Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Connecting with your local community

A Communications Guide for Welsh Community & Town Councillors and their Clerks

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Welcome:

Community and town councils are the grassroots of local government in Wales and they play an important part in improving local communities and enhancing the lives of residents.

They deliver many different services for their communities and have an important role as the voice of local people.

In Wales approximately 70 per cent of the population is served by more than 730 community and town councils, which are run by around 8,000 councillors.

Council areas range from large towns to small rural settlements, and the number of staff and budget for each council varies greatly.

In 2018 Welsh Government commissioned a review of community and town councils in Wales.

The review found that many community and town councils proactively engage with their communities using newsletters, annual reports, social media and events. However among the public there is still a lack of understanding and awareness of the contribution town and community councils make to local communities. The review panel recommended that *'Community and Town Councils explore digital mechanisms to aid ways of meeting, engaging and sharing information'*.

In response to this recommendation, Welsh Government surveyed Welsh community and town councils to find out more about how they are communicating with the communities they serve. Over 300 councils responded to the survey. The main findings included:

- Almost all councils which responded to the survey had their own website, or one hosted by an external organisation.

- Around three quarters of those councils responding have full control of their website, with most of the remaining passing content to a third party to update their website.

- Nearly half of councils which responded to the survey are using social media to communicate with their community, with most using Facebook.

- Around two thirds of respondents don't use information from social media or other digital platforms to assist with decision-making.

The responses to the survey also highlighted a number of challenges community and town councils identified with using social media:-

- Negative or disturbing comments being posted;

- Connecting with members of the community who do not use social media;

- Time needed to monitor and update social media; and

- Concerns over privacy, fake news, misinterpretation.

This guide has been informed by responses to the survey findings, and aims to act on the independent review panel's recommendation.

Your council may be in a position where it can only deliver the minimum communications channels required to engage and inform the local community, or you may wish to deliver a more extensive, annual communications plan.

Whatever your starting point, or your aims for the future, we hope you find the practical suggestions in this guide useful

Your starting point:

Community and town councils have statutory responsibilities to provide information about their work, including making up-to-date information available on the internet.

This is what should be available on your website:

- Contact details to allow people to contact your council and your clerk, including telephone number and email and postal addresses.

- A list of your council members: their names; how they can be contacted; any party affiliation; details of any position or committee membership on your council; and, if your council is divided into wards, the ward that they represent. If the member is co-opted rather than elected that should also be noted.

- Minutes of meetings and, where reasonably practicable, documents seen at the meetings.

- Public notices.

- Annual audited accounts.

- Register of council members' interests.

- Details of any payments made to councillors.

These are seen as minimum requirements, but as this guide explains there are many ways to communicate with local people, giving you the chance to tell them about your work and engage them with local issues, news and events.

Your communication choices:

What is 'communication'? Basically it's exchanging information by speech, visuals or writing.

Effective community communication is based around three principles:

Access: telling local people about your council and its activities. Letting them know who to contact, where you are and how to get involved;

Information: letting people know about particular events or activities;

Raising awareness: sparking interest in a particular activity, event or issue.

Community and town councils need to be able to convey messages clearly and consistently, helping people across their community to be aware of, become involved with, and benefit from their local council.

How can you communicate with local people? You have a great deal of choice, here is a list of the 'channels' you might want to use. This guide goes into more detail about various channels, explaining how to get started and providing some hints and tips you might find useful even if you are already communicating widely with your local community.

- Website
- Social media (your council's Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or other social media channels, also community social media such as a village Facebook page)
- Email
- Your office
- Noticeboards
- Local newspapers and other local media
- Newsletters
- Leaflets and other publications
- Events

Managing Your Message

Whichever methods are chosen, to communicate effectively the golden rule is to focus on the five W's – Who, What, When, Where and Why?

Who - Community and town councils have two main categories of audience, each needing specific and possibly different sets of messages:

- External - communication with external stakeholders: residents, potential participants, community organisations, business and other key organisations.
- Internal - communication between your council's staff and councillors to ensure everyone is up-to-date with what's happening and everyone gives the local community consistent messages.

What - 20 to 50 carefully chosen words to communicate your message.

Hint – A good test is to see if you can get your message across in 30 seconds.

When- using a 12-month calendar helps to structure your communications planning and schedule regular communications activities such as quarterly newsletters, monthly columns in a local newspaper and regular events.

Having an up-to-date communication calendar also ensures that your events do not clash with any other events taking place in your community.

Hint – Many free communications calendar templates are available online.

Refer to Annex 8, Activity 1: Communications Audit, which will help you to develop your own communications calendar. If you are a small council you may only have a handful of items on your calendar, focusing on your statutory duties, but larger councils with several staff may want to develop a more extensive calendar.

Where - 'musts' to include are:

- The event title
- Date and time (start and finish)
- Location
- A named contact
- How to join-in or book a place

Hint – Always ask a colleague to proof read the text to make sure vital details are correct and all important points have been included.

Why - this provides the motivation for someone to engage with your communication. Think of it from a 'What's in it for me' viewpoint (how will someone taking part benefit from attending your event) if you want to attract an audience.

Communicating Online:

Most of your community are going to look for you on the Internet. In 2019 91% of UK adults said they had recently been online and 67% of the UK population said they use social media.[1] Most community and town councils in Wales have been proactive in this area and do have a website. If you need help developing your first website, One Voice Wales or your principal council may be able to offer advice to get you started.

Your website

A website has become such a key means of communicating that people who want to find out about your council will simply assume you have one. They expect to be able to find out about your services and any activity that you have coming up at the click

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[1] Office for National Statistics, Statistical Bulletin 'Internet access- households and individuals, Great Britain: 2019'

of a button, so if you don't have an up-to-date website your council will certainly be missing out!

Aside from being a relatively low-cost communication tool, your council website is available to your community at any time of day or night.

So are you making the most of your web-presence? Things to consider:

- Have you identified your website's place in your overall communications planning?

- Does your website include links to your social media? Don't miss out on this chance to promote your Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels.

- Do you have a consistent brand, using similar fonts, colours and logos to those that you use for printed materials and on social media?

- Is the purpose of the site and how to contact you clear?

- Have you made sure that your nominated webmaster (the person who looks after the website) has the necessary skills and time to keep your site refreshed and up-to-date?

- How do you monitor the visitor activity on your website and the site's effectiveness?

- How do you identify the users who visit and benefit from your website?

- How do you respond to feedback about your website?

Social Media

Social media and its growing range of platforms have had a dramatic impact on how people discover, read, and share news and information. Many community and town councils already use social media. If your council is already using social media, are you getting the best from it? Do you have good practice to share with others? If you are not using social media, what benefits could there be for your council in beginning to use it?

Social media is fast and free to use as well as a great way of getting your messages to more people. Social media and online forums can help increase accessibility for people with a disability and can help break down barriers for people who might otherwise find it difficult to participate in your council's activities.

Your council can use social media to:

- Provide up-to-date information about your events and activities

- Consult on future plans

- Gather feedback

- Influence decision makers

- Promote your good news stories

Facebook

Community and town councils can make the most of being online by using social media to share information. The benefits of social media, such as Facebook, are that they are relatively easy to set up and you can reach a lot people quickly and at a low cost. A large proportion of your community will already be on Facebook, and will be using it regularly on their phones, tablets and computers.

Setting up a Facebook page for your council

Facebook offers three different types of account:

- Profile – the personal Facebook account most people have

- Pages – for organisations, businesses and public figures

- Groups – for communities to share a common interest

To get started you'll need a personal Facebook profile. Don't worry, even though the page for your council will be linked to your own account, no one will be able to see your account from your council page.

All you have to do is log into your personal Facebook account and click on Pages, then follow the simple instructions to make your council page.

Next put some content on the page - posts about your council and photographs, perhaps you have some of previous events or of the local area. Ask your councillors, staff and people in your community for ideas on the type of content they would like to see on the page.

Tell people about your new page

A good place to start is by inviting your colleagues to like the page and ask them to share it with their friends. You can also use your website and any newsletter, any printed material and e-mail updates to promote your page and create a core base of supporters.

It's possible to pay for advertising on Facebook. This is easy to set up and you can target people who live in your area. You can set a budget which is only spent if someone clicks on your advert.

How is your page doing?

Most people enjoy checking out their Facebook insights! These analytics will help you understand how well your page is doing and give you some basic information about your audience and measure the success of your various posts.

Twitter

If you're not familiar with Twitter, it's a social networking and micro-blogging service that lets its users send and read messages called 'tweets'. Tweets are posts displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers, who

are known as followers. Twitter has about 330 million active monthly users and it's an ideal place to promote your council and blog about activity.

If you don't use Twitter already here are some of the benefits:

- Direct communication with your community: Twitter is a quick way to directly communicate with your followers. They can turn to you for advice and receive a quick answer. Speaking directly to your followers is a win-win situation, they get their information or answers and in turn you'll learn about them and their needs.

- Bring in new visitors to your website: Twitter is a simple tool for sharing links and directing traffic to your website. Sharing links to your website will bring in new people who are interested in your council and its activities.

- See what others are saying: Twitter is a good way of keeping updated with local news and getting feedback on how your community perceive the work of your council. It also allows you to react immediately and where necessary, protect your council's reputation.

- Monitor what people are saying about your council by including a hashtag in your tweet. Using the hashtag symbol (#) before a keyword or phrase, allows all tweets and conversations using that hash-tagged word/phrase to show more easily in a Twitter search. It also contributes towards trending items on Twitter.

All you need to create a Twitter account is an Internet connection and computer or a mobile phone with Internet access. You can find lots of helpful information here https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter

Your Twitter followers could be receiving the latest information and content about your council, its successes and activity that you have coming up.

The best way to learn about Twitter is to start using it! Don't forget to look at what similar organisations are posting for inspiration.

Hint – Don't forget, 280 characters, including any punctuation, is the limit for a tweet. But you can 'thread' tweets, which means adding tweets to your initial post, to give you more space. Just click the plus sign at the bottom of each tweet.

How do you build up a following on Twitter?

Create your account and start posting. Remember your posts should fit in with your council's role as a community organisation and be useful and interesting to your target audience,

Follow other local organisations, your local county council, local journalists, sports clubs, schools, churches, councillors, MSs, MPs. You'll think of plenty once you get started.

When you tweet, tag other local organisations and influencers such as your local MSs, MPs, principal council and local county councillors. You can add Twitter

handles (for example @welshgovernment) to your post, or when you add a picture you can tag up to ten Twitter handles.

Like and comment on relevant posts from other organisations

Make sure you respond quickly to any queries you receive

Don't forget to use your other communications channels, such as your website, newsletter, blog and e-mail updates, to tell your local community about your Twitter account.

Hint – make your Twitter posts more interesting with photos, videos and gifs (short animations, you can search for these straight from your Twitter post) and don't forget to tag people and organisations, including your local newspaper, who you think might be interested.

Managing social media

It's easy for social media to start using a lot of your time. Set some time aside to check your accounts to see if you have received any queries or comments that you need to answer. How often you do this will vary for each council, some may check this every few hours, once a day, or a couple of times per week. Decide what is appropriate and proportionate in your own circumstances. You don't have to respond to every comment, some people like to use social media to sound off and aren't expecting a reply, but you do need to quickly respond to questions and comments, even if it is only 'liking' a positive response.

How often should you post?

This very much depends on what your community needs. Perhaps on Facebook you might post a few times a week. Your tweets are likely to be shorter and more frequent, and can include retweeting other local organisation's posts.

The aim should be to engage with your community, share the work of your council and invite local people to become involved. You may want to post to social media in advance and immediately following council meetings, encouraging your community to raise any issues that should be discussed, informing of the agenda items, inviting views and asking questions to inform your decision making.

Writing for Your Online Audience

When writing for an online audience, be it a webpage, Facebook update or Twitter post, be sparing with your words. Keep the information to the absolute minimum.

Remember to use:

- Active words
- Short sentences of 8-15 words
- One idea per sentence
- Sub-headings

- Lists of no more than seven bullet points

- Web links as part of the story

- A picture or diagram to illustrate – make sure these are clear and of good quality

- Look out for something new, different or quirky; emphasise the unusual about your story to make it stand out

- Keep it topical - your story must be happening in the near future or has happened recently

Dealing with negative comments

Social media has many benefits, but negative comments can be worrying and time consuming, but don't let that put you off, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

If someone is asking a genuine question or is misinformed, answer their question or give them the correct information. If you answer in a polite and professional manner many people will then thank you.

Some people just want to criticise, and this type of behaviour has become known as trolling. You don't have to answer everyone, they're entitled to their opinion. Don't take it personally and just remember that trolls help to promote your posts, as social media doesn't know your post has received negative comments, it just knows people have shown an interest and this helps your post to be shown to more people!

Hints

On your Facebook page you may want to include a paragraph under General Information in the 'About Us' section explaining the conditions that apply to people posting on the site. Here is an example:

Comments posted on and messages received through this page are the views of individuals and do not represent the views of *Anywhere Community Council*. We will review all comments and remove any that are inappropriate or offensive.

Working with the local media

When people say 'The Media' we often think of newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

But today there are many different types of media, including Facebook and Twitter, which people use daily and see as part of their everyday lives. In 2019 Ofcom said 49% of people in the UK used social media to get news. The top three news sources were: BBC 58%, ITV 40% and Facebook 35%.

Any story developed for publication has to compete with many others. This makes it even more important to carefully choose the type of media outlets that will be most likely to cover your council's news story. On the positive side, with the media

needing to fill the airwaves 24 hours day, and with the increasing range of web-based social media platforms, there has never been a better time to have a go.

Stages of Media Engagement

Different councils will be at different stages in their engagement with 'the media' in all its forms.

- Reactive - you only respond to media enquiries or comments

- Proactive - you generate your own media and social media releases

- Controlling - You use the media to actively promote your activities and manage key messages in a planned way.

Refer to Annex 8: Activity 2 will help you decide which stage your team are currently working at.

Building Positive Media Relations

You can be proactive in your media engagement and build positive media relations, by following these steps:

Step 1: Research the media operating in your area. A good way to start is to search Google News for local organisations, for example your local schools and county council, and see which media and journalists are writing about them.

Step 2: You need to know who and where your local media contacts are, so find out the contact details for local newspapers, TV, radio and community radio. You should be able to find these online or give them a call. Or buy copies of your local newspapers and study those – this will give you a good overall view of the type and style of stories that are printed, as well as giving you the names of their journalists. And the letters page can be very revealing about local people's concerns.

Finally use the information to prepare a media contact list for your council area. Below is an example of how you might layout your contact list.

Anywhere Town Times				
Job Title	**Name**	**Phone number**	**Email Address**	**Twitter Account**
News desk				
News editor				
Anywhere Town district reporter				
Anywhere Town Community Radio				
Job Title	**Name**	**Phone number**	**Email Address**	**Twitter Account**
Station Manager				
News desk				

Step 3: Introduce yourself and make that first contact with the local press. The best way is to phone and ask to whom you should send a press release. It might be the

news editor, or the local reporter covering your area or most organisations have a generic news desk email address.

Step 4: Find out the publication date and deadlines for your local paper. The more time you give them, the more chance that your story will be included, and don't be put off if your story isn't covered first time.

Hint – Consider 'saving' your press release until a time when there is likely to be less competition from other stories, for example, just before a bank holiday, but do remember stories often have a shelf life.

Step 5: Once you've started speaking to journalists, keep in contact with them so you can provide them with regular updates on your activities and generate on-going media coverage.

Step 6: Journalists will always remember how they are treated, so don't just be ready to speak to them when you have a good news story, if they contact you with a query make it a priority to get them an answer as soon as possible. Treat them well and you'll build up a good relationship.

Step 7: Monitor any media coverage you get and keep a clippings folder for future reference.

Bringing Your News to Life

Positive stories have great news value and so your council events and projects will always be of interest, especially as your stories will have a strong local angle and human interest as they will involve the local community.

Here are some ideas for making the most of your story:

- Once you have a story, summarise the key details into a short news release, explaining what is going on, when and where

- Think creatively to attract attention for your story

- Go for the local, human interest angle

- Always include your contact details

- Send your press release to your media contacts

- Follow-up with a phone call to talk them through your story

- Invite the media to attend the activity or event you are planning

- Invite local dignitaries or celebrities to visit your activities or events

- Add visual appeal in the form of photos or illustrations. Remember that copyright law may apply to written and visual materials that are found online.

- Take high quality pictures of the event and send these to the media. Local papers might also want to send their own photographer

- Prepare to give a short, informal interview and/or quotes to the media.

Interview tips:

- Keep it simple: condense your message into three short sentences
- Practice what you want to say beforehand
- Stick to the points you want to get across

Tips for Writing a News Release

If you want to share your news with your local media, you will need to draft a press release. A press release has a set format to make sure that all the necessary information that a journalist needs is included. Journalists are bombarded by press releases, so yours needs to stand out from the crowd to give it the best chance of being published. Even if you are promoting your story via social media platforms, using the press release format provides a structured approach.

Refer to Annex 2: A news release template.

- Start with a short catchy title. Make sure the local angle is in the headline to appeal to the local community.
- Get your facts right and include:
  - ➢ Who or what your story is about - articles with human interest are usually more appealing.
  - ➢ What is happening?
  - ➢ Where did/is it going to happen?
  - ➢ When is it going to/did it happen?
  - ➢ Why is it happening/did it happen?
  - ➢ How many people came to the activity?
  - ➢ Any other relevant statistics.
  - ➢ How can people find out more or get involved?
- Concentrate on what your 'story' has to offer others and write it from the point of view of the reader, listener or viewer. Don't use jargon and remember to explain acronyms.
- Use quotes from one of the people associated with the story, make sure they have given their permission before you use the quote. Always adhere to safeguarding protocols (being mindful of sharing information about children or other vulnerable people).
- Include a photograph or suggest that your story would provide a good photo opportunity. If you include your own photograph make sure the people in the picture have given their permission for it to be published. Always provide a caption saying where it was taken and who is in the photograph. (See section on 'Using Images to grab attention').
- Always add your contact details to your press release

- If available include background information about your story as this helps to give context. This is referred to as 'Notes to Editors' and is added at the end of the news release after your contact details.

> **Hint** – It is useful to always include a short paragraph explaining what your council does. Example:
>
> 'Anywhere' Community Council is part of the grassroots level of government in Wales. We represent the communities of 'Nowhere, Otherwise and Somehow'. The council represents the people of 'Anywhere', responding to local needs and advocating for community interests. We work with 'Somewhere' County Council to provide services for the local community and to maintain a thriving and vibrant community for our residents. The 'Anywhere' Community Council provides and cares for the 'Village' Road community allotments, the 'Common' and 'Riverside' playgrounds, the 'community' hall and the 'Anywhere' community centre.

- Proof read your press release. Always keep a copy of your story – you never know when you will need to refer to it again.

- If the press release is not for immediate publication, place an embargo on it and state the time it can be made public. After sending or posting your press release follow-up by checking it has been received and if they are interested in running it.

Writing Great Stories about Your Council

Whether writing an article about your council's news, activities or achievements for your local newspaper or your website, the basics are the same.

Building a Good Story

A good article is something that the reader wants to read or contains information they need to know about. By using plain language, with the right tone of voice, you will get your message across more clearly and in a friendlier way. Always have a clear idea of what you want the reader to know and make the information as concise and accurate as possible.

When writing the article use the five W's (who, what, where, when and why – see the section Managing Your Message) and aim to win the reader's attention in the first few sentences. Writing a great headline is a must if you want to grab your reader's interest. Faced with a mass of information, a reader may only scan the headline before discarding the story. It's vital for your headline to grab their attention and encourage them to read the story.

Aim for 300 words for a short story or announcement for a newspaper, and up to 1500 words for a magazine article or an event review.

Tips for writing effectively include:

- Make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order

- Use short words where possible

- Use every day English/Welsh

- Avoid jargon and always explain any technical terms (if you really must use them)

- Keep sentence length to an average of 15 to 20 words

- Stick to one main idea in each sentence

Following those tips will make your article easy to read.

Using quotes

Adding a quote is a good way to keep up the momentum of a story but preparation is crucial when undertaking an interview or sourcing a quote.

Imagine you are writing a news story about a recent 'Shop Local' event and you want to get quotes from local traders about the event.

You will need to:

- Decide on the questions you need to ask in order to get the information you want.

- Ask short, clear and concise questions.

- Be friendly, think how the interviewee feels, they may be nervous.

- Start with an easy question.

- Build-up to the important questions.

- Summarise the next steps.

It is advisable to:

- Read the quote back to the person.

- Write the quote so that they can read it and amend if necessary.

- Ask them to sign that they agree to the exact wording.

Refer to Annex 3: An Interviewee Consent Form.

Fact-checking

You may want to let those involved in the preparation of the story have time to read it and suggest any amendments. Always ask a colleague to read the story and give feedback, their fresh perspective will be invaluable. Finally proof read, it takes time but it's crucial to avoid potentially embarrassing errors. If possible, use more than one person to proof read.

Constructing a Case Study

Case studies help bring a story to life and can give your story a much better chance of being covered by the media.

When preparing a case study think about what makes your activity really interesting and relevant. Always include:

- An interesting title

- Introduction; what or who are you profiling?

- A brief overview of the project

- Things that worked well

- How challenges were overcome

- Quotes and visual interest - photos, graphics and design.

Using Images to Grab Attention

When looking through a newspaper or magazine the reader's attention is often drawn to a photograph, illustration or cartoon first, then the headline or caption, finally they might read the story. Using a vibrant photograph, graphic or visual brings a story to life and often helps get your story in the press and noticed.

The offer of a good photo opportunity might encourage the press to cover your story. If a reporter asks to send a photographer or film crew to an event or to cover a story, be available at the time they want to come. They know what the journalist will be looking for and what their readers or viewers like, so be flexible about how they want to take the photo or film.

If the reporter is unable to send a photographer or film crew to an event, taking your own high quality digital photographs is the next best option. The following tips will help you take and select the most attractive shot:

- Check out the newspapers and magazines you are targeting to see what type of photos they use regularly

- Any photograph you submit must be of a good standard

- Check if they are happy to accept emailed digital images

- Think about your story and take time to set up the shot

- Fill the frame with faces or activity

- Check the shot is clear – no lamp posts coming out of people's heads!

- Remember to get permission to publish the photograph from those in the pictures

  (See Annex 4 - Photography consent form)

- Write a memorable caption

- Note people's names, and job titles/organisation if appropriate, from left to right.
- Send the photo with the news release

Producing professional publications

Online communications are an efficient way to tell your community about your work, reflecting on what you've achieved, and what you would like to take forward in the future.

Printed publications can get your message directly into the hands of local people. Print does cost more than online communication, but if you plan carefully you'll be able to produce newsletters, posters and leaflets in a cost effective way.

Newsletters

You may decide your council and local community generates enough news to warrant a regular newsletter.

Whether printed or electronic, a newsletter is produced and distributed regularly – for example weekly, monthly or quarterly. Newsletters include news and details of forthcoming events as well as contact information for general enquiries. The text needs to be short and enhanced by quotes, colour, photographs or illustrations.

Before you go ahead with a newsletter consider:

- Does your council need a newsletter?
- What do you want to achieve with a newsletter?
- How often will it be produced? You need to publish regularly, even if it is only twice a year.
- Who is your target audience?
- Will it be printed or emailed as an e-newsletter?
- In which language(s) will it be available? What is the additional cost of translation?
- Will you need to make it available in large print and/or braille?
- If printed, where and how will it be distributed?
- If you plan an e-newsletter, how will people subscribe and how will you ensure you adhere to GDPR regulations?
- What will be the costs (financial and time) for producing the newsletter versus the benefits?

If you decide to go ahead with your newsletter:

- Set the number of pages and edit the copy to these parameters.

- Generate content: news stories and items relevant to your council and local community.

- Agree your house style for text used in materials for community use. Choose one or two fonts (one for the main text and one for headings). Fonts are the style of 'typeface' used to display text, numbers and characters.

The font(s) you chose will affect the overall legibility of your newsletter. To maximise the readability of your document:

- Select basic, simple, easily-readable fonts. In general sans serif fonts such as Arial and Tahoma are most legible. These are plain fonts, without the 'tails' seen on serif fonts.

- Use a limited number of fonts

- Avoid small font sizes. Use a minimum font size of 12 point

- Limit the use of font variations such as *italics*, and CAPITAL LETTERS

- Use **bold** sparingly and only highlight a few words rather than a whole sentence or paragraph

- Use headings and white space to emphasise your key points as pages dense with text are very off-putting for the reader.

Make sure everyone who contributes to the newsletter knows about and uses the style guide.

Prepare your distribution list.

Hints

Check out other community newsletters to get ideas about content and format as your newsletter needs to have similar appeal but must also stand out.

Avoid glossy paper as it's more expensive and creates excess glare, which makes it more difficult to read for people with impaired vision.

See Annex 5 – Accessibility

Leaflets, Flyers and Posters

Leaflets, flyers and posters are popular promotional tools used to raise awareness of an event or activity. Posters are used to inform large groups of people and are displayed publically. Leaflets and flyers are given out for individuals to read.

Distribution options for leaflets and flyers include:

- Leaving batches in public places, such as libraries, clubs, newsagents, shops, advice centres, your local pub, places of worship, council reception areas, community and leisure centres.

- House to house delivery, if you have the budget or willing volunteers.

Taking time to decide why your council is considering printing a leaflet, flyer or poster, can save time, effort and money, think about:

- What is the purpose of the leaflet, flyer or poster?

- What information do you want to share?

- Does your message need to fit into a wider communication campaign?

- Who are your target audiences?

- Do the leaflets, flyers and posters need to be translated into other languages?

- How will you get them in front of your audience?

- Will they reach minority groups?

Design and clarity of message are vitally important as your leaflet, flyer or poster will need to grab the attention of the reader. Don't try to tell your story with lots of writing and too many colours and fonts, as this will dilute or even hide your message. Rely on good quality images and graphics for impact. Taking a small graphic file of your logo or a small photograph and blowing it up will not work as resolution will be lost. Always review your proofs to make sure everything looks perfect before you send it to be printed.

Hints
Always include contact details on your leaflets, flyers and posters.

Ask people who attend your event how they found out about it. This way you can monitor the effectiveness of different methods of communication.

Balancing the Budget

When budgeting for a newsletter, leaflets, flyers or posters keep in mind costs for:

- Project managing the process

- Staff time for writing

- Photography and design

- Printing

- Distribution/mailing

Hints
Always get quotes from printers in accordance with your council's financial regulations and build print time into your schedule.

Be precise when asking printers for an estimate, decide beforehand detail such as, delivery date, number of copies, paper type/quality, colour, whether folding is included. Most printers are very helpful and will help you with these details if you are new to print buying.

Full colour printing is always more expensive, though if you want around 500 to 1,000 copies digital print will help bring down the cost. To offset costs you might want to explore sponsorship or advertising paid for by local businesses or key stakeholders.

Production Stages

Once you have chosen the printer for your publication, they will still need your input at various points during the production process to make sure the finished product is on time and meets your needs. Key stages are:

- Quotation

- Contract award

- Briefing – when you tell them what you want and they help you make the most cost effective choices

- Approving designs

- Approving/amending draft texts

- Approving black and white laser proofs of laid-out text at an agreed number of stages

- Checking and approving your printer's colour proof (if necessary) of the full publication

- 'Signing off' the job for all copies to be printed and delivered

Hints
Always work backwards from the date your leaflet or poster needs to be available to your target audience (your target distribution date) to create your production timeline. And don't forget to add some extra time for any problems that might crop up.

If you are using volunteers to distribute and deliver your publication allow plenty of time.

To maximise the shelf life of your publication, avoid putting a specific date on the publication, for example use 'Winter Edition' rather than specifying a month.

Promoting Events

Events can be a great way to build a sense of community, to get to know local people and tell them more about your council.

Your community council might already hold regular events such as:

- Consultation events and other public meetings

- Remembrance Sunday event

- Shop local event

- Community dog show

- Community litter pick

- Farmers market

- Christmas lights switch on

- Carol singing

Here are some practical ideas for letting your community know about your event:

- Before you do anything else, add information about your event to your website, positioning it prominently on the home page.

- Consider sending out a 'save the date' or diary marker to key people or media contacts you would like to attend.

See Annex 6 – Sample diary marker

- Put up posters in the areas where you know the people you want to attract will see them, such as leisure, youth and community centres. Don't forget your community notice boards and the door or windows of your office.

- Create a flyer or postcard that can be handed out in community hot spots such as shopping centres, libraries or the local cinema

- Contact local newspapers and radio stations about running a story linked to your event, or adding a notice on their listings page.

- Check out local community websites and social networks as these often feature news and details of events, and may be happy to help promote your event. Also your principal council might be able to give your event a mention on their website and social networks.

Don't forget to say:

- If your event is free

- What exactly the activity or opportunity involves

- What are the aims for the event

- Where and when it's happening

- Where to get more information

After the Event

Keeping a record of any media coverage is a good way of reminding people that your event took place. Reflecting on how it went helps you to evaluate whether your activity has been successful.

Why not write a case study? Make sure your case study contains information such as:

- A short description of the event

- Why it took place

- What happened

- How many people took part

- Who was involved (including any special guest appearances)

You can also include comments and quotes from people who came along and photos of the event.

Communicating with the whole community

Are you communicating with your whole community? Or are there some groups you need to involve and engage more for example young people or minority groups?

You may find it helpful to consider:

- Which groups are not engaging with the council?

- What do individuals within these groups have in common? For example, the languages they speak, their age, gender, learning disability, culture and religion.

- How large is each group?

- Do they meet informally or formally? If so, where?

Some research will identify the reasons for poor engagement with specific groups. A communications channel that is effective with one group may not work with another, or necessarily with a similar group in another area. So it helps to establish:

- What methods have been used to communicate?

- How effective have these been?

- Who else contacts these groups and how?

- If a group you are interested in reaching already uses an established information network, and, if so, how could you tap into it? For example there may be a local youth group or afternoon club for retired people.

- Who are the key individuals you need to work with?

- What are the alternative points of contact such as the youth service, your principal council equalities officer or older person champion?

Having made initial contact with your target group(s), a clearer picture will develop of how individuals like to receive information, such as word-of-mouth, social media or radio, and communications can then be planned accordingly.

Remember – one size does not fit all so communication methods should be targeted according to each group and the nature of the information being shared. Practical ideas for communicating with all groups, include:

- Keep the overall number of words used to a minimum

- Use images to share your story

- Avoid discriminatory language and practice

- Make information available in appropriate formats for individuals with visual impairment, for example large print, braille, coloured paper

- Use plain language and avoid jargon

- Provide information in appropriate community languages

- Don't make assumptions about access to, or experience of using, the internet

- Be proactive – go to them rather than wait for people to contact you

When planning an event for a specific group:

- Select a time that is realistic for your target group

- Make sure your venue is accessible, safe and welcoming with appropriate signage – multilingual if needed

- Provide interpreters if required

- Arrange for a loop system, signers and/or lip readers for people with a hearing impairment

- Choose a venue that's easy to get to

- Offer childcare if appropriate for the target group

- Provide refreshments - sharing a chat over tea or a soft drink can be a great way to establish contact

See Annex 7: A planning tool for communicating with groups.

Thank you

Many thanks for taking the time to read this guide. Good communication does take time and effort, but planned communication activities will greatly improve your relationship with your local community, plus you'll be helping to enhance the reputation and understanding of community and town councils across Wales.

Connecting with your local community

Annexes

1. Communications audit

2. News release template

3. Interviewee consent form

4. Photography consent form

5. Accessibility and Bilingualism

6. Diary marker template

7. Communicating with hard to reach groups planning tool

8. Workshop activities

Annex 1: Communications audit

Look at the list below of potential communications methods. How many of the following do you currently use to promote your council's activities?

Communications Options	Currently used (Yes/No)	If yes, is it effective? How do you know?	If no, is it a possibility?
Informal - word of mouth e.g. school gate, residents, dog walkers			
Council notice boards (physical and electronic)			
Shops windows and notice boards			
Community venues			
Community notice boards			
Community fairs and festivals			
Open days			
Flyers/leaflets			
Banners - printed			
Community newsletters			
Directory of local organisations			
Directory of businesses and services			
'A' Board pavement signs			
Consultation events			
Road shows			
Posters at community venues			
Comment box in shops			
Written press			
Local radio			
TV			
Websites of local groups e.g. school, sports clubs etc.			
Local business websites			
Blogs			
Online forums			
Facebook			
Twitter			
Phone call relays			
Mass text messaging			
Others			

Annex 2: Press Release Template

[Insert your council logo here]

[*Anywhere Community* Council Press Release]

[date, month] 202[X]

State if the press release is for immediate release or embargoed for release until a specified date/time.

Write your headline

(highlighting the main news point)

Write your article here.

Paragraph 1 – cover the 5 W's

Paragraph 2 – expand the details

Include a quote

Paragraph 3 - extra background

Finish with END of PRESS RELEASE

Remember your contact details

Don't forget to include your Note to Editors

Annex 3: Interviewee Consent Form

Occasionally, we carry out interviews with people that take part in *Anywhere Council* activities and may use the information provided in printed publications and publicity materials that we produce, as well as on our website.

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation. I understand the intent and purpose of this interview.

Signature: ....

Date: ....

From time to time, information about *Anywhere Council* activities may be used by the media and may appear in local or national newspapers, or on televised news programmes.

Please circle your answer to questions 1 to 5 below, then sign and date the form.

1. May we use information provided in your interview in printed publications and displays that we produce for promotional purposes?   Yes / No

2. May we use information provided in your interview on our website?   Yes / No

3. Are you happy for your quote to appear in the print media?   Yes / No

4. Are you happy for your quote to appear in the broadcast media?   Yes / No

5. I understand that my name may appear in any media coverage.   Yes / No

Note that websites can be viewed throughout the world and not just in the United Kingdom where UK law applies.

Participant's Agreement:

I have read and understood the conditions set out on this form.

Signature:

....

Name (in capitals): ....

Date:.....................................

Annex 4: Photography Consent Form

To Parent or Guardian: ....

Name of Child/Young Person: ....

Activity: ....

We may take photographs of the young people that take part in our activities and occasionally, use these images in printed publications and publicity materials that we produce, as well as on our website. We may also make video or webcam recordings.

From time to time, *Anywhere Council* may be visited by the media who will take photographs or film footage of a high profile event. Young people may appear in these images, which may appear in local or national newspapers, or on televised news programmes.

To comply with the Data Protection Act 2018, we need your permission before we can photograph or make any recordings of your child or the young person named above.

Please circle your answer questions 1 to 4 below, then sign and date the form where shown and return as requested:

1. May we use your/your child's photograph in the printed publications and displays that we produce for promotional purposes?   Yes / No

2. May we use your/your child's image on our website?   Yes / No

3. May we record your/your child's image on video or webcam?   Yes / No

4. Are you happy for your/your child's image to appear in the media?   Yes / No

Note that websites can be viewed throughout the world and not just in the United Kingdom where UK law applies. The conditions for use of these photographs are on page 2 of this form.

I have read and understood the conditions of use on the back of this form.

Parent's or guardian's signature:

....

Name (in capitals): ....

Date:....................................

Please read the information on the reverse of this sheet.

Conditions of use of images:

1. This form is valid for five years from the date you sign it. The consent will automatically expire after this time.

2. We will not re-use any photographs or recordings after this five year time period.

3. We will not use the personal details or full names (which means first name and surname) of any young person in a photographic image, on video, on our website or in any of our other printed publications.

4. We will not include personal e-mail or postal addresses, telephone numbers or social media addresses on our website or other printed publications.

5. If we use photographs of individual young people, we will not use the name of that person in the accompanying text or photo caption.

6. If we name a young person in the text, we will not use a photograph of that person to accompany the article.

7. We may use group photographs or footage with very general labels, such as "making Christmas decorations", "attending a forum meeting" etc.

8. We will only use images of young people who are suitably dressed, to reduce the risk of images being used inappropriately.

Annex 5: Accessibility and Bilingual Design

Accessibility

It's important to make sure your council's publications are as accessible to as many people as possible, and this includes people with visual impairment. It can be useful to involve people from your community in developing a plan for producing information in accessible formats.

You can find minimum guidelines on the website of the UK Association for Accessible Formats: www.ukaaf.org

Bilingual design

The Welsh Language Commissioner offers design advice to help organisations produce attractive bilingual materials which are easy to read.

They aim to give clear and practical advice on all aspects of bilingual design, from signage and graphics to electronic forms and publications. They are directed at all those working in the public, voluntary or private sectors who are involved in producing bilingual material.

See the Bilingual Design Guide on the Welsh Language Commissioner's website

http://www.comisiynyddygymraeg.cymru/English/Publications%20List/Bilingual%20Design%20Guide%202018.pdf

Annex 6: Diary Marker Template

Diary Marker

Name of council

[INSERT DATE]

Event Title

Event at [INSERT LOCATION]

Event details: [INSERT DETAILS OF WHAT YOUR EVENT WILL INVOLVE]

Date: [INSERT DATE]

Time: [INSERT START AND FINISH TIMES]

Address: [INSERT FULL ADDRESS]

Media opportunities:

[INSERT DETAILS OF PEOPLE THE MEDIA CAN PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR INTERVIEW AT YOUR EVENT]

For more information, to confirm attendance or arrange interviews please contact:

[CONTACT DETAILS]

Annex 7: Communicating with groups planning tool

Identify which group(s) you want to target

Assess the effectiveness of the existing communications methods used by your team for engaging with groups

Decide on the best method/s to use for your targeted group

Develop your key messages for your targeted group

Plan and carry out the information sharing campaign

Evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign

Identify which group(s) you want to target next.

Annex 8: Workshop Activities

The following activities are designed for community and town councils to use to further develop their communications expertise. The workshop could consist of staff, councillors and members of the community.

Activity 1: Communication Calendar

- Using a blank wall planner, ask participants to brainstorm all communication activities, opportunities and deadlines for the year ahead.

- Next, as a group, colour code the different types of activity e.g. online, newsletters, events.

- The collated information can then be converted into an electronic or online calendar and shared with the group.

Activity 2: Where are we now?

- Ask participants to discuss your council's approach to communications and consider at what stage you are currently working.

- Decide where your council wants to be and how you think you might be able to get there.

- Discuss ideas about how to move towards stage 3.

Activity 3: Making Contact

- Ask participants to think about and list local community media outlets (such as local newspapers, community magazines, newsletters, radio stations and even TV channels).

- Next research and record the contact details of each of the media outlets identified.

- Once you've recorded the contact details, make a contact phone call or send an email to each media outlet to check their deadlines for stories as they all differ. Add this information to your media contact list.

Activity 4: Hit the target

- Using your updated media contact list, identify the media outlets to be researched further. Collect examples of local newspapers, newsletters and magazines. For each media outlet note down the types of story they cover and the profile of the target audience.

- To gain a better insight into which media outlets to target with a specific story, discuss which media outlet is most likely to cover a story or activity your team are currently planning.

Activity 5: Writing a News Release

- Using the Press Release Template (Annexe 2), ask participants to have a go at drafting a news release for one of their activities, events or achievements.

- Share the draft new releases and ask other participants to give constructive feedback.

Activity 6: Who are we?

- Ask participants to suggest content for a short paragraph about your council to be used in press release Notes to Editors. Aim for 100 to 200 words – don't cram it with so much information that it's overwhelming or the reporter will just ignore it.

- Collate ideas and circulate the draft for the participants to comment. Finalise the text, which can then be used whenever needed. You can also use the text for the 'About Us page' on your website or on social media.

Activity 7: Hitting the Headlines

- Collect examples of local newspapers, magazines and community newsletters and give each group a selection. Ask participants to pick out what they consider to be three good and three poor headlines and to describe why they have made their choices.

- Finally ask them to choose one activity from current council or community activities and to write their own interesting headline.

Activity 8: Picking the Pictures

- The quality of any photograph is vitally important in increasing its chances of being used. Choosing the best photographs to illustrate your stories is a useful skill.

- Collect examples of newspapers and magazines and give each group a selection. Ask them to select what they consider to be particularly good photographs and to describe why they think they're attractive.

- Finally ask them to provide a photograph that accurately reflects their current activities and then write an interesting caption for it.

Useful information

Welsh Government Statutory Guidance: Access to information on Community and Town Councils https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/access-to-information-guidance-for-community-and-town-councils.pdf

Plain English Campaign: How to write in plain English
http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/how-to-write-in-plain-english.html

Cymraeg Clir Resources (Welsh only)
www.bangor.ac.uk/canolfanbedwyr/adnoddau_cc.php.en