



Kettering
TOWN COUNCIL

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KETTERING TOWN COUNCIL

REPORT FOR DECISION

Item No:- 099

Committee:-	Council
Date:-	15 th March 2023
Author:-	Emma Dezelu, Deputy Clerk
Report Title:-	Communications Strategy and Social Media Policy
Wards Affected:-	All

1. Purpose of Report

To submit the Communications Strategy and Social Media Policy for adoption.

2. Recommendations

Council is recommended to adopt the attached strategy and policy.

3. Information

- 3.1. The council's communications strategy sets out the aims and approach for how the Council should communicate with stakeholders, members of the public, members and officers and the wider community.
- 3.2. It highlights what has been achieved so far in terms of communications methods and what the Town Council will focus on in 2023/24.
- 3.3. The social media policy provides guidance and support on how officers should use the council's social media channels and how members should operate their own social media accounts.

4. Consultation and Engagement

Consultation and engagement is ongoing with the council's communications channels and preferred methods of communication have been taken into account in the creation of the strategy and policy.

5. Finance, Legal and Resource Implications

The policies have no resource implications, officer time is already accounted for with the management of social media accounts and communications activities.

6. Climate change implications

Online and digital communication is preferred where possible as the method of communication with least environmental impact.

7. Policy Implications

7.1. The communications strategy and social media policy support the Town Council's corporate plan, in terms of organisational effectiveness.

7.2. The Council will set out to explain what it is seeking to do, and why, and will listen to what local people have to say to it about their needs and aspirations.

7.3. The Council and its members will show respect to each other, to partner organisations and will help and support local people within its means to do so. It will be a constructive partner.

Background Papers

Communications Strategy

Social Media Policy

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Communications Strategy

Our aims and approach

We want to make sure people have a **clear understanding** of who the council is, what we do and why we do it.

The purpose of our communications is to

- Encourage **participation** in the events we organise
- Raise **awareness** about local issues and opportunities
- Promote the **work** of the Town Council and advertise the availability of Town Council **services and facilities**
- **Engage** with local people and enable them to **communicate** their views to the Town Council

The council will communicate with **those who matter the most** – the people in the communities we serve, partners we work with, those we do business with and members and staff.

We will be **focused** with our messages, enable **conversations** and encourage **feedback** which is listened and responded to, in order to improve service delivery and development.

Our communication activities will **align with the corporate plan**, echoing its objectives and standards and making sure our audiences and stakeholders have a **shared understanding** of the council's vision, values and ambition.

The corporate plan states that Kettering Town Council will **understand** what local people want and aspire to and provide **civic pride and presence**.

Our standards

The standard and nature of our communications reflects the council's culture and values, and will be:

Transparent – clear and free of jargon.

Accurate – truthful and open, supported with facts.

Timely – with information produced regularly that is up to date.

Appropriate – targeted to the relevant audience, with the right message, at the right time.

Inclusive – available in accessible formats through a variety channels, including digital and printed material.

Our principles

Our focus will be on our **audiences** and we will base communications on the insights we have into them.

We will put most emphasis on communicating **digitally**, ensuring online is the best way for people to communicate with the council.

We will **listen** to our audiences and respond to their needs and communications preferences, ensuring all are catered for.

Our activities will be **evaluated** so we know what works and where improvements are needed and we can innovate.

We will have a **collaborative** approach, working with partners on shared goals.

Our methods

We will:-

- Focus on **core activities** to communicate with the widest audience.
- Maintain **consistency** of approach in our message.
- Our tone and voice will remain **consistent**.
- Ensure the council's messages are politically **neutral**.
- Support **partner organisations** with information on our social channels and website where our values and aims align.

Highlights from 2022/23

Created and launched social media channels on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter building to more than 1,200 followers in total after nine months.

Increased **public engagement in budget consultation** by six-fold on the previous year.

Engaged with the local media, through generation of press releases, news stories and photo-opportunities.

Key activities for 2023/24

Establish a **core range of methods** to communicate with audiences.

Build **digital** audiences across social networks.

Develop an **email stakeholder database** and create regular newsletters.

Increase **engagement** on social channels.



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Increase **awareness** of and **build attendance** at/involvement in the Council's events and activities, its markets and at consultation events.

Run **campaigns** to support the following activities:

- **Lottery** – build awareness and engagement for Kettering Community Lottery
- **Events and markets** – build on past success with community entertainment events
- **Grants** – promote the availability of grants
- **Families** – engage families with Kettering By The Sea
- **Christmas** – develop an audience for festive celebrations

Develop civic pride by promoting the role of Kettering's **Mayor**.

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Social Media Policy

Introduction

This policy applies to council employees and gives guidance to members on the use of social media.

Council employees and members are encouraged to show pride in the Town Council and its work, in line with our values. As with word of mouth recommendations, social media sharing is an important tool for promoting and sharing the work of the council.

Council employees are governed by strict rules on impartiality and publicity and must not support or promote the political views of any councillor or group of councillors. Any communications must be in line with council policy.

“Social media” covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, Nextdoor, blogs, discussion forums, wikis and any sites which may be created after the creation of this policy.

Council accounts

All Town Council employees must ensure social media is used sensibly and responsibly and not adversely affect the council or its business, damage its reputation or violate any policies.

Manging accounts and responding appropriately to the ensuing communication that is invited takes up much time so the Town Council will focus only on a streamlined number of accounts.

Creating a new account must be a considered move, involving evaluation of the value which adding a new account can bring to the council.

Council social media must not be used for party political purposes or party political campaigning purposes. Officers must also not promote councillors’ social media accounts during the pre-election period.

Council officers must not use inappropriate, abusive, bullying, racist or defamatory messages either in or outside the work environment.

If an officer receives threats, abuse or harassment through social media as part of their work they must report it immediately to their line manager, or, if not possible, to the Council’s membership.

As a general rule, the Council's officers will not engage in a debate over social media as to the merits of a particular policy or activity.

Any safeguarding issue or issue which might involve the committing of a crime, raised through social media, will be addressed through other communication channels, and not conducted in public.

Principles and guidance for using social media

Respectful – online conversations should be polite, open and respectful. Language should be friendly, honest and professional at all times. Confidentiality should be respected with no private information or the personal information of others being disclosed.

Credible and consistent – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. What is said online should be consistent with the Town Council's other communications.

Responsive and accurate – questions and comments should be responded to in a timely manner with factual and useful information.

Members' guidance

Councillors need to be clear at all times whether they are posting in a personal or political capacity, as an elected member or as a private individual.

Including 'Cllr' or 'Councillor' in a name is taken to mean that the councillor is writing in the capacity as an elected member. Reference to the member's political party will also imply that the councillor is acting as an elected member.

Councillor profiles, websites and social media accounts should clearly be labelled as either private or personal or in your capacity as a councillor.

The offices of Mayor and Deputy Mayor are traditionally viewed as carrying a degree of impartiality over and above the role of councillor. Access to the Mayoral social accounts, created by and managed by the Town Council, will be given to the Mayor at the start of their term to use to promote the role. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor should not refer in their social media posts to their political party allegiance or explicitly support or promote the activities of a political party during their term of office.

Useful links

Government guidance on local authority publicity:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recommended-code-of-practice-for-local-authority-publicity>



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Local Government Association guidance for councillors on using social media:
<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/leadership-workforce-and-communications/comms-hub-communications-support/social-media>

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