was built using the same wire framework as the main site, meaning changes to content and page design will be less time consuming and more varied.
- 4.7. We continue to offer online forms, adapting the original which was created by Aubergine, whilst still maintaining the previous download and paper-form methods as an option. The online form enables applicants to upload supporting documents securely, and in line with GDPR.
- 4.8. We have embraced video more this year with our online events programme and created bespoke pages for engagement, e.g. Remembrance Sunday and the Corona Quilt project.
- 4.9. We continue to develop the informative side of the website, e.g. the Covid-19 Task Force page and our new FAQ page.
- 4.10. Looking ahead, we have ambitions to improve the layout of the home page to better communicate important news stories and messages. More concise monitoring of analytics is also high on the agenda.

5 TOWN COUNCIL APPS

- 5.1. The LLTC app continues to be promoted via About Town and social media, as well as a dedicated panel on the homepage of the main LLTC website. Current downloads are 550 compared with 388 this time last year.

- 5.2 With no events taking place during this period it has had limited content added, although publications are still being added to download.
- 5.3 Adding the Children's Trail to the existing Buzzard Trail app is on the workplan for this year, this will bring together our town trails in one place and hopefully further the reach.
- 5.4 As with the website previously, we are committed to ensure we meet WCAG 2.1 standards for accessibility and work is underway to meet the deadline of 23 June 2021 for this. All phones have assistive technologies which enable accessibility features and App Office apps have built-in features that are friendly with any phone's assistive technology. The App Office is currently upgrading some features to improve accessibility.

6 ELECTRONIC SIGNAGE

- 6.1 Content for all four electronic signs is planned alongside our wider communications messages using our digital content planner and content is communicated in advance on the first page of members' weekly newsletter.
- 6.2 The updated signage software is now in use allowing officers to pre-schedule messages. This allows for a more seamless approach as messages can be built into our content planning and be scheduled in the same way as our other communications. It also means messages can be changed or stopped outside of normal working hours (e.g. messages about Saturday markets or events, which would previously have had to be kept on display until the return to work on Monday).

7 SOCIAL MEDIA

- 7.1 Along with our website, social media continues to be an invaluable tool in communicating vital information. This has become even more evident during the Covid-19 pandemic as we have shared not only information about Town Council services/facilities but wider public health messages.
- 7.2 We have recently outsourced a consultant to undertake a social media audit, to look at our current way of working and highlight areas of improvement, specifically in regard to privacy and data protection of our social media profiles. The report is expected imminently.
- 7.3 Town Council profiles are still monitored daily for messages and comments and we endeavour to respond in a timely way, despite reduced time and resource currently.
- 7.4 Officers continue to use Hootsuite, a scheduling tool, to plan, schedule and send messages to the majority the Council's social media profiles. The platform is now also used to read and respond to messages posted by visitors to the page. This allows for a consistent approach and to ensure nothing is

missed. In the past 6 months 569 posts have been scheduled on Hootsuite across all platforms.

- 7.5 In November 2020 we used the Town Council's main Facebook profile to live-stream coverage of the Act of Remembrance in Leighton Buzzard, whilst the later Act of Remembrance in Linslade was recorded and made available later in the day. This was extremely well received by residents and it is the intention to do the same in 2021.
- 7.6 To allow greater engagement with the Annual Parish Meeting in March 2021, it is proposed to also live-stream this meeting via the Facebook profile, thereby allowing residents who have an interest but who may not wish or be able to actually participate in the meeting, to view it online. We will also be encouraging the submission of questions in advance via the website or social media.

8 ANALYTICS

Websites:

- 8.1 Website analytic reports continue to be sent to us with a breakdown summary from our website provider to see what users of the sites are visiting the site for.
- 8.2 The Keeping it Local Campaign and Shopping competition both proved popular areas on the site over the past six months and retailer resources continue to be downloaded.
- 8.3 One of the biggest draws was the Christmas Festival which had 470 clicks alone in December.
- 8.4 The town centre Wifi Landing page has understandably had fewer hits with lockdowns and reduced shopping provision, however it did see a jump in hits with 197 in December.
- 8.5 Although it was visited less in Autumn we saw clicks on the Covid banner pick up again in December to 14, and the 25 in January. Similarly, visits to the Task Force page increased with 487 in December and 643 in January, proving our website is still very much a go-to for this vital information.

Social Media:

- 8.6 We currently have 16,983 followers across our Facebook profiles, with 4,341 people following the main Town Council Facebook profile. This represents a continued rise.
- 8.7 In the past six months, the number of followers on Instagram (only launched 2018) has significantly grown to 1216 from 770.

- 8.8 Twitter has also seen an increase in followers, although more modestly, from 2210 six months ago to 2317 currently.
- 8.9 Using Hootsuite's and the Insights on our Social Media sites we are able to gather information on how our followers engage with our posts. Some of the most popular posts since the last report (based on interactions with the post) are included at the end of this report.
- 8.10 More in-depth analysis in the future, subject to available resources, will help us understand what areas are of most interest to visitors to the site and assist targeting our campaigns as effectively as possible.

9. DOWNLOADS

- 9.1 There have been 618 downloads of the Buzzard Trails app since its launch (44 in the last three months).
- 9.2 Subscribers to the email editions of About Town Newsletter have increased from 349 to 409. We have also seen an increase in downloads of the magazine per month from the website from 25 to 32 on average.
- 9.3 Other items regularly downloaded from the website are 'Cycle of Meetings', cemetery information, 'fees and charges' documents, Councillor poster, the Children's Trail and Covid Vaccination Centre opening.

10 BRANDING

- 10.1 A branding guideline review is scheduled into the communications workplan as inconsistencies still exist across use of the LLTC brand palette.
- 10.2 There have been improvement projects carried out in branding across all service areas, and now we need to ensure all elements are pulled together and applied to future work across publications, marketing materials and digital graphics.

11.0 INTERNAL PROCESSES

- 11.1 Content planning for the website, social media platforms and publications has been difficult with the ongoing changes in restrictions arising from the pandemic. Communication has had to be much more spontaneous to reflect quickly changing advice and guidance.
- 11.2 However, in the last three months work has been done on various parts of the website with further reviews scheduled, to make improvements in specific areas.

- 11.3 Individual stakeholder meetings are still held remotely for virtual events, however content is currently planned in the week(s) leading up to an event rather than months, as it was previously. This ensures that the event content reflects the situation at the time, given how quickly advice on what can be done outdoors and between households/bubbles has been changing.

12.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 12.1 The Town Council has been able to deliver information, advice, help and support using a multi-channel approach in an unprecedented time, increasing confidence in the Town Council and helping to facilitate an enviable level of community action and spirit throughout the community.
- 12.2 We have been able to quickly adapt in terms of methods of working to maintain delivery of information, entertainment and services.
- 12.3 We have also used our channels to applaud the community response and give recognition to all for every contribution made throughout this strange time.
- 12.4 We are committed to meeting the continued expectation of the public to offer information and engagement across multiple and ever-involving platforms.
- 12.5 We respect that all members of the community are not online and many people face physical barriers accessing public information and therefore maintain our commitment to paper options.
- 12.6 With this in mind, officers continue to work to ensure that Leighton-Linslade Town Council is at the forefront of town communications using all appropriate channels and methods to reach our community as widely as possible.

Social Media examples:

Leighton-Linslade Town Council Official
Published by Hootsuite [?] · 7 January · 🌐

If someone collapsed in front of you, would you be confident about what to do?

The Town Council maintains 4 defibrillators in the Town Centre and in an emergency they quickly, and very clearly, guide you through the steps to take.

Our Town Centre webpage: <https://www.leightonlinslade-tc.gov.uk/town-centre/> has instructions and a short video on how they work. You'll be surprised at how straightforward it is.

Take a quick look.

One minute of your time now, could mean years ... See more



Performance for your post

5,720 People Reached

81 Reactions, comments & shares ⓘ

41 Like	6 On post	35 On shares
1 Love	0 On post	1 On shares
24 Comments	0 On Post	24 On Shares
15 Shares	15 On Post	0 On Shares

322 Post Clicks

17 Photo views	24 Link clicks ⓘ	281 Other Clicks ⓘ
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NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide post **0** Hide all posts

0 Report as spam **0** Unlike Page

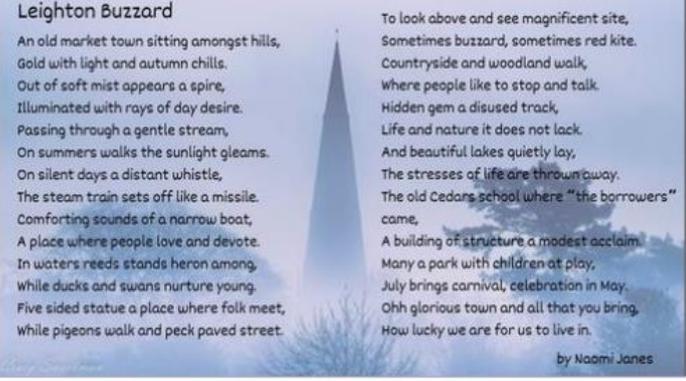
Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Leighton-Linslade Town Council Official
Published by Hootsuite [?] · 18 January · 🌐

In November last year we received this wonderful poem entitled 'Leighton Buzzard', written by local resident Naomi Janes and inspired by the photograph taken by Craig Sweetman.

Now we at LLTC always enjoy hearing what people love about the town, so this has motivated us to relieve our Lockdown blues with a creative writing competition!

Whether you have an aptitude for poetry or prose, or just want to share your thoughts on the town in a personal way, we encourage you to get ... See more



Performance for your post

3,391 People Reached

108 Reactions, comments & shares ⓘ

44 Like	14 On post	30 On shares
24 Love	8 On post	16 On shares
28 Comments	12 On Post	16 On Shares
12 Shares	12 On Post	0 On Shares

155 Post Clicks

15 Photo views	4 Link clicks ⓘ	136 Other Clicks ⓘ
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NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide post **0** Hide all posts

0 Report as spam **0** Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Some screenshots of our website:

