

# LTC Communications Strategy:

## Ideas and Questions

### Aim:

To engage and communicate with all residents within the Parish of Lowestoft to tell the story of Lowestoft Town Council and to bring the community together.

### Why:

Important that members of the community feel a part of the Town Council (“A Town Council for Lowestoft”) and understand and appreciate our journey as a new council finding its voice to one that is “**Delivering for Lowestoft**”.

n.b. Using the term “*story*” highlights that this is a developing message that is all encompassing and linked together.

### Context to consider:

Whilst an important tool, it is worth noting that Lowestoft Town Council’s social media accounts are **followed by 3.4k people** (Facebook) out of a **population of 50,000** (approx.). The age range of followers mostly falls in the **35-44 and 45-54 age brackets** (although it is worth noting that the ongoing Sports Facilities Provision Survey currently has **the most responses from the 65 and older age range** followed by the 35-44 and 55-64 age ranges). More could be done to get social media posts more reach including using paid-for ads and boosting of specific posts. It is clear that, although social media offers an immediacy for communicating (and has its benefits and drawbacks for conversation and engagement), not enough people within Lowestoft across the population use social media or follow the Town Council’s accounts.

Another useful tool in communicating with members of the public is the use of the Town Council’s public noticeboards. The Town Council currently has **14 noticeboards** within its parks and open spaces however, these vary in sizes which makes **a uniformed approach to publicity difficult**. These noticeboards also need to hold more statutory information such as election notices and audit information. How spread these noticeboards are across Lowestoft also makes keeping the noticeboards updated a challenge (covering all the noticeboards is more than half-a-days work, including travel).

Press releases to The Lowestoft Journal are also a good way of communicating to a wider audience however, there are a number of things to consider here including the editing of press releases, press releases not being published prominently or at all, and a declining circulation of the newspaper. A recent change in the papers ownership and significant cut backs in staffing has also meant that the paper covers stories from a wider area than before. This is also true for other mainstream media outlets, including local BBC radio reporting and ITV Anglia as localised reporting sees further cuts.

It is also **worth considering that Lowestoft Town Council has made a climate declaration** alongside an Earth Protector Town declaration and commitments to being carbon neutral and

plastic-free. These are all important details for establishing ways to communicate with the wider public.

## Ideas (and questions) on moving forward:

Every year, the Town Council has promised to the people of Lowestoft, through its Council Tax leaflet, that it will grow its engagement and listen to the voices of the Town. Here are a few ideas as to how this could be achieved, with some further questions that need to be considered:

### In-Person Events

Councillors could consider hosting in-person drop-in events throughout the year. These could be as simple as Ward Councillor drop-ins or be larger community events around campaigns and consultations. This sort of engagement would give a physical presence throughout the town. These could include:

- **Regular engagement sessions.** This could be a series of drop-in sessions across different locations (using community halls and open spaces if the weather is appropriate) which could have a theme (*“What are LTC doing about the climate?”*, *“How can LTC improve \*insert location\*?”*, *“How are LTC delivering for Lowestoft?”* etc.). These could also take place at different times to engage with different people and would be focused on the theme (although will always welcome other comments) to allow for the appropriate preparation in resources and present personnel.
- **Consultation-focused engagement.** An example would be the Sports Facilities Provision Survey which could be a in-person drop-ins within various parks with chance to ask questions and fill in the survey. A targeted approach would allow for users of the park to be consulted.
- **LTC stall at all LTC events** (where appropriate). This would need to be considered within the event plan and ensure that there were enough councillors and officers on the stall throughout the event to talk to members of the public. Further consideration would be to attend externally organised events. The Town Council is already committed to attending the SWT Eco-Event in April 2024.

### Benefits

- Town Council meeting people where they are and engage with different people,
- Would encourage conversations and give the Town Council a “face”,
- Could help in explain decisions, processes and responsibilities.

### Challenges

- Making sure enough people are present to make the event a success,
- Making sure councillors and officers are suitably briefed and “on-message” and are prepared for possible confrontation and difficult members of the public. Ensuring positive engagement,
- Making sure LTC isn’t branded as “the Council” and can helpfully signpost where needs be.

## Questions

- Would such events be well enough attended?
- Is there enough time for a regular timetabling of such events around council meetings and other commitments?
- Do we have enough resources (*e.g. in personnel, hand-outs, advertising (i.e. banners, gazebos, tables, chairs)*)
- Where would these events take place?
- How often should these take place?
- How can we make these accessible to all?
- How would these be advertised?
- How would we communicate the results of the engagement and the impact it has made?
- How do we make sure this isn't seen as a "box ticking" exercise?
- Do we join with other engagement events (*i.e. East Suffolk Council Communities Team*) or look to have a presence at other events? *The SWT Eco-event will be a good gauge for this.*

## LTC Newsletter

Having a regular newsletter (either quarterly or bi-annually) has been mooted in the past. This has the benefit of delivering communication on what the Town Council is doing directly onto people's doorsteps however, there are logistical challenges.

### Benefits

- LTC Communication delivered directly to residents' homes on a regular basis,
- The newsletter can include a wide range of news in a clear format, including the use of photographs (feedback so far on the council tax leaflet for 2024 has welcomed how visual and bold it was),
- Newsletter could also be made into a digital version for the website (and for email delivery).

### Challenges

- Ensuring that all the content is to a high standard and is received by an appropriate deadline (many quarterly magazines have a deadline two-months before publishing),
- Meeting deadlines for editing, proof-reading, printing and postage may make some information out-of-date by the time people read it,
- The logistics of getting the newsletter delivered to addresses only within the parish of Lowestoft and associated costs. The only viable option would be to outsource the delivery. Royal Mail would be able to deliver for around £2000 +VAT for every edition but they are unable to do partial postcodes so some areas of other parishes would be included whilst some areas within the parish are missed,
- Ensuring that the printing of the newsletter and delivery is inline with our climate declarations,
- How do we ensure that GDPR is followed if we are collecting emails for delivering an email newsletter? Who would be responsible?

## Questions

- How regular would this newsletter be delivered?
- Is it solely a Lowestoft Town Council newsletter or would it welcome outside articles from community groups?
- Would we seek advertising/sponsorship?
- What would its format be and how long would it be? Would it be news-focused or include interactive elements (crosswords/sudoku/quizzes etc.) and questions/surveys for people to be involved in?
- Will it be designed in-house or by an external company?
- Who would be editor and what would the editing process and approval include? Councillor involvement?
- What guidelines do we want in place for what could be published? How would we ensure the newsletter is not used for promoting individual councillors?
- How can we mitigate against the climate impact?
- How would this be delivered?

## Communications Budget

A dedicated Communications Budget for promotion of the Town Council could help with wider campaigns where the promotion of which is not covered by event budgets. This could be used to purchase:

- Paid-for ads on social media (would increase reach and engagement outside our following),
- Wider advertising campaigns promoting parks, facilities, litter awareness, “Have your say...” opportunities, LTC commitments (*see council tax leaflet*), community grants (*both the awarding of and how to apply*). Budget would finance environmentally-friendly and professional printing of posters/banners/resource materials, and advertising within the Town Centre (*advertising boards, bus shelters, lampposts, buses*) and in community publications,
- One-off purchases would include a new, smaller and light-weight gazebo for use at events, branded roll-up banners, fold-out table and chairs for stalls and display cases for promotional materials. (n.b. *This could come out of the existing Community Engagement budget*).

## Benefits

- Would put the Town Council’s image in-front of different people (*Good example is the use of LTCs own vans gives a moving advertisement for the Town Council*),
- Would give an over-arching strategy to LTC communication plans,
- Social media ad campaigns are relatively cheap with large gains.

## Challenges

- Campaigns would need to be planned in advance if using a wider advertising package due to the time-frames campaigns can be run (*likely to be more competition for advertising space in the summer*),

- Danger of advertising campaigns continuing past their use (e.g. *Marina Theatre Pantomime posters still on some buses two/three months after the event*). I don't believe that this incurs an extra cost to the advertising campaign.
- Although the cost for social media campaigns is small, larger campaigns involving physical advertising is more expensive depending upon the package used.

## Questions

- What outcomes are hoping to be achieved? How are they going to be measured?
- Is this public money well spent?
- Would this be a fully delegated or partly delegated budget?