WETHERBY TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

2024-2028

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Mission Statement

Wetherby Town Council will be an efficient council, working to make Wetherby a fair, inclusive and high quality sustainable place to live and work and will strive to maintain and enhance its character as a genuine market town.

Wetherby Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan, adopted by the Council in 2020, not only has a clear vision for the future of the town, but also as a publicly mandated guide for the work of the Town Council.

Since the elections to the Town Council in May 2023, Councillors and staff have worked together to build on the work already instigated and produce a cohesive strategic plan to direct work over the next four years and provide a foundation for the future.

The Local Government Association recommends that strategic communications should deliver:

- Leadership - clarity of purpose and commitment
- A distinctive brand
- A clear vision
- Authenticity to the local area
- A strategic approach to communications
- Communications that are owned by everyone

It also sets out the five rules of reputation, that is, the areas that all councils need to focus on to improve reputation:

- Prove that you provide good value for money
- Always inform and engage residents and staff
- Build trust and confidence in what you do
- Improve key services and show you are doing so
- Focus on changing lives for the better

This Communications Strategy sits alongside the Neighbourhood Plan and Council's Mission Statement and adopted strategy.

What is a communications strategy?

Communications is also about giving people the opportunity to express their views and opinions as well as providing information. Good communications leads to better services, a stronger reputation and positive relationships.

Internal and external communications affect all aspects of our day-to-day business: from committee meetings talking about planning issues; promoting family leisure activities; Councillors advocating on behalf of their residents; and information in the annual report about value for money.

Communications is a shared responsibility of everyone who works at Wetherby Town Council, not just the communications officer.
Everyone has a part to play in supporting and delivering good communications for the organisation.

We need conduct a ‘’SWOT analysis’’ regularly to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the council and work on them accordingly.

The Council wants to keep improving its services and functions, including communications.

All Councillors and employees can play a role in this improvement.

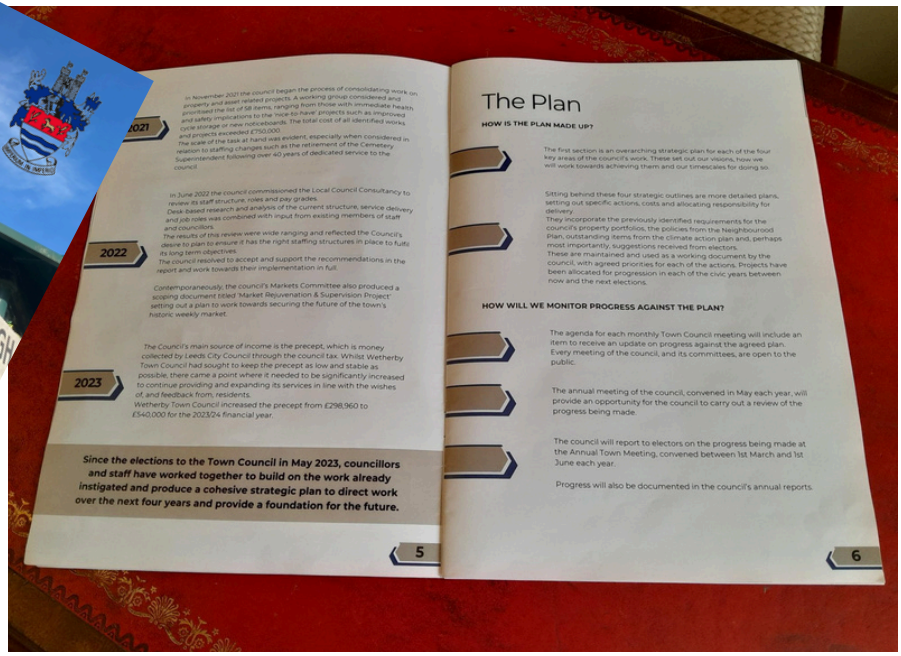
"None of us is as smart as all of us.”
Ken Blanchard

Why we need good communications

There are clear relationships between how well-informed people are about their council's services and how satisfied they are overall.

Good communications leads to more effective services, a better reputation and higher levels of trust.

A good reputation and high levels of trust are especially important when things go wrong. Local residents and businesses need to know that they can trust Wetherby Town Council to deliver good services and provide effective community leadership at all times, within the confines of theirs duties and statutory responsibilities.



"Communication works for those who work at it."
John Powell

Communications Strategy 2024/2028

The Town Council recognises the role of good communications in building positive relationships with the public and with organisations that provide services in the town and as such will continue to seek to improve established channels of communication with:

- Residents
- Businesses
- Our own workforce
- Elected members
- Voluntary sector organisations
- Community groups
- Business networks
- Social networks
- MPs and national government as appropriate ·
- Local media

We intend:

- To promote and represent the community's views and aspirations at local level.
- To engage with voluntary groups in the area with practical support and via grants.
- To encourage the provision of and use of existing community buildings and facilities.

This strategy is based on these principles of good strategic communications, outlining our overall approach to developing communications focused on the Council Strategy, and establishing a framework for pro-active communications work over the coming period.

Our principles sit at the core of our policy making, planning and design for the future and form the basis of planned and proactive corporate communications work focusing on campaign-led activity, stakeholder engagement and internal communications.

Communications

To improve quality and channels of information disseminated to members of the Parish public.
Promoting Wetherby to the town and wider worlds as a place to live, work and visit.

Communications at Wetherby Town Council

Wetherby Town Council believes that good communications is about engaging with our audiences, not just informing them about issues and services.

Communications is also about giving people the opportunity to express their views and opinions as well as providing information.
Good communications leads to better services, a stronger reputation and positive relationships.

Internal and external communications affect all aspects of our day-to-day business.

We take pride in Wetherby's unique and beautiful environment and rural heritage and tackling the climate challenge through new approaches to sustainability.

Tackling climate and ecological emergencies is an important part of our overall Council Strategy.

Working towards a plastic free status, developing and supporting tree planting initiatives, hedgehog corridors, and introducing a community recycling hub for printer cartridges and batteries are some examples of the initiatives we have communicated and engaged our residents with.

Delivering this communication strategy will call for dedicated time from the Communications & Events Officer on an ongoing basis in line with the five year plan, and workloads will be prioritised to support the development and delivery of campaigns, supporting the strategy along with the diary of events which we have planned.

This will only be adjusted in times of crisis when emergency communications are required e.g. global/national/ local emergency response, i.e. death of a member of the Royal family or pandemic.

"Working together for the future of Wetherby."
Wetherby Town Council Communications & Events Officer

Communication channels

Wetherby Town Council engages with residents, Councillors and employees through a wide range of activities, initiatives and channels.

Effective communications relies on a mix of communications channels, including media relations, direct communications (leaflets, publications, digital and social media), events and internal and partner communications (working with employees and stakeholders to ensure everyone gets consistent, timely information).

Media relations:
Active partnerships with print and broadcast media through joint campaigns will help campaigns reach a key demographic (older residents without access to digital communications) and support important locals businesses valued by residents.
A continued presence on the Wetherby local radio station Tempo FM is also important.

Events:
Wetherby Town Council has established a weekly councilor surgery in the Town Hall on Thursdays, to help the local community engage with the council's vision and activities. There are also occasional specific and themed events which target specific audiences and, and these continue to be an effective way to inform and engage our community i.e. Sandringham Park consultation, Market Survey.

Internal and partner communications:
Our employees are our greatest asset, with an important role to play in sharing our story and advocating for the Council. We will ensure employees get the information they need to share our campaigns with friends, families and neighbours in their communities so they can act as a network of communicators across the county.

Direct communications:
Councils increasingly use a range of communications tools and channels to talk directly to their audiences. These include social and digital media channels (website, Facebook & Instagram), and traditional tools like posters and leaflets. Campaigns will use a variety of direct communications channels, targeted to reach the right audiences, with a focus on the most cost-effective communications channels. The development of a quarterly newsletter has also been included in the 5 year plan.

Market research needs to be undertaken on an ongoing basis to better understand our most important audiences, their motivations and communication preferences.

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."
George Bernard Shaw

Communication channels (continued)

We will create an improved way of engaging more intuitively and with a more tailored approach digitally with residents via the design and implementation of our new website, offering an informative and successful customer experience.
The new website will also offer us an opportunity to evaluate and improve our communication and engagement activity and the overall security and stability of the site.

Google Analytics and social media monitoring will gather insight to inform ongoing digital and social strategies to align more closely with audience needs and behaviours.

We will also ensure we sufficiently address and adhere to the General Data Protection Regulation and Public Sector Accessibility Regulation requirements.

Telling our story simply, effectively and truthfully has never been more important. We need to drive engagement and direct action from a range of audiences, broadening awareness amongst audiences, stakeholders and influencers.

A good story – our narrative – allows us to share our vision, key messages and plans with employees, residents and partners in a powerful and compelling way. It's a key tool for building consensus across an organisation – telling the tale of a past and present that everyone recognises, explaining current challenges and issues and outlining a future that people want to make happen.

We will develop varied and interesting content to include photography and videos, to be more attractive to a broader range of the community.

"Effective communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what you know."
Jim Rohn

Tone of voice

Our tone of voice in delivering these messages is in keeping with our values and principles.

Our employees: professional, committed, continually developing and striving to deliver quality services.

- Value for money: we spend your money wisely.
- Governance: we are committed to democracy, transparency and honesty.
- Progressive: we are a progressive organisation, listening to our residents.
- Compassion: we are compassionate in our approach.
- Progressive: we are a progressive organisation, listening to our residents.
- Customer Service: we take customer service seriously.
- We will protect the brand of Wetherby Town Council so that all residents recognise the council's role in improving the town.
- Respect: we respect each other and expect others to do the same.

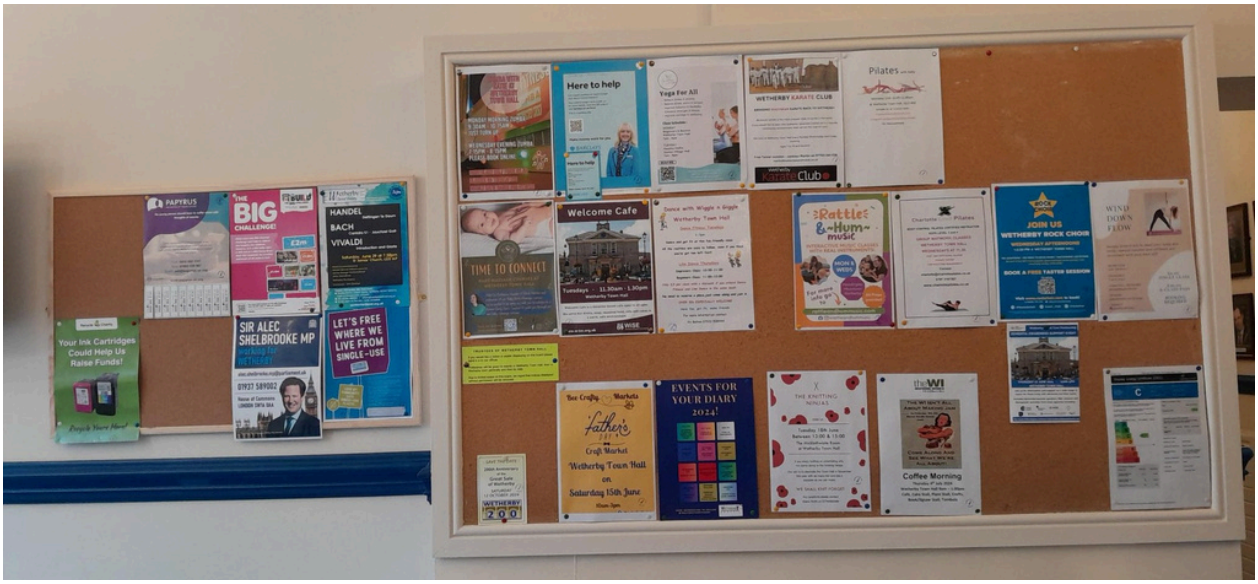
"It's important to make sure that we're talking with each other in a way that heals, not in a way that wounds."
Barack Obama

Key messages & objectives for 2024/2028

Key messages are the foundation of strong communication - internally and externally. They allow everyone involved to tell stories consistently and in a compelling way to drive action and results.

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Help our residents and stakeholders feel informed about Council services and policies and how to engage with them.
- Ensure communications are coordinated, consistent, targeted and driven by insight so that communications is delivered at the right time, in the right way to the right people.
- We will apply our vexatious policy if necessary, to maintain statutory communications even in challenging circumstances.
- Ensure the Council's role is understood and appreciated by residents, visitors, partners and businesses so they feel supported and confident about the future.
- Develop pride - across internal and external audiences - in the Council's unique role in leading the town into the future with confidence, clarity and an inspiring vision for the future.
- Ensure all employees and members are effectively supported with frequent, clear and consistent communications and updates.
- To identify the challenges we face engaging with, and onboarding, the community.
- To use communication and marketing channels to support the onboarding new members of the community.



"Great communication begins with connection."
Oprah Winfrey

Our approach & action points

Our communications will be timely, open, trustworthy and focused on issues that matter to the residents of Wetherby. We will communicate in plain English.

Our goals are to:

- Post regular news of Town Council initiatives on the website, newsletters/publications and social media channels.
- Provide an opportunity at each Town Council meeting for public questions and comments.
- Make the Town Council Business Plan available on the Town Council website.
- Publish an annual report covering Town Council activities.
- Continue to invite representatives of outside agencies to address the Council on key matters of interest (to Town Council meetings but also to round table discussions with the Council).
- Work with other statutory and voluntary bodies, businesses, residents and other stakeholders as appropriate, in order to facilitate coordinated effort.
- Appoint representatives to appropriate external agencies and committees.
- Attend relevant conferences and meetings.
- Host monthly meet your councillor events

We further intend to:

- Always engage with the community in a two-way dialogue to improve understanding, inform and engage residents and staff.
- Prove we provide value for money.
- Build trust and confidence in what we do.
- Outline and improve our services and show we are doing so.

"Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much."
Helen Keller

Our approach & action points (continued)

To meet the goals of the council's communications strategy we will aim to:

- Communicate as one organisation with one voice..
- Ensure our communication is successful by measuring the quality and impact of what we do.
- When possible, act on feedback we receive.
- Engage with our audiences through channels which work for them:
  We must listen and ensure we are easy to communicate with.

How we will do this:

- We will deliver clear, creative and value-for-money communications based on the issues that matter to Wetherby residents.
- We will protect the brand of Wetherby Town Council so that all residents recognise the council's role in improving the town.
- We will ensure our employees are informed and engaged in all that we do.

"To effectively communicate, we must realise that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others."
Tony Robbins"

Summary

Creating an effective communications strategy involves several key steps to ensure that the messages being conveyed align with the Town Council's goals, and reach the intended audience effectively.

We have outlined in this strategy our objectives, key messages and our communication channels.

Our action points have been clearly identified and communicated.

We intend to produce high quality content, and strive to continually understand our audience, using a mix of channels to ensure broader reach and engagement.

It's important that we track performance and use metrics and analytics tools, to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of our communications on an ongoing basis by using:

- Social Media analytics to track likes, shares, comments, and follower growth.
- Website analytics to monitor traffic, bounce rates, and conversion rates.
- Survey feedback to collect feedback from customers to gauge satisfaction and awareness.

As with any good strategy we must be willing to adjust as needed based on feedback and performance data, ensuring the effectiveness of how we communicate and improve outcomes overall.

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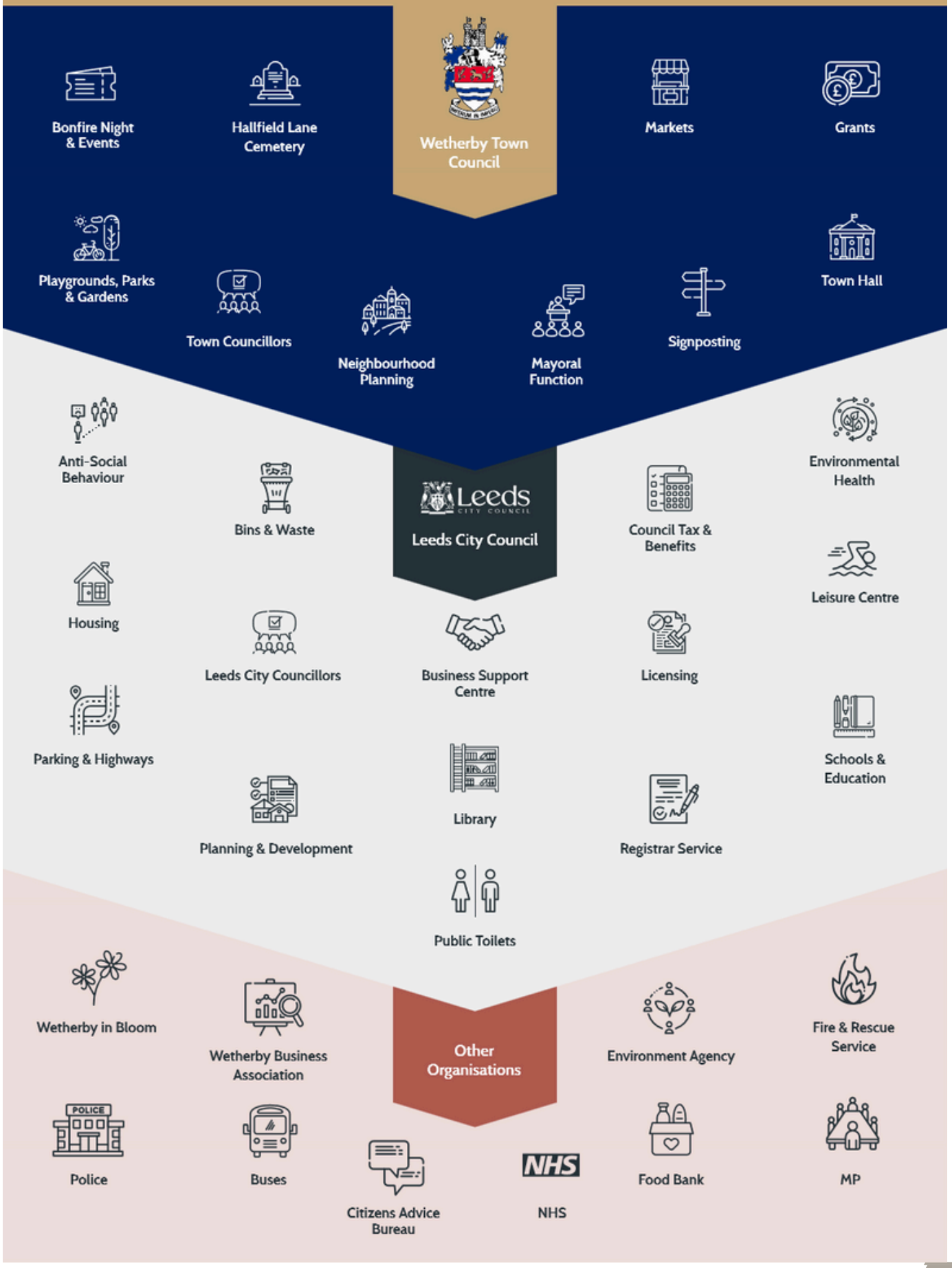
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