

Supporting Plan for the Communications Strategy 2019 - 2021

Executive summary

This is the supporting plan for the council's third Communications Strategy. The supporting plan provides a detailed rationale for the Communication Strategy's areas of focus over the next three years as well as setting out the opportunities and challenges we face.

Introduction

Good communication is essential for local authorities to engage effectively with local residents, stakeholders, partners and our own staff. Councils have the opportunity to act as community leaders, as well as delivering a high standard of services; effective communication is key to fulfilling these roles successfully.

Since the previous communications strategy was published in 2013, the communications landscape has changed dramatically. Not only has the Duty to Involve - the legal duty that compelled the council to inform, consult and involve local people in services, policies and decisions - been repealed, but also the fundamental way information is shared and received has changed; there has been a dramatic shift away from traditional news sources towards digital and social media networks, with more people than ever downloading information on demand using smart phones¹.

The growth of information on demand is staggering:



77% of all adults in **2018** had used the **internet "on the go"** using a mobile phone, smartphone, laptop, tablet or handheld device. Almost all adults aged **25 to 34 years (97%)** have accessed **the internet "on the go"**, compared with only **39%** of those aged **65 years and over**³



More people in the UK now read **news** on their **PC or personal mobile** than in print, while **85%** of people get their news from **television**. **51%**⁴ of people with online access use **social media** as a news source⁵



² **89%** of adults in Great Britain used the **internet** at least weekly in **2018**, up from **88%** in **2017** and **51%** in **2006**

² & ³ Office of National Statistics, Internet access - households and individuals, Great Britain: 2018

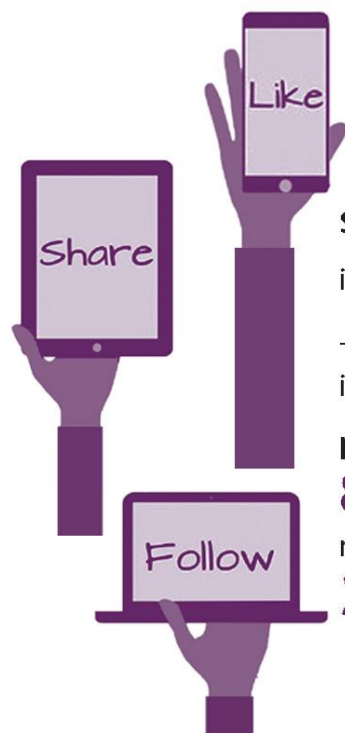
⁴ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism research 2016

⁵ GCS Government Communication Plan 2015-2016

¹ GCS Government Communication Plan 2015-2016



Since **2006**, the percentage of adults who use the **internet daily** has grown from **35%**, to **86%** in **2018**. Furthermore, the proportion of those who had not used the internet in the last three months has fallen from **40%** in **2006**, to **9%** in **2018**⁶



Social media use by internet users has increased by **224%** since **2007** - nearly three quarters (**72%**) of internet users now have a **social media profile**, compared to **22%** in **2007**. **81%** of this audience uses social media at least **once a day**, up from **30%** in **2007**⁷

^{6 & 7} GCS Government Communication Plan 2015-2016

In this changing landscape, it's essential we communicate and listen to the views of our residents to ensure we meet the communication needs and demands of our customers, members, partners and staff. At the same time, ensuring we provide value for money and efficient methods of communicating with our audiences must remain central to our efforts on behalf of the council.

As we shift towards a greater share of digital communications, we must remember that while digital communication is a cost effective way of reaching many customers quickly, not everyone is on the internet; many of our customers do not have easy access to technology or prefer traditional forms of communication. According to the Office of National Statistics data for 2018, 7% of adults in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland have never accessed the internet. While that number is shrinking every year, it is still significant and represents 6,160 adults in Hinckley and Bosworth. The challenge is increased when we consider the main alternative channel of communication, local newspapers, are experiencing falling circulations, making it harder than ever for our messages to reach some of our customers.

Expectations around communication and information are also changing; social media and news on demand has influenced the way that we all consume and share news, creating a demand for the latest information that is readily available whenever anyone wants it. That's why we must be proactive about promoting our services, events and news in a timely and relevant way to ensure we exceed those expectations and enable our messages to reach as many people as possible as efficiently as we can.

The three ambitions of this strategy are to:

- 1** Inform people about the services the council provides so that residents and businesses make the best possible use of council services, ensuring that our online services are both user-friendly and accessible to use.
- 2** Show that the council is providing value for money in what we do. As well as ensuring our customers use the services provided for them as efficiently and as effectively as we can, we want to ensure that customers value the services they receive from the council.
- 3** Be accountable to local people. We will build trust by listening to the views of all our residents and representatives of local people, act upon them and tell them what action has been taken.

Our main areas of focus for this strategy will be:

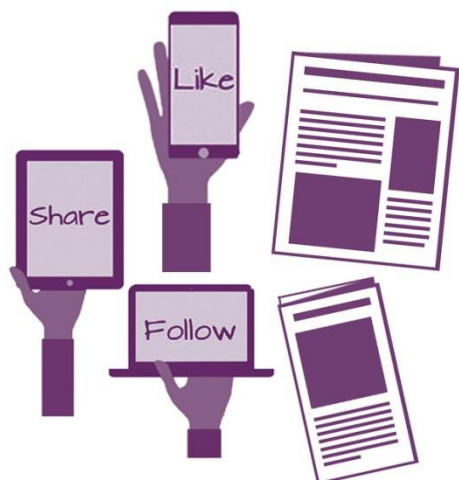
- 1.** Shifting more of our communication activity online by increasing the use of e-mail marketing, e-newsletters and further developing our presence on social media.
- 2.** Making our communications and promotional campaigns insight-driven - based on what we know our customers want and where we can reach them.
- 3.** Providing a professional media office service to our media partners and to the authority's own service areas.
- 4.** Ensuring that whatever method we use to reach our customers, our communication continues to be timely, informative, engaging, accessible and factual.

Focus one: Shifting more of our communication activity online by increasing the use of e-mail marketing, e-newsletters and developing our presence on social media.

Why?

1. The growth of information on demand and social media in particular has been staggering in the UK. Hinckley and Bosworth is no exception to that.
2. The most recent citizens' panel and public satisfaction survey (2018) told us that while the Borough Bulletin is still the most popular way for residents to receive information from the council, its popularity and the popularity of local newspapers is decreasing while the popularity of social media and the website is increasing:

How residents find out about and keep up to date with HBBC activities:



25% say the **Borough Bulletin** (**4%** decrease in one year)
16% say **local newspapers** (**2%** decrease in one year)
14% say **social media** and the **council website** (**4%** increase in one year)
15% say **leaflets** and **posters** (no change)

3. More customers are using the website each year. One key indicator is the increase in sessions - a session is a user spending up to 30 minutes on the website. Between 2014 and 2017 the number of sessions on the council's website doubled from 350,000 to over 700,000 sessions. With over 55% of our customers accessing our website using a mobile device or tablet in May 2018, we have ensured that our website is responsive so it successfully displays services to customers on the device of their choice.
4. At the same time, the use of social media is growing. The council has several social media profiles:
 - Facebook profiles for:
 - Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (main council page)
 - The Atkins Building
 - Barwell Community House
 - Earl Shilton Community House
 - Gwendoline Community House
 - HBBC Jobs
 - Hinckley Market
 - Feast Hinckley
 - Twitter profiles for:
 - Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
 - HBBC Children (for childcare professionals)
 - The Atkins Building
 - Additionally the council has an Instagram account that was launched in 2018
- The council's social media accounts have the potential to reach significant numbers of people organically, that is, without paying for content to be shared.

There is also the option to increase the reach of a post by paying for an advertising boost. We have used this approach to boost event posts in 2018 and have seen excellent results with a spend of less than £100

- The number of people liking or following the Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) social media accounts is as follows:

Social media account	No of people who like the page (Feb 2019)	Avg reach per week (Feb 2019)
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council	5,312	74,800
The Atkins Building	807	270
Barwell Community House	453	62
Earl Shilton Community House	427	10
Gwendoline Community House	202	22
HBBC jobs	193	68
Feast Hinckley	1,278	August 2018 month of the event – 19,630

- This compares well against the benchmark group of district councils in the UK (based on population area and demographics) where HBBC currently ranks first for both page likes and for page likes as a percentage of the population:

Rank	Council	Population	Facebook page likes February 2019	Facebook page likes as a % of the population
1	Hinckley/Bosworth	107700	5312	4.93%
2	Newark/Sherwood	114800	5297	4.61%
3	South Ribble	109057	4543	4.17%
4	Gedling	113543	4207	3.71%
5	South Staff	108131	3934	3.64%
6	North Kesteven	111000	3044	2.74%
7	Blaby	93915	2566	2.73%
8	Rushcliffe	109057	2247	2.06%
9	Amber Valley	122309	2168	1.77%
10	South Derbyshire	94611	1875	1.98%
11	Lichfield	102100	1814	1.78%
12	East Northampton	88900	1565	1.76%
13	High Peak	90892	1184	1.30%
14	Stroud	116600	996	0.85%
15	West Lancashire	111900	597	0.53%
16	Staffs Moorlands	97800	588	0.60%

- Facebook events have proven to be an effective way of promoting council events. When social media users engage with an event, Facebook will use push notifications

(pop up reminders on a mobile device) to remind the user the event is coming up and share the event with the user's friends. This boosts reach considerably with some 332,700 people having had one of 77 HBBC events ²appear in their newsfeed in 2018

- In 2018 the top performing post on Facebook was seen by 45,000 people, with other popular posts regularly achieving a reach in excess of 10,000 people. One post in early 2019 reached 55,000 people.
- Facebook messenger is increasingly used by customers asking for council information or to report a problem, with the number of messages having doubled between January and June 2018 to around 100 people on average every month
- HBBC's corporate twitter account has 5,326 followers (February 2019). While it continues to grow steadily and it is a valuable means of reaching some of our customers, a sizeable proportion of the followers are businesses rather than residents. It is particularly helpful for promoting messages to businesses as well as general messages.

What we will do:

1. Grow our social media audiences, with the aim of achieving 10,700 Facebook page likes, equivalent to 10% of our resident population for the borough liking the HBBC main page by 2021. This is an ambitious target that reflects our desire to ensure we maximise the potential of social media to reach our residents into the future. Twitter has been growing at around 5% per year, so we look to build on that with a stretched target of 20% by 2021, taking the number of subscribers to 6,300 by 2021.
2. Develop and enhance our social media content to increase its reach and boost engagement with our residents. A working group of social media editors from key council services has been established to improve HBBC's social media guidelines and to share insights. We will aim to use social media as a channel for online conversations and interactions, rather than using social media merely as a 'broadcast' tool. We will harness the influence of digital influencers, such as community and interest groups, to build trust and reach.
3. We will continue to test the efficacy of paid boosts on Facebook to increase the reach of key events and messages.
4. While Facebook and Twitter are currently the most used social media channels, this may change during the life of this strategy so we will continue to monitor emerging social media channels and grasp the opportunity to join in important conversations where they are happening locally.
5. Aim for digital by default – ensure online services are so easy to access and view online that it becomes the channel of choice.
6. Continue to develop e-newsletters, maximising the potential of Mailchimp and My Account to enable customers to subscribe to regular updates from services that interest them.
7. Make the best use of new and emerging technologies such as accessible animation and video to make sure we are reaching all our audiences. We will aim to create engaging, shareable content to encourage audiences to re-transmit our material.

² Facebook insights data 2018

8. Work with Leicestershire County Council to offer training and support to those people who do not currently access the internet but are interested in doing so.

Focus two: Making our communications and promotional campaigns insight-driven - based on what we know our customers want and where we can reach them

Why?

- Understanding audiences is essential to communications. By finding out more about audiences' attitudes, habits and preferences, insight can help ensure our communications are as relevant, meaningful and effective as possible
- Analytical tools enable us to evaluate the effectiveness of our communications, identifying which groups of customers we are reaching and importantly, the customers we are not reaching. This will help us to target information and messages effectively and efficiently

What we will do:

1. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our public relations activity, monitoring media coverage, social media reach and, where appropriate, attendance at events to evaluate and understand who we are reaching.
2. Identify the scope and frequency of customer insight and consultation arrangements across all service areas and understand how this insight can better drive communications and promotional activities.
3. Research and identify best practice customer consultation and customer insight arrangements in 'similar' district councils to identify any further potential to use insight to drive communication improvements.

Focus three: Providing a professional media office service to our media partners and to the authority's own service areas

Why?

The main media organisations operating in the Hinckley and Bosworth area are as follows:

media	circulation 2016	circulation 2017	circulation 2018	frequency
Hinckley Times	8093	7221	6220	weekly/paid
Leicester Mercury	25,859	not known	21,130	daily/paid/online
Grobby Spotlight			3,500	monthly/free
Local Rock (central Hinckley)			10,000	fortnightly/free
Local Rock (villages*)			14,500	fortnightly/free

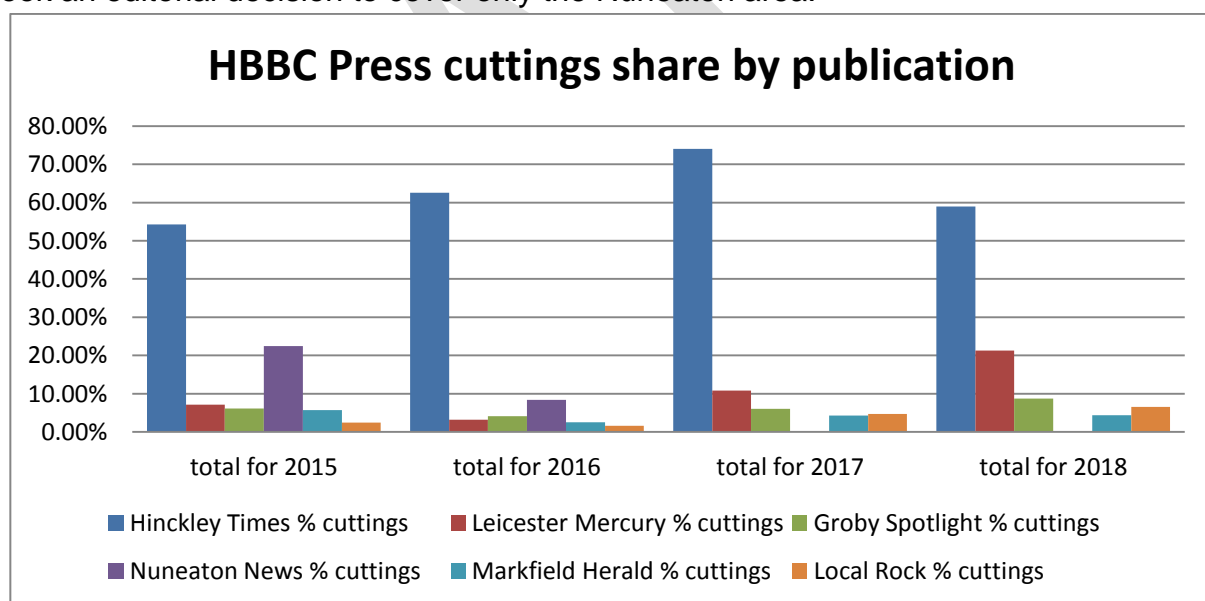
Markfield Herald			4,000	monthly/free
BBC Radio Leicester	118,000	161,000	172,000	daily broadcast
Fosse 107	26,000 per week	unknown	22,000 per week	daily broadcast
BBC East Midlands Today	unknown	unknown	unknown	daily broadcast
ITV Central	unknown	unknown	unknown	daily broadcast

Footnote:

Local Rock villages edition circulation goes beyond the HBBC boundary: Burbage, Wolvey, Burton Hastings, Aston Flamville, Sharnford, Sapcote, Stoney Stanton, Elmhurst, Earl Shilton, Peckleton, Kirkby Mallory, Dadlington, Thurlaston, Stoke Golding, areas of Barwell and Earl Shilton and the villages of Sutton Cheney and Cadeby. The Markfield Herald is distributed to Markfield, Stanton-under-Bardon, Field Head, Thornton and Bagworth.

The Leicester Mercury has a city and county wide distribution.

- HBBC issues around 200 press releases every year which generate around 880 press cuttings. The largest majority of those cuttings (60% on average) appear in the weekly Hinckley Times followed by the Leicester Mercury, which is covering an increasing proportion of HBBC stories in recent years. Other local titles also regularly feature council business, but this can fluctuate or even cease – in 2017 the Nuneaton News took an editorial decision to cover only the Nuneaton area.



- Traditional newspaper sales continue to decline. The latest audited circulation figures for the Hinckley Times show a circulation of 6220 copies per week in 2018, which is 14% less than the circulation in 2017 and 23% less than the circulation in 2016³. In early 2018 the Hinckley Times parent company undertook some substantial changes, shrinking the editorial team and moving online content away from the local Hinckley Times pages to the Leicestershire Live web site. Local editorial is shared between the Hinckley Times and the Leicester Mercury and supplemented with syndicated national content. In January 2019 the cover price increased by 18% to £1.30.
- However, the local media retain a loyal audience and its influence on the public, councillors and partners still remains. Even if circulation figures for the printed edition

³ ABC circulation figures 2018

continue to fall, its digital audience, particularly on social media, is significant so it is still an important and valued way of reaching our residents. According to the company that owns the Hinckley Times and the Leicester Mercury, the Leicestershire Live website (the site where Leicester Mercury and Hinckley Times stories are now published) boasts a monthly audience of 9 million users⁴. While this cannot be independently verified, it is a considerable audience.

The Borough Bulletin

1. The Borough Bulletin (BB) is a tabloid newspaper published by the council four times a year and distributed to every household in the borough. The BB was launched in 1998 as a means of communicating council news and information to residents and it continues to be an important way of reaching our residents. The aim is to ensure information reaches residents living in all areas, including areas that are already served by free and paid-for newspapers and areas that have no local newspapers.
2. Every service area, all parishes and key partners including Hinckley BID and Hinckley Leisure Centre, are offered the opportunity to include content in every edition. The content is then professionally copy written and presented including images wherever possible.
3. Each edition of the BB is distributed:
 - Spring edition – early March
 - Summer edition – early June
 - Autumn edition – early September
 - Winter edition – mid November
4. The council has a strong commitment to ensuring that every household receives a copy of the BB so for some years the council has directly employed staff to deliver to every property in each electoral ward. BBs are posted to a small number of very rural and hard to access properties to ensure that every property receives one.
5. The BB is supplied in accessible formats to residents on the council's preferred formats list. This includes an audio version (produced by local charity VISTA) and a large print version. The accessible format BB's are posted for free to hundreds of residents using the Royal Mail 'articles for the blind' service. Additionally the BB is available to read online via the council's website.
6. Anecdotal feedback from BB advertisers and service areas points to the BB being an effective way of reaching residents throughout the borough. In a 2018 residents' survey, 25% of residents said the Borough Bulletin is the most popular way for residents to receive information from the council.
7. In 2017, the communications team consulted with parishes on BB content and as a result, the BB now has a stronger community and people focus, with the content of each edition having a particular theme in addition to carrying council and community news and upcoming events. Feedback from parishes and residents to these changes has been positive.

What we will do:

⁴ Comscore data 2018

1. Continue to provide a regular flow of news releases suitable for local, regional and specialist media outlets. Wherever possible, we will provide ready to use images and web links with each news release to help to maximise coverage in print titles and for digital audiences.
2. We will maximise media coverage of council events and other key newsworthy activity by supplying ready to use copy and images as soon after the event as possible.
3. Continue to provide a reactive media service, responding to incoming media enquiries to ensure they are answered in a factual and timely fashion.
4. Proactively challenge and rebut misinformed and inaccurate news articles to ensure media coverage properly reflects facts. We will seek to avoid inaccurate stories by continuing to build good relationships with our media colleagues, ensuring the communications team has a sound reputation for responding to media deadlines and being clear when the authority is unable to provide a response.
5. Continue to produce four editions of The Borough Bulletin per year, enhancing and tweaking content and style to reflect the views of residents and stakeholders. We will use the power of storytelling to create an engaging, emotional connection with audiences.
6. Ensure the Borough Bulletin continues to be a popular way to receive information about the council, as measured by the annual resident satisfaction survey.

Focus four: Ensuring that whatever method we use to reach our customers, our communication continues to be timely, informative, engaging, accessible and factual.

Our communication and consultation activity will continue to be guided by the following principles which were established in 2006 to ensure that what we do achieves our ambitions:

1. We will ensure all communication is written in plain English so that it is clear, concise and accessible to everyone.
2. We will be open and transparent
3. We will be clear about what we are consulting on and tell people how their views can influence decisions.
4. We will publish the results of each consultation and tell people how we have used the findings.

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Communication Strategy 2019-2021

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1.1 Consultation and the Public Sector Equality Duty

On 5 April 2011, the public sector equality duty (the equality duty) came into force. The equality duty was created under the Equality Act 2010.

The public sector equality duty has a key role to play in making sure that fairness is at the heart of public bodies' work and that public services meet the needs in different groups. The public sector which includes Local Authorities is subject to general and specific duties as set out in section 149-159 of the Equality Act 2010.

The specific duty requires that the council takes into account gender, race and disability and also extends it to cover age, marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and gender re-assignment.

The Equality Act 2010 puts various requirements on organisations when exercising their functions. The general duty requires all organisations to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

1.2 Principles of Consultation

In order to make sure that consultation complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Government's Consultation Principles (as revised in 2018), we have adopted the following checks to guide how, when and why we consult:

Universal

The council is aware of demographic changes through economic migration and subsequent settlement as revealed in the 2011 census and will seek to identify and respond to emerging needs by way of communication and consultation.

Inclusive

We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure an inclusive approach to consultation and will make reasonable arrangements for anyone affected by a proposal or proposed service change to have an opportunity to have their say. This means we will not normally settle for approaches which we know will exclude people whose views may be significant in the context of the particular proposal. We will also have reference to corporate style guidelines in preparing consultation material.

Appropriate

We will ensure that our methodologies are appropriate to the needs and expectations of those whose views are sought, and presented in ways that are accessible and understandable (including, where necessary, making them available in other languages and formats). We will go to where people are, rather than expect them to come to us. Survey samples will be structured to include all whose views ought to be considered, and approaches will be designed to ensure that people are engaged with and involved at an appropriate level.

Timely

We will consult before decisions are made, rather than seek to secure approval for decisions already taken, and will allow sufficient time for people and organisations to respond.

Rigorous

We will ensure that our consultation work adheres to established good practice and professional disciplines, and follow recognised professional codes of practice. We will build adequate and proportionate quality checking into our processes to ensure the reliability and inclusiveness of the data we present.

Proportionate

Consultation will be tailored in size and complexity to the significance of the issue in question. We will not consult unnecessarily, or in ways which are excessive and disproportionate to the significance of the issue or its relevance to the respondents.

Usable

We will put the results of consultation in front of those who need them, helping them to respond appropriately to the issues raised and to use the data to make informed decisions. We will make sure that the key messages are communicated in clear, unambiguous ways and ensure clarity of understanding on the part of our audiences.

Meaningful

We will not undertake consultation purely to say we have done so. This wastes resources that could be spent securing useful information, and token approaches inevitably tarnish the perception of the council on the part of those consulted in such a manner.

Confidential

We will respect the confidentiality of those taking part in our survey work, and will comply with the 2018 Data Protection Act regarding the privacy and data handling of participants.

Accountable

We will publish the results of non-confidential research in accessible ways and will feed back to respondents on the results of research in which they have taken part. We will also communicate the action we intend to take as a result of discovering respondents' views and how we have responded to these, in a variety of ways to reflect the scale and method of consultation. This will always include survey results being posted under 'Have your say' on the council's website.

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