

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Community Committee
Meeting date	4 June 2024
Report author	Nicky Cayley
Agenda item	9

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY TOWN CLERK

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 Communications Review

2. **Summary**

2.1 Report the on the Town Council's Current Communications

2.2 Appendix 1 – Draft Communications and Social Media Policy and Action Plan

3. **Action required**

3.1 Members are asked to agree the Communications and Social Media Policy and Action Plan (Appendix A), subject to any amendments requested.

3.2 Members are asked to agree to delegation being given to officers to make the amendments before adoption by the Council.

3.3 Members are asked to agree to a longer term overhaul of the website, and to consider setting a budget for this during the budget setting cycle later in the year.

3.4 Members are asked to consider and agree to changes in the publication of The Town Crier as described in the report.

4. **Link to strategic plan and objectives.**

4.1 KO1: To respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency.

KO3: to manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future.

5. **Key information and options**

5.1 **Town Council's Communications – Fit for the Future**

Abingdon Town Council's communications need to be fit for 2024 and beyond.

Effective communication will be fundamental to fulfilling the priorities of the Council's Strategic plan and achieving its goals. It isn't just about disseminating information and broadcasting messages but instead about a two-way conversation. These same channels should be used to listen, to gather customer feedback, opinions, desires and ideas.

The Town Council needs to join in the conversations taking place about how we make Abingdon a better, safer, more inclusive and welcoming place. Ensuring communications are audience focused will make them more engaging and effective. There is a need to embrace digital channels to help get key messages and information to the right people, at the right time and in the right way, while at the same time recognising that not everyone is comfortable with the internet and supporting them with alternative format choices. While we must aim to ensure important communications reach those who may not have easy access to technology, or who simply prefer traditional formats, it is evident that we are part of a smartphone society. As such, we need to accept that digital communications are becoming faster, easier and the norm and be agile in meeting this demand.

5.2 **Current Communications**

The Town Council currently uses its website, social media (Facebook, Instagram and X) and the publication of "The Town Crier" to communicate with residents.

The current website is now starting to look a little outdated. There is so much information on it that it is now difficult to navigate and to find what you are looking for.

Currently, the Council is not meeting the demands of a social media driven society. For example, on Facebook, an open invitation was posted to the Mayor Making, but yet it was not followed up by photos of the event and the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

The Town Crier is a regular publication, which currently goes out to all houses in Abingdon.

5.3 **Moving Communications Forward**

Website

The website and its information needs to be streamlined, with clear delineations on the three tiers of Council's responsibilities whilst maintaining a corporate

identity. The Council can sign post residents to other services without going into details – for example: [The Net – Abingdon on Thames Town Council](#). This should not be seen as diminishing collaborative working with others.

The Town Council should, going forward, also have officers listed with job titles, a brief description of responsibilities and contact e mail addresses (perhaps with the exception of the Town Clerk). The Admin Officers do a tremendous job in fielding the significant amount of e mails received daily, but officers should be able to take a certain amount of direct e mails. Inevitably enquiries will get the lion's share as residents are often unsure of who to contact.

The Deputy Town Clerk has met with the Museum manager, who would like to have a separate website for the Museum and historical aspects of the town. This would aid users in terms of accessing the information they want without being overwhelmed with the sheer volume of information on the current website.

Reducing the size of the website overall would also benefit the climate emergency as it would reduce the amount of server storage needed.

The website should also be checked for accessibility.

If members agree these recommendations, costs will be obtained from the website provider to aid the budget setting process.

Social Media

The Town Council needs to make sure that its social media output is engaging, dynamic and up to date and grow our audience – the Facebook page currently has 2.2k followers – a similar sized council in Oxfordshire has 5k. On both social media channels and the website, the Council needs to start celebrating all the amazing things it does in the town! In line with this, a new press release form will be issued internally to all officers, so that they can complete it when a project has been completed (hopefully with a quote from the relevant Councillor) and the news can be shared with the public.

Linked In is also increasingly popular – not only for networking but also for those looking for new jobs. To help attract high calibre candidates, the Council should have an official Linked In profile.

The Town Crier

The Town Crier is currently only available in hard format and at a significant cost to the taxpayer. The Deputy Town Clerk proposes that from 2025, this hard copy is reduced to once per year with all other editions available on the Council's website. This should help to reduce The Town crier's carbon footprint. A limited run of hard copies would be made available in the TIC, Museum and the library (with agreement) The annual print edition should also include a freepost survey to measure customer feedback – this would also be available online.

5.4 Supporting data: Some Key metrics from Ofcom’s 2023 report ‘Online Nation’

UK adult internet users spent on average 3 hours 41 minutes online per day in May 2023.

In total, 47.9 million UK adults accessed the internet on smartphones, tablets and computers in May 2023, spending an average of 3 hours 41 minutes a day online, eight minutes more than in May 2022. Young adults continue to spend the most time online, with 18-24-year-olds spending a daily average of 4 hours 36 minutes, and the 65+ group spending the least time (2 hours 46 minutes).

Seven per cent of UK individuals aged 16+ don’t have access to the internet at home, with a quarter of these citing affordability as a reason.

While a large majority of people aged 16+ do have access to the internet at home, 7% did not have access in 2023, with the figure even higher (18%) among people aged 65+. Among those who did not have internet at home, a perceived lack of need or interest (65%) remained their top reason. However, a quarter (26%) cited reasons related to cost.

Alphabet- and Meta-owned sites and apps remain the most visited.

Nicky Cayley
Deputy Town Clerk
24 May 2024