

8 June 2018

## INFORMING AND ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES TASK GROUP – 21 JUNE 2018

The first meeting of the Informing and Engaging Our Communities Task Group will be held at 6pm on Thursday 21 June 2018 in Committee Room 2 at the Town Hall, Rugby.

Adam Norburn  
Executive Director

### A G E N D A

#### PART 1 – PUBLIC BUSINESS

1. Appointment of Chair – to appoint a Chair of the Task Group.
2. Apologies – to receive apologies for absence from the meeting.
3. Declarations of Interest

To receive declarations of:

(a) non-pecuniary interests as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors;

(b) pecuniary interests as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors; and

(c) notice under Section 106 Local Government Finance Act 1992 – non-payment of Community Charge or Council Tax.

***Note: Members are reminded that they should declare the existence and nature of their interests at the commencement of the meeting (or as soon as the interest becomes apparent). If that interest is a pecuniary interest the Member must withdraw from the room unless one of the exceptions applies.***

***Membership of Warwickshire County Council or any Parish Council is classed as a non-pecuniary interest under the Code of Conduct. A Member does not need to declare this interest unless the Member chooses to speak on a matter relating to their membership. If the Member does not wish to speak on the matter, the Member may still vote on the matter without making a declaration.***

4. Discussion with the Communication, Consultation and Information Manager:

- Appendix 1 – Review of the one-page strategy
- Appendix 2 – Communication Strategy 2014
- Appendix 3 – Web Content Standards ‘Golden Rules’

For the LGA Guide to Engaging Communities, please see link below

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/New%20Conversations%20Guide%209-2.pdf>

5. Programme of work and dates of future meetings – please bring your diaries to the meeting.

## **PART 2 – EXEMPT INFORMATION**

There is no business involving exempt information.

### **Membership of the group:**

Councillors Bearne, Douglas, Claire Edwards, Gillias, Keeling, Lewis and Srivastava

*If you have any general queries with regard to this agenda please contact Veronika Beckova, Democratic Services Officer (01788 533591 or e-mail [veronika.beckova@rugby.gov.uk](mailto:veronika.beckova@rugby.gov.uk)). Any specific queries concerning reports should be directed to the listed contact officer.*

*If you wish to attend the meeting and have any special requirements for access please contact the Democratic Services Officer named above.*

# INFORMING AND ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES TASK GROUP

## ONE-PAGE STRATEGY

### What is the broad topic area?

How can we involve communities in decisions that affect them, in ways that suit them?

Can we provide information and tools to council teams and to Members, so that they can inform and engage communities where relevant?

### What is the specific topic area?

The last five years has seen an explosion in the use of social media and the consumption of mobile content, resulting in a shift in user habits and expectations.

These new habits have also provided new opportunities for very targeted content placement, reaching specific communities at relatively low cost.

The review will look at including a range of new media tools that members and relevant officers can use, together with a refreshed package of traditional engagement techniques.

It will include some analysis of when it may be appropriate to use each technique, depending on the objectives of the engagement exercise.

### What should be considered?

- Relevant best practice from other authorities, and the Local Government Association
- New trends in technology
- Changes in community expectations
- Resources
- Case studies

### Who shall we consult?

- Communications, consultation and information team
- Members
- Relevant officers
- Residents
- Business community

### How long should it take?

Around six months, depending on the amount of support needed.

### What will be the outcome?

- Understanding of a variety of methods to involve members and residents on issues that affect them.
- Recommendations to cabinet that will ensure decisions on budget proposals presented to council have been informed by timely and relevant community engagement.

**Rugby Borough Council  
Communications Strategy 2014  
For adoption.**

## **1. The council**

Rugby Borough Council is making things better for its residents. By understanding the communities that it serves it provides customer-focused services that meet their needs. The council has ambitious plans for the future growth of the borough, and also to maximise the potential benefits arising from being the birthplace of Rugby football.

## **2. This strategy**

This communications strategy sets out how we will communicate with our residents, businesses, visitors and staff.

In short, our communications will be **direct, digital, devolved, data-led, and deliberate.**

## **3. Direct communications**

### **Summary**

Rugby Borough Council's communications team see the local press, radio and television as only one way of many to reach our communities. Fewer of our residents regularly access traditional media than ever before, and this number is continuing to decline. We must find ways to communicate directly with our communities in ways that are relevant to them. Targeted communications are more effective than traditional approaches, and allow our communities to interact with the council. Direct engagement with relevant messages, not broadcast, is the key to effective and accessible communications.

### **Actions**

#### **We will:**

- target our communications directly to the individual, business or community who will most benefit or who are most affected.
- use demographic data to help us to identify who we should engage with, and how to communicate with them using language they understand and in a format they prefer.
- encourage individuals and businesses to interact with the council through their chosen means of communication.

## **4. Digital communications**

### **Summary**

Our communities are becoming “digital-enabled”. Broadband and wifi coverage is nearly universal, and in some communities smartphones are starting to replace fixed telephone lines. Our citizens are able to communicate with and access services 24/7, in the palm of their hand. This is an opportunity that we must embrace, ensuring that the council maximises its presence in the social networks that our citizens use.

Our smartphone app has helped us to serve up content in a format convenient for these users. We must make sure that the right content and right services are accessible on all types of devices and at all times of the day and night to our communities. Digital technologies will help us to do this.

### **Actions**

#### **We will:**

- create an infrastructure that allows us to format content, services and information in ways that are useful to our users, regardless of the type of device that they are using.
- adopt web content standards to ensure our web content is relevant, concise, and aimed at helping our website users to complete their chosen task.
- create content in formats and using technologies that allow our communities to reuse it in ways that they find useful.
- engage with our communities in the social networks that they use, helping them to find the information they need, report problems, and achieve their goal.

## **5. Devolved communications**

### **Summary**

Rugby Borough Council trusts its staff and members to represent the best interests of our communities and the council, and will help them to do so whenever it is appropriate. Our combined voices are more powerful, more engaging, and more effective than a single centralised message.

### **Actions**

#### **We will:**

- help members and officers to get the skills and knowledge that they need to interact with our communities in the social networks that they use, in a timely, relevant and professional way.
- provide tools and relevant guidelines to help appropriate council departments to promote their services in a timely, relevant and professional way.
- provide the infrastructure to allow members, officers and citizens to report on meetings or events in real-time.

## **6. Data-led communications**

### **Summary**

Good data helps us to get things done. It can show us what needs doing, where, and when. Presented well, it can help our communities to understand the council's decisions. We must make sure that our communications are based on good evidence too. And in those situations where there is no evidence available, we will collect evidence so that it is available to us in future.

Our service areas check their systems, plan changes, implement them and re-check as matter of routine. We must similarly monitor and evaluate our communications.

### **Actions**

#### **We will:**

- use data to help us to decide what needs doing, how to do it, and how well we did.
- use good graphic design to help us to present complex data in a way that is easy to understand.
- evaluate our communications by tracking how they have affected desired outcomes.

## **7. Deliberate communications**

### **Summary**

Our communications team has the skills, knowledge and experience to more proactively manage our communications. These communications must focus on key corporate themes, and help our services understand how their messages fit into the bigger picture.

We will be deliberate about this. Sometimes it will be necessary to postpone a communications campaign, or not do it at all, in order to most benefit the council and our communities as a whole. But by planning everything we do in advance, we will be able to take advantage of regional, national or international events more effectively.

### **Actions**

#### **We will:**

- use a calendar to help us focus our communications and time their delivery to maximum effect.
- make sure that all of our communications campaigns have a well-defined purpose or "call-to-action" that we can monitor and evaluate.
- make use of regional, national and international news topics and trends to maximise exposure to our communications campaigns.

Rugby Borough Council web content standards.  
For adoption

## **“Golden Rules”**

In a sentence:

**Is the information you’re presenting to the public necessary, readable, original, easy to find and well-presented?**

In a checklist:

1. Is the content answering a question that our customers are asking?
2. Is your content easy-to-read and understandable to a layperson?
3. Is the content original?
4. Can the content be found using search words that make sense to the customer?
5. Are graphics and pictures appropriate and do they add something to the page?

**Is the content answering a question that our customers are asking?**

Council websites can be cluttered with pages there is no demand for.

This wastes officer time spent writing and maintaining them, and customer time spent wading through them to get to what they need.

Irrelevant content makes relevant information harder to find by making it difficult to navigate to and search for.

Could you justify the publication of your page if you were asked?

**Consider...**

Who's going to read it?

Pages should relate to questions or queries asked repeatedly by customers.

Your audience should be clear to you as you write.

- Does your page relate to a specific council service?
- Does it meet the needs of the customer, as well as the council?
- Is the potential audience large enough to justify publishing the information?
- Is the potential audience able or likely to access the information via the internet?
- Is there a statutory requirement to publish this information?

Why does your audience need to know?

Information gained from a website should enable, equip or inform a customer to take an action. It's rare to find anyone that will browse council web content for fun.

Think laterally about their reasons for visiting your page, and gear your content toward those reasons.



## Is your content easy-to-read and understandable to a layperson?

Web content is often scanned rather than read line-by-line.

Jargon, acronyms and technical terminology can make this difficult, and give the impression that a page is written for experts rather than for everybody.

This leads to a perception that the council is not accessible. It also inevitably leads to people seeking information elsewhere, or through other means.

Poorly written content online often leads to an increase in telephone calls and emails to the council to clear up confusion.

Could you understand your page with no prior knowledge?

### Consider...

Is it written in an accessible tone, in plain English, without being over-familiar?

Your page should:

- Be interesting but serve a purpose
- Be approachable but not too chummy
- Feel modern but not try to be 'down with the kids'
- Focus on your council's customers not internal services

Does it get to the point?

Your page should set out its purpose within the first sentence.

Does it avoid jargon?

Is it presented in an interesting and intuitive way?

Information should be in a common-sense order. Don't assume the customer already knows what you're talking about in your introductory sentence.

Big blocks of text are difficult to read. Consider presenting 'sets' of related information in tables or introducing bulleted lists.

Use bold text, but sparingly. Avoid different coloured or differently sized text wherever possible, and never use italics or underlining.

Are headings used appropriately to break content up into identifiable sections?

Headings provide a means for customers to quickly scan a page and identify the content they want to read. However, having too many headings can make a page look cluttered, making it harder to scan, so finding a good balance is key.

Use headings rather than bold text.

**Is the content original?**

Content writers have to be careful when copying information from other places, especially private sector sources.

Not only are there potential issues with copyright ownership and intellectual property, changes to the information at the source may not be reflected in our web pages.

In addition, sometimes the data is simply not needed – if information already exists, a smarter way to refer to it is by directing customers straight to it.

Care also needs to be taken with images and graphics.

Are you sure that the information or images you're including are owned by your organisation and won't change outside of our control?

**Consider...**

Are you copying information stored or owned by an external agency, body or company?

If so, you may need to gain direct permission to do so.

Guide customers to external resources rather than reproducing information already available somewhere else.

Is the information advertising a company or private sector service?

The council should not promote or imply promotion of specific businesses or companies.

Are the images, graphics or photographs you're using copyright-free, public domain, or owned or created by your organisation?

Make sure you are using images that don't have a copyright on them – don't save images from search engines for use in council pages.

**Can the content be found using search words that make sense to the customer?**

Customers may use search words that don't match the exact terms used by your organisation.

The website should be designed for customer use – we need to be aware of the kinds of ways customers will search for our information. It's likely that someone in your organisation will have access to analytics information, telling you about the search terms used.

However interesting and important our content might be to us, the key things to keep in mind as we create a page are how, why and when a customer will want to read or use it.

If we make our content too hard to find, or too complicated for customers to understand, the council will appear out-of-touch, aloof and not working for the people it serves.

What will customers use as search words when they look for your content?

**Consider...**

Is there a more common way of phrasing something?

For instance, the council might refer to "waste management", but customers will overwhelmingly refer to "rubbish" or "bins".

Does your page title reflect what people will search for?

The title forms the key data used by search engines when indexing and directing customer queries.

'Front-load' titles where possible – put keywords first.

Keep them short and snappy.

Avoid "etc" – be precise – no-one ever searches for "etc".

Have you neglected the "Introduction" or "Summary" sections?

An introduction or summary section provides a short explanation of what the page is about and is used to describe the page for Google and other search engines.

**Are the graphics and pictures appropriate, and do they add something to the page?**

Images and graphics are useful tools for making a page look interesting, to illustrate points, and for design reasons such as breaking up large amounts of text.

However, you need to be sure that images you do use are of sufficient quality to add something to the page.

You also need to be sure that their use is thought about carefully to make sure customers with accessibility issues aren't disadvantaged if they can't see them.

If we're not careful about our use of images and pictures, pages can look amateurish or vary too much from one service to the next. This doesn't present a professional, consistent, joined-up website to customers.

If the page looks amateurish or poorly laid-out, no matter how good the content is, the information will not be credible or trustworthy to customers.

Do your images add anything to the page?

**Consider...**

Is the picture strictly necessary?

It might seem desirable to illustrate a page about farming and agriculture with a picture of a tractor, but how does this help the understanding of the customer?

Does the image clash?

Images might clash with the scheme of the site as a whole, or even with other pictures on the same page. Don't, for instance, mix representative clip-art with high resolution photographs.

Is it the right size?

Pictures that are much bigger than the amount of text on the page make the content difficult to read.

Too many pictures also draw the eye away from important information, reduce the visual effect of including them at all, and makes pages crowded and messy.

Less is frequently more.