

Full Council Meeting – 7 July 2020

Report of Councillor Benet Allen – Deputy Leader and Communications & Culture

Communications - external

Business Support

Since the announcement of lockdown and the financial support grants from Central Government the communications team have been instrumental in ensuring our communications were reaching all corners of the district.

We used the following communication methods to support the grants:

Somerset County Gazette

The Gazette was used to support both print and digital awareness of the businesses grants.

Social Media and Facebook Videos (boosting posts)

Engaging posts and paying to boost posts to a demographic, ensured that our message was seen by every Facebook user within a confined area through target advertising.

Press Releases

Website

Both Visit Taunton and Somerset West and Taunton Council had information relating to advice and support and was updated regularly to reflect the changes from Central Government.

GovDelivery (E-Newsletters)

Learning from others, it was identified by introducing a new communication tool (GOV Delivery), to would help to support communications for local authorities dealing with the COVID-19 crisis.

As a function, we are producing weekly and bi-weekly newsletters, covering community and voluntary sector and our Economic Development and Inward Investment function. We are producing a number of bulletins to share information.

To better aid communications with residents and businesses within the District. We have procured and implemented GOVDelivery. You can subscribe to a number of topics from our website. Currently we hold about 15,000 email addresses that allows us to keep in contact and adopt a more pro-active

approach in getting our messages out. Many authorities using GOVDelivery have also indicated that the demand on customer services is reduced by their proactive approach of using GOVDelivery for messaging and is a large step forward in our drive for digital change and efficiencies.

As the process of lockdown eases, there has been work carried out to support the re-opening of the high streets.

Communications team have been responsible for producing a Re-opening of the High Street Toolkit. It was full of useful information for businesses to prepare themselves for the re-opening and signposted to other business support networks, including the Better Business for All and Heart of the South West Growth Hub. The tool kit can be accessed here:

www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/businesssupport.

Communications are working with an agency to assist in the social media messaging as the retail units start to open, this also includes the PHE messaging / Signposting to our website and GOV.uk.

We are producing and publishing daily footfall figures to better inform visitors and community members of quieter times to come into the County town.

Place Marketing (Visit Taunton)

Wi-Fi – Taunton, Wiveliscombe and Wellington continue to be promoted through the open Wi-Fi. Website – Taunton, Wiveliscombe, Wellington, Watchet and Minehead are now listed on the Visit Taunton website, with links to their respective sites.

Social Media for Visit Taunton as of 15 June:

12,754 – Facebook

3,734 – Instagram

7,865 – Twitter

Social Media for Somerset West and Taunton Council is:

3,502 - Facebook

1,256 – Instagram

1,788 – Twitter

2,972 – Business Twitter

Taunton Visitor Centre update

The Visitor Centre has continued to support and promote all marketing activities on all Social media platforms and through our Visit Taunton website. This means over 23,000 people will see Visit Taunton's posts, promoting Taunton and all it has to offer across our platforms.

Advertising opportunities in and around Taunton through Rotunda's, Pennant's and Banner's continue to be provided with regular bookings made with local businesses and events.

Communications - internal

SWT Staff Communications and Engagement during COVID-19 Pandemic

Background

The Coronavirus pandemic and following lockdown halted the regular face-to-face CEO all staff Team Talks, and Director's team meetings. However, prior to the lockdown we had already begun daily CEO communications about the situation to all staff, followed by directorate updates as the pandemic unfolded. This has continued during lockdown with daily CEO emails, weekly updates from Directors and some additional messaging in recognition of quickly became a new way of working for a large portion of staff. The objective is to ensure SWT staff not feel isolated or forgotten by the Council during these unprecedented times.

Channels

As well as emails, our internal communications are shared across the new social platform Microsoft TEAMS, and across a WhatsApp (mobile app) group specifically created to reach colleagues who work remotely out in the community, without a PC. Some messaging is also supported by posters in relevant locations, and PC screensavers. The aim is to ensure we capture all staff regardless of how they work.

Alongside this work, we have ensured we maintained any business as usual (BAU) messaging for those staff not directly involved in our COVID response work, and that we have also profiled their work.

Below is a list of COVID-19 communication activities since March 2020, designed to keep staff feeling informed and valued:

CEO Updates during COVID-19

A daily email from the CEO to all staff regarding COVID updates and the Council's position on any broadcast news announcements. At week 12, these emails have been reduced to twice weekly as staff have found their rhythm in their new world.

One a month, a CEO video update is also recorded and distributed to increase engagement levels as we know from research that face-to-face communications have more impact.

CEO Breakfasts

Via Microsoft TEAMS, this is an opportunity for colleagues to ask questions of the CEO in a live environment and to share their own views.

CEO Team Talks

Monthly all staff live updates via Microsoft TEAMS where people can hear directly from James in person and ask questions.

Directorate Updates

These are weekly or bi-weekly updates via emails and TEAMS from Directors regarding priorities and achievements to share successes across the organisation. Some Directors have also participated in video updates out to the organisation to increase morale and engagement levels.

HR and People Managers

We provide regular reviews and updates on processes and procedures that are flexing with people's needs as the landscape moves. These are distributed via emails, TEAMS and the WhatsApp group.

Health and Wellbeing

We have created a weekly wellbeing bulletin with tips and guides on holistic health and wellbeing (including nutrition), as well as staff stories about experiences during COVID lockdown. This content is mostly pulled together by the Wellbeing Champions at SWT and is distributed via email and the WhatsApp group.

Wellbeing Survey

At the beginning of June, a pulse survey was sent out to gauge staff morale, how they are coping with lockdown, and whether there are any gaps in the tools and information we are providing. The results are currently being analysed.

Health and Safety

Regular and continual updates on Government guidance and advice. Most of these messages are distributed using posters and PC screensavers, as well as the other channels mentioned above, again to ensure we capture everyone.

Weekly News Round-up

This provides colleagues with an opportunity to share their own news, via email and the WhatsApp group. Stories are mostly about the work they are doing and are most proud of, and we often receive photos to support each story.

Staff FaceBook page

This is an area where colleagues socialise, sharing music, recipes and generally holding the conversations they would normally hold were they allowed to meet after work.

In addition to these regular communications, we have begun a project to identify our customer and employee value proposition, which will help inform the ensuing employee communications strategy and support the current CEO Communications Strategy.

Culture

Cultural strategy

During May, the council's Arts and Cultural consultant (Ann Jones, Art Projects & Solutions) contacted key cultural partners and members of the council's Cultural Forum to conduct some research on how COVID-19 has impacted their organisation and changed how they work.

The research also considered:

- How this will change how the organisation operates and delivers its activities in the future
- Views on how people will want to express their creativity and consume culture in a post-COVID world

- What organisations need to adapt to the needs of your audiences and beneficiaries post-
- COVID
- Any positives that organisation may have experienced as a result of the lockdown

The findings of this research have recently been shared with Officers and will now be used to help inform the draft Cultural Strategy and delivery plan, which will also now be aligned with the council's economic recovery plans.

SWT has continued its support for the Brewhouse and the delivery of Taunton Theatre Associations programme of arts, cultural, social and leisure offers this year. Following the government's guidance the Theatre closed the building on 17th March, and have since worked hard to continue to provide arts, culture and leisure opportunities adapting to online provision, which has worked extremely well. During the lockdown period TTA have continued to plan for further adaptations, new offers for the Taunton town centre and are preparing for reopening to the public as soon as it is safe to do so.

The outcome of the cultural youth survey has yielded responses from over 700 young people between the ages of 16-18 and a final review and analysis of the findings is imminent which could inform the multi-purpose venue from a young person's cultural need as well as enhancing the evening leisure offer of our towns.

A report is being prepared for the Local Government Association on how Councils can support the cultural and creative sector with examples of best practice, toolkits etc. to inform our strategy – the case study is currently being updated before publication by the LGA.

The Somerset cultural alliance has been encouraged to put in an application for the Business Rates Pilot programme providing cluster/sector capacity funding of up to £25k.

The Somerset Cultural Alliance has engaged with Visit Somerset and the Leisure and Hospitality sector to put in a bid of £0.5m from the Business Rates funding pilot to support their recovery and a detailed work plan is under development. The economic development team has been encouraging the County and SWT recovery plans to recognise this sector and support its recovery.

Hestercombe and Take Arts have been funded from the cultural grant pot as National Partner Organisations of the Arts Council.

Outside Bodies

I have held meetings with the management of the West Somerset Railway to re-establish the Partnership Development Group, and to raise awareness of the Railway's situation with the councillors and the two MPs who represent its route.

Unfortunately neither of the latter attended, although communications have been established.

SWT is also represented by myself on the board of the Minehead Amateur Theatrical Association, which looks after the Regal Theatre. Although theatrical performance is impossible in the current crisis, volunteers at the Regal are looking at other activities which are compatible with social distancing, as are the staff of the Brewhouse Theatre in Taunton.