

Communications and Engagement Strategy

Progress Report January 2022



To All West Berkshire Libraries Customers

We are pleased to bring you the latest news from West Berkshire Libraries, including details about the services we are currently able to provide in line with government guidance on managing the risk of COVID-19.

Visitors welcome!

The new tiered restrictions for managing COVID-19 allow us to admit people to library buildings again in limited numbers in West Berkshire from Saturday 5 December.



The Communications and Engagement Strategy in numbers



6725
viewings of Council
and Executive

157 public surveys
and consultations



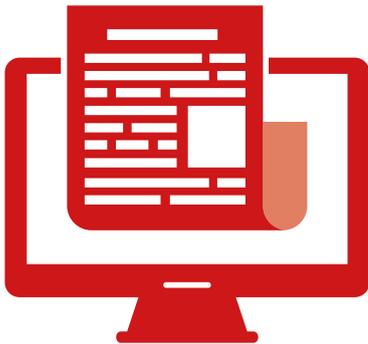
219
public
questions
answered



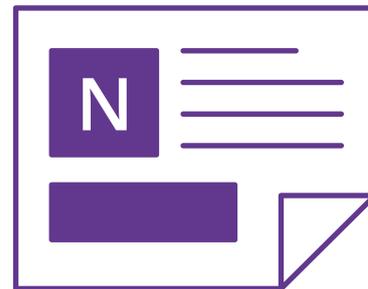
Subscribe



64,900 subscribers to
Gov Delivery



4.6m newsletters sent out



20
newsletter
topics

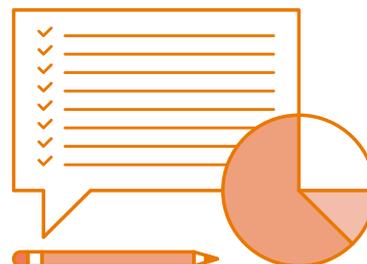
New Nextdoor account
which is accessed by

22,800 members in
WB across

18,300
households

and **92** neighbourhoods

8
Ask Lynne
sessions
hosted



**Bi-annual
Resident
Survey
launched**

Introduction from the Leader of the Council

Effective communication and engagement is vital if local authorities are to ensure their services, and the way they are delivered, meet the needs of the residents they serve. At West Berkshire Council, we are committed to properly informing, consulting and involving our residents in their local services. We must also be confident that the aspirations laid out in West Berkshire 2036 (the long term vision for West Berkshire) and our new Council Strategy (2019-2023) have the best possible chance of being met and that the outcomes for local people are the best they can be.

As part of our drive to interact ever more closely with our communities, we invited the Local Government Association (LGA) into the Council in November 2019 to assess, among other things, how we might do this. They offered some useful suggestions as to how we might make communication and engagement central to the organisation and we began to develop what is now the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

Although we had begun to develop a new approach following the LGA review, the local response to Covid-19 has accelerated this significantly. When we went into a nationwide lockdown in March 2020, timely, effective and engaging communications became an urgent necessity, rather than a medium term aspiration. The Council's approach to communications and engagement had to be, and was, transformed overnight as we responded to events that would have been unthinkable just a few months previously. Although the Pandemic has been the most difficult period in living memory, it has left behind it a legacy of communities coming together to help others, and working with us as

the local authority to mitigate the impact of the virus. Though the delivery of the strategy, we have built on this spontaneous response and have been better involving local people in our work.

With these commitments came the necessary investment, with new resources deployed and enhanced engagement undertaken within the community. By creating of the Engaging and Enabling Local Communities Programme, rolling out a new community newsletter, organising online events and improving our consultation framework, we have strengthened our links with local people and have ensured that their voice is reflected more strongly in our service planning.

In the following pages, you will find details of the progress made to date on each of actions contained within the strategy's delivery plan. Our task is not complete, however: we recognise the need to continuously review our engagement and look for opportunities to improve in the interests of all who live, work and learn in West Berkshire



**Councillor Lynne Doherty
Leader and Portfolio Holder
for Communications**

Theme: Inform

Actions completed-**84%**

Actions in progress-**16%**

Corporate adoption of GovDelivery to increase reach and ensure consistency
A weekly Council newsletter would be produced using this platform and all other newsletter would also use this platform. COMPLETED

The use of video will be extended with a particular focus on hard to reach groups. COMPLETED

Review and renew the website to ensure it remains fit for purpose IN PROGRESS

Social media content is expanded to assist in helping engage hard to reach groups COMPLETED

Campaign focused around each of the Council's key priorities is planned annually COMPLETED

In respect of internal communications a monthly email is provided by the Leader /Chief Executive in addition to the staff newsletter Reporter. COMPLETED

Our progress so far

- We have made strong progress with our newsletter, with:
 - ✓ 20 topic subscriptions
 - ✓ 302 e-bulletins sent
 - ✓ 4.6m recipients with a 53.5% open rate
 - ✓ Most popular bulletins are:
 - o Coronavirus bulletin (41,000 subscribers)
 - o Residents' news bulletin (21,500 subscribers)
 - o Waste and Recycling (18,700 subscribers)
- We have expanded our use of video significantly, both internally and externally. We have introduced Facebook Q&As with the Leader and senior officers, hosted webinars on a series of topics and use videos more often to promote our work
- Our website review is well underway with our waste and recycling pages among those that have already been migrated to a clearer, more accessible format
- We have launched our annual campaign plan with activity focussed more clearly on resident priorities and how council tax is spent

Case study- Gov Delivery

In April 2020, West Berkshire Council adopted a new email marketing platform to enhance its email communication with residents. The first bulletin was launched at the height of the pandemic and focused on health advice, how to access support and changes to our services. In the first 18 months 74 Covid-19 bulletins were issued to residents to around 40,000 residents - delivering 4.6m emails into their inbox.

Additional topics have been since been added and residents can now choose to hear from

us on up to 20 different topics – from culture and libraries to the environment and business there is something for everyone. There are now 64,900 subscribers with each choosing on average to hear from us on three different topics. Feedback from residents has been positive, and we will continue to look at how we can develop this further.



- Preparation of a consultation framework to guide and inform the Council's consultation activities COMPLETED
- Publication of a 12 month Consultation Plan COMPLETED
- The retention of Consultation Portal but with enhanced feedback COMPLETED
- Replacing the Community Panel with something that is truly representative of the local community and which enables more of a listening approach COMPLETED
- The establishment of an annual Residents Survey to measure service satisfaction and Council reputation COMPLETED

Case study - 2020 Resident Survey

During May/June 2020, soon after the first national lockdown, the Council conducted an online Covid-19 Residents Survey. This proved a very useful engagement exercise to understand service satisfaction levels and the impact of the pandemic on residents. The views of over 3,300 residents that responded to the survey have informed a number of strategies and plans, including the Recovery and Renewal Strategy, the Communication and Engagement Strategy and the refresh of the Council Strategy.

Lessons learned from the residents survey included the need to maintain this type of engagement and to ensure that the survey captures the feedback from an as broad as possible range of residents.

The current Residents Survey will use questions from the Local Government

Our progress so far

- Publication of an 'annual' rolling consultation plan – arrangements are in place for any member of staff to submit a new consultation exercise entry to be added on the Forward Plan using a digital form on the intranet (<https://intranet/index.aspx?articleid=32548>). This also ensures the Communications Team is notified so they can update their communications forward plan. In addition, as part of quarterly performance data gathering, all services are asked to notify if they have any consultation exercises planned for the subsequent 12 months.
- Review of Consultation Portal – this has been migrated and is now available to the public as the Consultation and Engagement Hub (<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/consultations>). Residents can see current consultations and access the reports that show the Council's response to previous consultations
- Residents Survey – A representative residents' survey has been commissioned and will take place between in October and November. The results to will be published during Q4 2021/22

Association's (LGA) "Are you Being Served" survey model in order to support benchmarking of the results where data is available.

5,000 questionnaires have been sent to households that have been randomly selected from based on the total ward population as a proportion of the district's total.

The selected households have received the questionnaire together with a letter from the Leader, inviting them to respond (on paper or online) and explaining the importance of sharing their views.

The results are expected during Jan – Mar 2022 and will be shared with all the residents on the Council's website.

Theme: Involve

Actions complete-**50%**
Actions in progress-**25%**
Actions delayed-**25%**

- To consider rebranding the Council
DELAYED
- Greater engagement through social media
COMPLETED
- Greater use of media briefings
COMPLETED
- Placing clear expectations on managers to ensure a more consistent approach to engagement with staff and partners
IN PROGRESS

Our progress so far

- It has been decided that undertaking a branding exercise cannot be prioritised at this time as it is likely that costs would be high
- Our social media engagement has grown significantly, with:
 - ✓ Twitter – 3.2m impressions (no. times tweets seen)
 - ✓ Facebook – posts seen 4.4m times
 - ✓ New Nextdoor account which is accessed by West Berkshire 22,800 members across 18,300 households and 92 neighbourhoods
- The weekly briefings for the media started during the pandemic have been retained, with local journalists meeting regularly with senior members and officers. This is now an important part of our open and transparent approach to communicating
- All council service areas are being supported to enhance the level of activity they undertake when consulting the public. This is also helped by the establishment of a weekly Communications Steering Group, where all departments meet to discuss engagement activity and are given direction and advice by the Communications Team

Case study - Social media stats/Ask Lynne

In 2020, a new virtual question time with the Council Leader was launched. #AskLynne provides a chance for residents to hear directly from the Leader and to put their questions to her, either in advance or during the event itself. It means residents can share their views on issues and ask questions directly from their own homes.

So far seven of these virtual events have been held on Facebook, with plans to rotate with

YouTube and other social media platforms. Feedback from residents has been positive, with these events attracting more resident participation than many public Council meetings.



- Reviewing our engagement with Parish and Town Councils IN PROGRESS
- Adopting co-production as a guiding principle to the way in which we collaborate IN PROGRESS
- Establishing a new overarching strategic partnership to guide our engagement work IN PROGRESS



Our progress so far

- Reviewing our engagement with Parish and Town Councils has begun with 75% of towns and parishes responding to engagement during the summer. An Engagement Report has been shared with an invite for town and parish colleagues to join us in co-designing an improvement plan.
- Scoping has taken place on a co-production framework, with a Strategy Board held at the end of September to develop and understand the direction that co-production should first take.
- A new overarching strategic partnership has met for the first time to guide our engagement work. This will be known as the Empowering Communities Partnership and will connect to the extensive community network which exists to support all of West Berkshire's communities.

Case study- Parish engagement work/community conversation

In recognition of the valuable contribution that town and parish councils make, West Berkshire Council has committed to reviewing and improving engagement with local towns and parishes. The work is underpinned by a commitment to working alongside our communities.

To begin this review, we undertook a survey and some 'Community Conversation' style workshops over the summer. During this time we heard from a total of 56 representatives covering 45 different town and parish councils. This means that we reached 75% of town and parish councils who shared how they feel about their relationship with West Berkshire Council and how we could improve the way we work together.

The feedback has shown us that most town and parish councils (68%) reported that their relationship with the Council was excellent or good. A further 28% said they had a fair relationship. There were themes within the feedback which our town and parish council colleagues identified where we can work together to improve our relationships. They are:

- Communications
- Engagement
- General customer service
- Customer service improvements in specific service areas
- Resources
- Planning and delivering services together

Following this significant engagement with Town and Parish Councils, the next steps will involve working together to co-design an improvement plan to address the themes identified.

Theme: Empower

Actions complete-50%

Actions in progress-37.5%

Actions delayed-25%

- Commissioning a Community and Voluntary Sector Support Organisation to provide support to, and build capacity within, the local community, voluntary and social enterprise sector IN PROGRESS
- Agreeing a corporate approach to engaging communities more fully in the design of public buildings and public realm DELAYED
- Introducing a new scheme for generating staff suggestions to replace Lions Lair COMPLETED
- Commissioning a BAMER advocacy group COMPLETED
- Realigning the Building Communities Together Programme with this new approach and newly established senior management structure COMPLETED
- Developing a 'Community Engagement Framework' IN PROGRESS
- Maintaining signposting and connections to community support functions COMPLETED
- Distributing of a new grant fund to support community based engagement work IN PROGRESS

Our progress so far

- We have undertaken two phases of engagement with our Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to understand support needs amongst the sector. The second phase was co-designed with sector colleagues. Responding directly to the feedback we gathered, the Council's Executive has agreed to award a grant to the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire for up to five years for the support they offer on the brokerage of volunteering opportunities. The Executive has also

agreed to invest almost £60k per year for up to five years to commission services that support VCS colleagues in the running of their organisations. Finally, because the council was seen as best placed to provide safeguarding advice and training, the council will provide support direct to the sector on safeguarding. We expect these solutions to be in place by the 1st of April 2022.

- A 'Diverse Ethnic Community Advocacy Service' was commissioned earlier this year to provide service users from diverse ethnic communities with support, representation and a voice. The service, provided by Educafe, aims to empower individuals and communities to identify and benefit from their own strengths and resources.
- We have worked to realigning the Building Communities Together Programme to ensure there is clarity internally and externally as to where responsibility for driving and overseeing community engagement lies. The BCT Team is now aligned with the Council's Community and Wellbeing Service.
- As part of our work with community groups through our 'Community Conversations', we have begun to introduce a community mapping facility. This work does not duplicate that of the West Berkshire Directory, but is aimed at maintaining signposting and connections to very local community support functions. The learning gained by rolling out community mapping will inform the development of future such signposting facilities.
- Linked to the new 'Empowering Communities Partnership' which will guide our engagement work, we will develop and distribute a new grant fund to support community based engagement work. The ECP has met once to date and the criteria and process of this grant stream will be developed shortly to align with community aspirations.

Case study- Educafe

Our Diverse Ethnic Community Advocacy Service, delivered by Educafé mobilised and launched in May 2021. Since July, Educafé have been providing a weekly Community Café which is seeing more than 100 visitors each week.

A number of varied activities have been developed alongside the Educafé weekly session to provide additional value to the community; this includes a new 'Parent's Village' with more than 40 families sharing a WhatsApp group to support each other. Café visitors also benefit from:

- Befriending
- Free refreshments
- Arts and Crafts
- Knit and natter
- English conversation practise
- Children's story telling
- Partner Village (where local service providers set up information stalls)

Educafé are also working through social media channels to make connections with people across West Berkshire. Since launching, Educafé have reached around 11,000 people through social media sites and have developed a fully translatable info-website.



- Establishing clear customer standards which are made accessible to all customers IN PROGRESS
- Introducing a training and development programme IN PROGRESS
- Considering the expansion of artificial intelligence and the introduction of webchat IN PROGRESS
- Continuing to pursue an approach based on 'digital by default' IN PROGRESS
- Developing a culture of providing customer feedback and to design systems that automatically enable this. IN PROGRESS
- Enhancing and coordinating the monitoring of customer demand and satisfaction so that we can shape services to meet customer needs IN PROGRESS

Our progress so far

- A draft customer charter has been produced and will be subject to public engagement shortly
- Our HR Team is working to ensure communications skills form a key part of our staff induction process
- Our Chatbot was launched and we are working to build its functionality so that we can offer live chat and answer questions across a wider range of service areas
- Our Many Channels, One Service programme has commenced and will see more transactions and functions available online within the next two years, improving the customer experience
- We are using a formal Residents Survey as well as shorter, more frequent feedback requests to those who have used our services to gain information about how effectively we are performing- and to improve our services as a result

Case study- Many Channels, One Service/Digital Strategy

In early Spring of 2020, many of the council's facilities were closed as a response to the COVID19 pandemic, including its Household Waste Recycling Centres.

The council's Digital Services Team worked with the Waste Management Team and its booking platform supplier at pace during the first week of May 2020 to deliver a solution to manage demand for Household Waste Recycling Centres, both so they could be operated in COVID secure way, and to ensure queuing traffic would not become dangerous given the expected high demand when they reopened.

Household Waste Recycling Centres Booking was launched on 13 May 2020 with customers able to use the Click and Tip service online or phone the Contact Centre to book an appointment, allowing customers to choose their engagement channel.

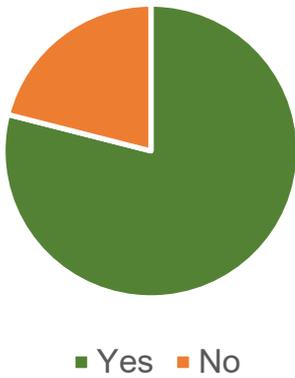
Metrics show that 97% of customers used Click and Tip with 3% using the phone, and during the 18 months since launch the service has been used to book over a quarter of a million appointments.

Three separate customer surveys were undertaken between June 2020 and June 2021. Of the 3000+ respondents 79% expressed the view that the council should keep the booking system, with 90% saying they had a positive experience of using it.

Customer satisfaction in queue time also increased from 74% in February 2020 to 91% in August 2021, as visits to the centres are now more evenly spread throughout the day and week.

Digital Services team continue to work Waste Management and the booking platform supplier to explore and deliver improvements to the booking experience for Household Waste Recycling Centres.

Should the council keep the booking system?



HWRC Bookings May '20 to October '21



