



**OPEN REPORT  
GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

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**Governance and Resources Committee – 6 June 2024**

**Communications and Marketing Strategy – Annual Report 2024/25**

**Report of the Director of Corporate and Customer Services**

**Report Author and Contact Details**

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**Wards Affected**

District Wide

**Report Summary**

The Communication and Marketing Strategy sets out how residents, employees and service users are kept informed about what the District Council is doing, how it is spending public money, and the District Council services they can access.

**Recommendations**

1. That the strategic framework of the current Communications and Marketing Strategy is noted.
2. That the Action Plan for 2024/25 is approved.

**List of Appendices**

List all appendices as follows:

Appendix 1 Draft Communications and Marketing Strategy

**Background Papers**

None

**Consideration of report by Council or other committee**

Not applicable

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from Press or Public**

No

# Communications and Marketing Strategy – Annual Report 2024/25

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The District Council adopted its current Communications and Marketing Strategy in September 2014, reflecting the development of technology and the needs both of the public and the District Council, which had evolved dramatically since the previous strategy's adoption in 2011. This ninth annual update sets ambitious yet realistic targets to support the Council's Corporate Objectives and core values.
- 1.2 The aim of the Strategy is to ensure our communications help to promote a positive image of the Council, and, in marketing terms, it's designed to help us to meet the needs and wants of our customers in a fast moving digital world through a multi-channel approach. Associated with the Strategy is an annual Action Plan, which this report reviews, also setting new targets for the coming year.
- 1.3 The adopted Strategy sets out a multi-channel approach to reach a wide variety of customers and stakeholders, underlining traditional forms of communication while embracing more modern approaches.
- 1.4 Communicating well is the responsibility of everyone and the Strategy is designed to be a useful tool for the corporate leadership team, heads of services and all employees and elected members. It sets a framework for communications and gives direction to all media, online, internal, marketing, publications and public relations communications actively undertake on behalf of the district council.
- 1.5 The Communications and Marketing Strategy sets out ways to:
  - Make the Council easy to understand and talk to
  - Co-ordinate and direct communications
  - Ensure that everyone understands our targets and what the outcomes will be
  - Ensure that staff and partners understand their contribution
  - Make sure people know the outcome of the changes the District Council makes
  - Ensure openness and transparency
  - Make people feel better informed, proud to live in Derbyshire Dales, proud to work for the Council and proud to work with it.
- 1.6 The Strategy (attached as Appendix 1) is without a timeframe. This is deliberate and seeks to set a strategic framework with a more dynamic approach to actions which can be measured by way of an Annual Action Plan, monitored by a Communications & Marketing Hub, comprising officers from all Council service areas.

## 2. Review of 2023/24 Action Plan

- 2.1 ACTION: Lead partners in on-going communication of the £15-million Levelling Up town centre programme in Ashbourne.

PROGRESS: Partnership communications tools created by the District Council's communications team (Facebook Twitter X, Instagram and e-newsletter), plus a dedicated web area which, in the coming months, will have a unique presence and new URL. Work continues to prepare residents and stakeholders for work that will transform Ashbourne town centre. The vital communications work has been enhanced by the temporary appointment at the start of 2024 of Anna Paxton as Communication Officer with direct responsibility for Ashbourne Reborn. Anna takes the District Council's communications team numbers up from two to three.

- 2.2 ACTION: Continue to monitor and improve with the in-house IT web development team the new [www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk](http://www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk) website, scheduled to launch at the end of 2022.

PROGRESS: Our new accessible website was relaunched on schedule. We worked hard to make the website more accessible, including halving the number of pages and improving the navigation. We've also made the content more engaging and easier to understand, making it more straightforward to do business with the District Council.

- 2.3 ACTION: Ensure all leases and licences include District Council branding requirements by condition to enhance the authority's reputation, linking to the Events Strategy.

PROGRESS: This continues.

- 2.4 ACTION: Continue to utilise our online panel to gauge the overall level of satisfaction in the District Council.

PROGRESS: This continues. Our Policy Officer has access via our e-newsletter to 2,254 contacts who have signed up to our online panel. An annual satisfaction survey is facilitated, and the Communications Department also continues to create ongoing satisfaction surveys for individual service areas.

- 2.5 ACTION: Continue to generate sponsorship to support the Action Plan, focusing on welcome signs, parks signs and Big Belly Bins, introducing poster frames to the Big Belly Bins and additional commercial income from advertising in our paid-for public toilets and the Dales Matters publication.

PROGRESS: Moderate success in this area in a difficult commercial climate, including a new tickets sponsorship for the 2023 Matlock Bath Illuminations, which we have improved again in 2024. Big Belly Bins branding has been costed and promoted; some interest but no sign-ups yet. However, a more professional approach to asset generation is proposed in 3.1 for the coming year.

- 2.6 ACTION: Continue to measure the success of large event promotions and marketing (eg Matlock Bath Illuminations) via social media engagement tools, post-event surveys and takings/visitor numbers.

PROGRESS: The post event survey for the Illuminations in particular is valuable in analysing likes and dislikes and making appropriate adjustments. This year, for example, we are introducing a brochure, which responds to

demand (in the survey) and will also boost revenue. Social media promotion of the Illuminations is phenomenally successful. Our Illuminations Facebook page, which now has 46,000 followers, sells the event at virtual nil marketing cost. The page is also a vital tool in terms of engaging visitors, helping them with any queries and reminding them of important information regarding tickets, timings, transport and parking options. Facebook also helps us to understand our audience and get the tone of our posts right. For example, analytics reveal that 86.5% of our followers are female, the vast majority aged 25-44, with the highest number living in Sheffield, followed by Stoke-on-Trent, Derby, Mansfield, Nottingham and Chesterfield.

- 2.7 ACTION: The Hub will take the lead on important corporate communications issues, including crisis communications.

PROGRESS: The value of our crisis communications is underlined in events such as Storm Babet, where we issued posts throughout the night via our flood teams on the ground.

### **3. New Action Plan, 2024/25**

- 3.1 ACTION: Generating additional revenue from asset generation is proposed to be our key action for the coming year. Contract negotiations are at an advanced stage with one of the fastest growing media companies in their field with the aim of generating more commercial income from the assets we own as a District Council.

The media company, which works on a commission basis, currently has relationships with several small district councils and some of the largest counties, working in historic towns and visitor hotspots such as Harrogate. They also have the sales contract for 1,000 buses across the UK and 23 regional airports.

Asset generation isn't new for the District Council, but we can do it better. Currently, as a Council, we generate a relatively small amount per year in sponsorship and advertising; indeed selling sponsorship and advertising is currently a minor part of some colleagues' wider job roles and is done very much on an ad hoc basis and when resources allow. The media company are specialists in this field, printing and fitting everything themselves, including gadgets such as digital display boards in car parks. They also specialise in lamppost banners, bridges and poster sites, plus more traditional advertising and sponsorship.

As the locations for display boards etc are within the District Council's ownership, we will retain control of the decision-making process, which will be important to manage any sensitivities around proposed sitings.

We will have a better idea of the likely level of income when the company carry out initial site assessments. We have a draft contract implementation plan that envisages planning applications as early as week 4 of the contract, with the first sales forecast in week 10.

The company offers a 5-year contract (break clause at 3 years) with a 60/40 revenue share in the council's favour. They forecast 90% of the shared revenue

will come from local businesses. They don't cold-call clients; instead they target businesses through direct mail and social media.

- 3.2 ACTION: Complete the parks signage project by introducing new corporate signs in our Lovers' Walks and Derwent Gardens in Matlock Bath. Funds have been set aside in the Communications and Marketing budget from income raised previously from sign sponsorship to carry out this work in 2024/25. The signage will be similar to that installed recently in our large parks in Ashbourne, Bakewell and Matlock.



- 3.3 ACTION: Continue to lead partners in on-going communication of the £15-million Levelling Up town centre programme in Ashbourne.
- 3.4 ACTION: Continue to monitor and improve with the in-house IT web development team the new [www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk](http://www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk) website.
- 3.5 ACTION: Continue to ensure all leases and licences include District Council branding requirements by condition to enhance the authority's reputation, linking to the Events Strategy.
- 3.6 ACTION: Continue to utilise our online panel to gauge the overall level of satisfaction in the District Council.
- 3.7 ACTION: Working with the Communications and Marketing Hub, led by the Communications and Marketing Manager, continue to examine new ways of improving communications, both external and internal, and maximise commercial income opportunities.
- 3.8 ACTION: The Communications and Marketing Hub will take the lead on important corporate communications issues, including crisis communications.
- 3.9 ACTION: Continue to measure the success of large event promotions and marketing (eg Matlock Bath Illuminations) via social media engagement tools, post-event surveys and takings/visitor numbers.
- 3.10 Communicate progress on the District Council's UKSPF Investment Plan (2022–2025)

#### **4. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal**

- 4.1 It is recommended that the annual report be noted and the 2024/25 Action Plan approved.

#### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 This report does not seek a decision to make changes to policy or procedure and therefore it has not been subject to consultation.

#### **6. Timetable for Implementation**

- 6.1 The Civic Year 2024/25
- 6.2 The proposed media contract (3.1) will be monitored and managed by the Communications and Marketing Manager

#### **7. Policy Implications**

- 7.1 This report links to the Council's [Consultation and Engagement Strategy](#).

#### **8. Finance and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 The Communications and Marketing Strategy can be delivered within existing budgets and, therefore, the financial risk arising from this report is low.

#### **9. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 9.1 The Legal Services Manager has approved the draft contract with CP Media.

#### **10. Equalities Implications**

- 10.1 There are no direct equality or diversity issues arising from this report, so it has not been necessary to prepare an Equality Impact Assessment.

#### **11. Climate Change Implications**

- 11.1 There are no direct implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change arising from this report.

#### **12. Risk Management**

- 12.1 The approval of the strategy is in itself a mitigation against risks facing the Council in respect of events held on Council owned land. Providing a clear strategic direction for officers is a necessity.  
Approvals obtained from:

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive	Paul Wilson	10/07/2024

Director of Resources/ S.151 Officer (or Financial Services Manager)	Gemma Hadfield	10/07/2024
Monitoring Officer (or Legal Services Manager)	Helen Mitchell	10/7/2024