

# **CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 8 NOVEMBER 2021**

## **OVERVIEW OF COUNCIL COMMUNICATION**

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### **Summary**

1. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has requested an overview of the Council's Content and Communication function, including facts and figures, coverage and strategy.

### **Background**

2. The Council's Content and Communication function lies at the heart of communication with residents. The function strives to:

- Improve engagement with residents, partners, stakeholders and staff.
- Manage the Council's reputation.
- Promote the Council's success stories.
- Raise the profile of the County Council and Worcestershire as a whole.

3. Working closely with key officers and partners, on a daily basis the Team:

- Provides media and communications advice to elected members and senior officers.
- Handles all enquiries from the local, regional and national media.
- Manages a wide range of social media accounts and engages with the public on these channels.
- Engages with members, the workforce, partners and communities.
- Creates compelling content so that stories can be told in the most creative way possible, to the right audience, at the right time.
- Keeps staff updated with stories they may want to hear and information they may need to know.

4. The Team tells the Council's story by taking a content first approach ensuring close working between the press desk, social media desk and communications colleagues who lead on all communications for specific areas of the business. The Team aims to be proactive in its planning and responses and measures engagement through monthly communications dashboards.

5. The function utilises a number of different channels to tell the Council's story and to share information. These include the Council's social media channels, website, traditional media such as print, radio and TV, in addition to hyperlocal direct

communications and working closely with partner and community organisations to utilise their channels when appropriate.

6. Social media, over the last few years has become a key channel to share information and stories and to engage with residents and communities. Recent UK wide statistics show that 96% of the population are internet users and 80% of the population are active social media users. The team uses different channels to reach different audiences as it's a great way to engage and connect. Journalists are now also using social media to find stories for their channels.

7. During the pandemic, where local residents and businesses were looking to the County Council for information, advice and guidance, the Team grew the Council's social media audiences considerably by ensuring the content was relevant, informative and creative. Below are the current followers by channel and the increase in these followers since the start of the pandemic:

- Twitter – all channels – 42,078 current followers (9% increase versus the previous 18 months).
- LinkedIn – all channels - 11,379 current followers (16% increase versus the previous 18 months).
- Facebook – all channels – 23,438 current followers (25% increase versus the previous 18 months).
- Instagram – all channels – 4475 current followers (48% increase versus the previous 18 months).

8. In the last 12 months, content shared on the Council's social media channels has been viewed 31.8 million times with videos produced to help tell the Council's story viewed 430,000 times.

9. During the pandemic, the team has also explored opportunities to reach specific audiences through social media, such as posting on local notice boards and devising content to be shared by other organisations. This has enabled the team to build a wide and diverse portfolio of channels to help get the right message, to the right audience at the right time on the right channel.

10. Whilst social media is one of the best ways for the Council to reach audiences, communication through local, regional and national press is still an important part of how the Council communicates.

11. Stories that are published or broadcast through these channels are usually driven in two ways – by stories or information that the team sends and share with the press (proactive) and stories and information that the team are asked to comment on (reactive).

12. The function has a proactive approach with how it engages with the media with a target of at least 60% of all communication to be proactive. By taking a proactive approach to communications, the Council is able to tell the full story. The team also prepare reactive statements in preparation for stories that may be in the media, particularly when there is a story that the Council may be asked to comment on that it does not necessarily want or need to be proactive with.

13. The Team issues media releases and statements to a standard list of media contacts on an almost daily basis – in the last 12 months the team has issued over 600 press releases. The Team measures the amount of coverage in the media achieved by a metric called Equivalent Advertising Value (EAV) which is an industry standard calculation that shows how much the Council would have paid in advertising costs if it was to have purchased the space in the media. In the last 12 months, the EAV was just over £90 million which was an increase of 59% against the previous 12-month period.

14. Profiling the County Council and Worcestershire as a whole outside of the county is another important role the function has. To help support this, the Team works with regional and national trade media outlets to share stories that are of a specific nature, where technical information and stories that could be too detailed for local media are shared. Often these outlets appeal to very targeted audiences however the distribution is often national. In the last 12 months, the Team has sent 120 trade media stories which have been featured in print or online.

15. The Team also manages all requests for interviews and provides pre-interview support for those being interviewed for TV, radio and press. When the Council has a big story it wants to share, the media will be contacted and a 'media pitch' given to encourage them to cover the story in more detail. This could include offering access to a location to film, in addition to providing spokespeople, either from the Council or from supporting stakeholders.

16. In addition to managing all County Council communications, the Team also provides support to Worcestershire Children First. This includes dealing with all media enquiries, managing its social media channels and supporting internal communications with staff.

17. 'Visit Worcestershire' is now managed by the County Council since moving over from the Chamber of Commerce last year, so the team also manages the website and all communications for this brand. Another brand that sits within the remit of the Content and Communications function is 'One Worcestershire'. This was set up just over 2 years ago to showcase the best that the county has to offer by sharing opportunities, supporting local businesses, supporting the Council's inward investment plans and to share great stories about the county. The communications platform is a joint venture between Worcestershire County Council, all district councils, Local Enterprise Partnerships and the University of Worcester.

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

18. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- Consider the information provided in the report
- Determine any comments the Panel would wish to make to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication
- Agree whether any further Scrutiny is required at this stage.

## **Supporting Information**

Appendix 1 – presentation slides

## **Contact Points**

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## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report: