



Helston Town Council

Communications and Engagement Strategy

Prepared by Breakthrough Communications

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Cover photo and council logo taken from the Helston Town Council website on 22 January 2021.

Section 1: Introduction and background

Introduction

Helston Town Council wants to take a more strategic and proactive approach to communications. The Council wants to communicate clearly what it does, as well as what it does not do. To have a clear and distinctive identity. It also wants to ensure that residents, businesses and visitors have a seamless experience when interacting with the Council.

The Council believes that to be effective it needs to engage with the community it represents. Communications should not just be about informing people. The Council wants to ensure that the community can play an active role in the future of Helston.

A communications work plan can be found at Appendix A and a two page summary of the Strategy is at Appendix B. Summary survey responses and workshop notes are at Appendix C.

Purpose of the Strategy

The Strategy is a living document that should be reviewed from time to time. It should be adapted to meet new circumstances and to ensure the Council can meet the challenges of an ever-changing communications landscape.

The Strategy seeks to provide a framework for messaging, enabling staff and Members to develop engaging communications with a coherent narrative. It will also consider how the Council could better understand the priorities of the community it represents.

We have made recommendations in relation to key messages, communications platforms and ways to measure impact and effectiveness of communications.

The primary goal is to provide a broad framework for developing communications. The aims of the Strategy could be summarised as:

- To support the Council in achieving its overarching objectives;
- Ensuring the Council is fully engaged with residents, businesses and visitors;
- That people have opportunities to make their voice heard;
- That information is provided in a clear and accessible way;
- Allowing for the development of new communications channels and the strengthening of existing ones, and;
- How it could build on existing relationships and create new ones.

Helston

Helston is said to be the most southerly town in Great Britain. It is located at the southern end of Cornwall, approximately 12 miles north of Lizard Point. In 2019 it had an estimated population of 11,560 according to the ONS. Helston is an ancient town. Known in earlier times as 'Henlys' or 'Hellys' the name is thought to derive from 'hen lis' which is Cornish for 'old court'. The 'ton' suffix is a later anglo-saxon addition.

Helston was given its first charter by King John in 1201. It was for some time a 'Stanary Town' for the stamping of tin. The town also had a castle. During the reign of Henry VIII it was said that the first signs of Cornish rebellion appeared in Helston. Education has played an important role in the town for centuries with a grammar school established as early as the 1550s.

By the 1800s Helston had grown in size and was considered to be an important town in the west of Cornwall. It was a centre for mining, trade and with the arrival of trains a tourist destination. Culdrose naval base built after World War 2 brought increased employment to the town. The town grew over the course of the 20th century. Much of the housing, both new and old, is of a consistent style using granite and grey slates.

Modern Helston is in the heart of the Cornish countryside. It has a rich articularal legacy with many older buildings and landmarks surviving into the present day. The winding alleys and lanes up steep hills provide interesting walks. As with many other towns, retail has suffered in recent years. However, Helston is still a busy town and focal point for the surrounding area.

The town is proud of its history and traditions. Events such as Flora Day and Beating the Bounds are still celebrated alongside more modern ones such as the Freedom Parade. Helston is twinned with Italian town Sasso Marconi which is Marconi's birthplace. This acts as a reminder of the work Marconi undertook in the Helston area of Cornwall.

The Town Council

Helston Town Council replaced Helston Borough Council in 1974. This was done as part of the national reorganisation of local government that took place at the time.

Currently the Council has two wards and 14 Members who are elected once every four years. Alongside Full Council there are four committees and 10 Working Parties. Some elected Members also represent the Council on outside bodies. The Grade II* listed Guildhall is the administrative centre of the Council and where meetings are held.

The Council's precept for the 2021/22 financial year is £557,740. According to analysis by SLCC there were nationally 260 councils in 2021/22 with precepts above £500,000. On that basis Helston Town Council could be considered to have a 'large' precept.

In Cornwall the Council still has a comparatively 'large' precept. However, 13 other local councils have higher precepts, eight of which are greater than £900,000.

There is currently a team of 12 members of staff, with one being seasonal. The Council undertakes the usual core functions of a local council, for instance, as a statutory consultee for planning and representing community views.

In addition to the core functions, it provides a comparatively wide range of services for a local council. It plays an active role in event management. The Council manages and maintains the Guildhall which is used to host events and weddings. It also manages and maintains key services, such as: parks, playing fields, open spaces, benches, bus shelters, CCTV and public toilets.

The Council's overarching objectives

The Council has set out overarching objectives in a 'Strategic Plan 2021-2025'. The document was reviewed and approved in January 2021. It is understood that the document is reviewed annually and is currently being considered.

The goal of the 'Strategic Plan 2021-2025' is stated as follows:

"This Strategic Plan is a statement of Helston Town Council's objectives for the period 2021 to 2025. The purpose of the plan is to provide an overview of the Council's plans to improve the quality of life for Helston's residents, businesses and visitors over the next four years."

Six overarching objectives are set out in the 'Strategic Plan 2021-2025':

1. Provide services responsive to the needs and aspirations of the residents of Helston
2. Provide services that are sustainable and represent good value for money
3. Deliver services with partners where this offers best value
4. Provide services which will assist with the reduction of Helston's carbon footprint
5. Provide services that are recognisable as being delivered by Helston Town Council
6. Provide a channel for the residents of Helston to express their needs and preferences

Two specific areas of focus are also identified:

- **Community Leadership:** The Town Council is committed to working for, and with, the community to make a positive difference. We encourage local engagement and will work with groups to improve services and support a variety of activities and events.
- **Communication and Consultation:** Helston Town Council strives to maintain openness and transparency in our actions and decision-making. The Council actively seeks to listen to the needs of the community and to positively respond within its powers and budgetary limits.

Diagram 1: A simplified representation of the Council's overarching objectives and specific areas of focus



Section 2: Review of current communications

Introduction

Breakthrough Communications had a preliminary meeting with officers. We also conducted a Council-wide survey and facilitated a workshop for officers and elected Members. Engagement with both the survey and workshops was high with useful insights provided.

A summary of responses to the survey and the notes taken during the workshops have been made available in a separate document (Appendix C).

Identity and branding

Core identity - Helston Town Council



The Town Council has a roundel style logo. In the centre is an image of what is presumed to be St Michael's victory over the devil. Arranged around the image between two borders are the following words in English and Cornish:

“Helston Town Council - Konsel An Dre Hellys”

Beyond the logo the Council does not appear to have any branding. There is no style guide in place. The use of colour, typography, language, taglines or messages is inconsistent and has developed organically. It is worth noting that even the use of the logo is inconsistent. As of early February 2022 the website has a version of the logo without the Cornish text.

In a broad sense the use of Cornish could be described as a ‘branding like’ feature of the Council’s communications. Cornish is used by the Council with some consistency for headings and basic messages. Whilst not branding as such it is a feature that might help audiences to identify the Helston Town Council brand. The Council also has a specific policy setting out the importance of the Cornish language.

Other identities



Weddings

at the Guildhall, Helston

The Council has been or is actively involved with a number of different joint projects and initiatives. For instance Discover Helston and Helston Climate Action Group. However, it does not appear to have direct control of the branding or communications of these joint projects or initiatives. They have therefore not been considered as part of this Strategy.

Alongside the core identity there appears to be two others. They are:

- **'Guildhall, Helston Weddings'** - The brand has been developed in quite a limited way with a dedicated page on the website and a separate Facebook Page. There is also a PDF brochure available for download.
- **Plastic Free Helston** - Once again the brand has been developed in quite a limited way with a dedicated website page and a Facebook Page.

There appears to be no plan or strategy in place for the development of either identity or their branding. This is particularly surprising in relation to the 'Guildhall, Helston Weddings' identity as it was presumably created to generate additional revenue. Indeed it is not clear that the Council even recognises the above as identities for which it has control.

Tone of voice

Current tone of voice

The Council has organically developed a reasonably consistent tone of voice which is used across most of its communications. It's current 'default' tone of voice could be described as:

- Formal
- Inaccessible
- Emotionally distant
- Inflexible
- Broadcasting - Not having a two-way conversation or listening

A formal tone of voice is appropriate for certain communications channels and in certain contexts, for instance agendas and formal reports. However, in other contexts it will not assist the Council in engaging with its audiences and might even work against it, for instance on social media or in newsletters.

Proposed future tone of voice

During the workshop it became apparent that some elected Members and Officers would like to see the Council explore a new approach. The proposed new approach would see the Council adopt a 'default' that is where possible and appropriate more:

- Informal
- Accessible
- Friendly
- Flexible
- Engaging - Providing information as required, but inviting a two-way conversation wherever possible. More open to and encouraging of feedback

Human resources and budgets

Currently there is no dedicated human resource for communications. There also doesn't appear to be a specific communications budget beyond a basic provision for consumables. Management of communications appears to spread out over a number of officers and in some cases elected Members.

In the survey and during the workshops repeated comments were made about the need for more time, increased budgets or additional human resources for communications. This went hand in hand with a general desire for the output to be increased and quality improved.

In general the Council has for the most part focused on essential day to day communications. This is not a criticism as it needs to be done. However, tackling the issue of limited human resources and budgets will be central to a more strategic, proactive and accessible approach.

Serious consideration needs to be given as to how sustainable and effective the current arrangements really are. From a strategic perspective the key question should be:

'What resources (both human and financial) will be required to create a more strategic approach to communications and allow the Council to achieve its key objectives?'

What's working well

- Sufficient resources for day to day communications and what is legal required (agenda, minutes, etc)
- Limited resource available events and projects communications
- Reactive and crisis communications
- The very basic internal communications (official notices, meeting summonses, etc)

What could be improved

- **No review:** The Council has not considered what human resources are required to deliver its aims and objectives. Ensuring enough human resources are in place are key to ensuring its overarching aims and objectives are met.
- **Strategic approach:** Increased human resources are likely to allow the Council to take a more proactive and strategic approach to communications.
- **Beyond the day to day:** With sufficient human resources the Council could move to a more strategic approach to communications. One possible benefit of this would be improved internal communications. Another would be a less reactive and more proactive approach. Both the quality and quantity of output will most likely improve.

Communication channels

During the preliminary meeting with officers and the subsequent workshop the ways that the Council currently communicates were identified.

We have considered each of the key public-facing channels. There is a summary setting out what is working well, what is not working well and how they could be improved.

Council noticeboards

The Council currently has two external noticeboards at the Guildhall which are used for official notices and business. There are two internal Guildhall noticeboards for public and service information. There are a further three noticeboards around the town which are used to advertise public services and event information.

What's working well

- There are quite a few noticeboards in key locations
- Key service and event information is provided
- There appears to be a widespread knowledge of them as a communications channel

What could be improved

- **Key messages:** The Council could more effectively use noticeboards to get across key messages. In particular providing simple posters about the services the council does and does not manage.
- **Improved engagement:** The noticeboards could be used to more generally improve engagement and awareness of other communications channels. For instance posters with QR codes for the Council's social media accounts, landing pages for email newsletters or to advertise surveys.

Community noticeboards

The Council seems to be making little if any use of community notice boards in places such as community centres, GPs surgeries, shops, pubs, etc.

What could be improved

- **Use of community noticeboards:** Having posters and information in community notice boards is one comparatively quick, easy and cheap way for the Council to reach a wider audience. It is likely that audiences which make little or no use of the internet will in particular benefit from this.

The Council's website

There was a high degree of recognition of the website as a communications channel. Many officers and members had engaged with the website and were familiar with it.

The website should act as the focal point for the Council's communications. It should be the place that brings together all key information and integrates the various communication channels the Council has.

Diagram 1: How the website should as a focal point for communications



What's currently working well

- The website contains a considerable amount of information and appears to cover most of the Council's services and functions
- The use of some imagery adds to the user experience of the website
- The inclusion of Cornish is a positive addition to the website
- The 'Contact Us' page on the website is clear and easy to find
- Services offered by the Council are listed. However, they are mixed together with other councils and the list appears to be incomplete, for instance, Guildhall Weddings is missing and so are events

What can be improved

- **Setting out a clearer identity:** The Council's logo is on the website and its name appears prominently on the website. However, there appears to be no plain English explanation setting out the difference between the Council and Cornwall Council. There is also no 'Frequently Asked Questions' section. The A-Z service list is a useful addition, however, the mixing of services from different councils might be confusing for some.
- **Home page:** The Home page contains a large amount of information that from a user perspective is not easy to work through. When viewed on a mobile device the Home page takes quite some time to scroll through and some of the text is quite small. One quick win for the Council would be to create a short video introducing the website rather than the current introductory message from the Mayor.
- **Navigation:** The website is not as easy to explore and navigate as it could be. There is a lot of repetition or information set out in non-user friendly ways. For instance, meeting dates, agendas/minutes and committee membership are spread out over two top navigation dropdown menus. Under just one of those dropdowns there are four separate pages giving further details.
- **Information:** Information is not always easy to find. For instance, there is quite a large amount of information accessed through the 'Council Administration' tab/page, but this is not immediately obvious or clear to the user. Quite a few pages refer to events in 2021 or appear to be out of date. Other important information like the Projects Officer vacancy appears to be 'buried'.
- **Integration between the website and social media:** The homepage has social media buttons. However, they appear at the bottom of the website page. It is important they appear at the top of the page if possible. Many people access the internet through mobile devices and are unlikely to scroll to the bottom.
- **Call to Actions (CTAs) up front:** It is important to get across key messages and calls to action as one of the first things that visitors see when they visit the website. This could for instance be a CTA to sign up to an email Newsletter or to take part in a survey. The Council should give more thoughts as to how to make its CTAs more clear and prominent. For instance the current (as of 24 January 2022) CTAs to take part in the photography competition or for people to apply for the Projects Officer role.

- **Accessibility:** A basic accessibility check was done on the website. A few issues were found that the Town Council might want to consider. In particular the Council might wish to consider having a more regular check for accessibility. The accessibility statement does not appear to have been reviewed (and presumably a check done) since June 2020. In more general terms the Council might also wish to consider if it could use less PDF documents and include more information in a HTML format.

Social media

Benchmarking

On 24 January 2022 a simple benchmarking exercise was carried out on the Council’s social media accounts.

The number of followers the Council has was compared with other similarly precepting local councils from around the country. The number of followers matters because those people will receive the Council’s content, assuming paid Ads are not used.

It should be noted that after technical difficulties with the old Facebook Page a new one was launched late last year. The old Page was ‘unpublished’ around the start of 2022. On 10 December 2021 the old Page had 2,110 followers and the new one had 643.

The Council now operates only one Facebook Page as ‘Helston Town Council’. It also operates two other Facebook Pages:

- ‘Guildhall, Helston Wedding’ which has 101 followers
- Plastic Free Helston which has 172 followers

Table One: Results of the social media benchmarking exercise on 24 January 2022

Social Media Channel	Helston TC	Skipton TC	Ringwood TC	Thorne-Moor ends TC	Horden PC
Facebook	675 (Old Page 2,110)	2,073	2,313	1,492	1,636
Twitter	80	2,523	N/A	N/A	N/A
Instagram	N/A	N/A	566	N/A	N/A
Linked In	0 (Auto-listing)	82	N/A	N/A	N/A
YouTube	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

In summary, the Council is operating a similar number of social media accounts to other councils. However, its Twitter account is in effect 'dormant' with no new tweets.

The Council had a high number of followers on the old Facebook Page when compared to other councils. However, the new Facebook Page had only grown by 29 followers (4.51%) over the course of seven weeks. If such a rate were to remain constant it could take the Council months, possibly even years, to reach the same figure it had for the old Facebook Page.

What's working well

- The set up of the social media is good
- Facebook is updated on a regular basis
- The tone of voice on Facebook has become a little more informal in recent months
- Facebook posts are often supported by imagery
- There is some sharing of posts from other organisations (MP and NHS)

What could be improved

- **Strategically managed and engaging content across all social channels:** There appears to be no coherent approach to social media. With exception of a photo competition the content tends to be more broadcasting rather than engaging. Opportunities for two way dialogue and call to actions points are limited.
- **Tone of voice and language:** A good start has been made, but the tone of voice, language and subject matter could be a little more accessible. A recent post about the Guildhall flowers is a good example of moving towards a more accessible, fun and chatty tone. Used in the right context a more informal tone will be more engaging, receive more views and be shared more often.
- **Lack of messages relating to priorities:** Few if any of the Town Council's key priorities are clear. For instance, the two key areas of focus outlined in the Council's strategic document of Community Leadership and Communication and Consultation are not consistently addressed. One exception to this is tree planting, however most of the posts relating to it are lengthy and read more like press releases.
- **Story, issue and event development:** There is limited effort to create and sustain engaging stories and content relating to key issues and events. Most posts are 'one-offs' rather than being part of a longer conversation. To increase engagement and recognition more could be done to plan and develop stories, issues and events. One positive example where a new approach has started to happen is with the photo competition. However, the 'call to action' in one post was for people to scan a QR code which they are unlikely to do from the smartphone they are using to access social media on.
- **Use of video:** Right now there is no video content on the Council's Facebook Page. This means that the council is missing out on a range of opportunities to even more effectively engage. The Council should give consideration to producing basic video content to market the Guildhall for weddings.

- **Use of metrics:** The Council should make use of the metrics generated in social media. This would help it to understand what content is being engaged with and to gain an insight into key audiences' interests.
- **Twitter:** The Council has 80 followers. It does not appear to have tweeted since June 2021. Some consideration should be given as to how it could be used more effectively. If there is no role for Twitter then the Council should consider the future of the account.
- **LinkedIn:** The LinkedIn Company Page is an auto-listing. The Council should consider taking ownership of the Company Page and how it could most effectively be used.
- **Instagram:** Consideration should be given to the creation of an Instagram account. It will help the Council to reach younger audiences. It is also useful for showcasing the town to visitors/tourists and to advertise events. One other useful benefit of Instagram is that it can be managed through the Meta Business Suite. However, before the Council creates any new social media accounts consideration must be given to the dormant Twitter account and the issue of limited human resources.

Printed newsletters

Currently the Town Council produces four editions a year, about once a quarter. It is designed and edited internally. The primary mode of delivery is digitally in the form of a PDF via the website and Facebook.

Some physical copies are made available in public locations such as the Guildhall. It is estimated that print runs are between 50-250 per edition.

What's working well

- There is a range of content covering events, achievements and service delivery
- Attempts to develop on some of the priorities identified by the Council
- Some images are available
- Mix of communications media - some physical copies are provided
- Use of Cornish in addition to English on the first page

What could be improved

- **Design:** The newsletter design could be cleaner and more modern. The Council could try to use Canva or desktop publishing software to develop a more modern feel.
- **Links to social media:** In every edition there should be a prominent reminder that to get up to date information from the Council people should follow it on social media.
- **Development of a clear and independent identity:** The Council could use the newsletter more effectively to set out its own identity. For instance a regular section setting out in plain English the services it provides and functions it undertakes.
- **Physical copies of the newsletter:** It was mentioned that all the physical copies are taken away by the public. Therefore there clearly is an appetite for physical copies of the newsletters. The Council could consider delivery of the newsletters to residential and

businesses addresses in the town. Another option might be to have more physical copies printed and distributed to prominent community locations (GPs surgeries, cafes, etc). This will help it to reach a larger audience particularly those who don't use social media or the internet.

- **Consistent approach:** In general the Council should consider the consistency of its brand and messaging. There appears to be limited consideration given to the development of a consistent brand and a common set of messages across the newsletter, website, social media, etc.
- **e-Newsletters:** The Council could consider the creation of an email newsletter. We would recommend varying the e-Newsletter content, including having some focused on single issues or services, some just appearing as brief 'letter'-style updates/bulletins from the council/civic leaders, etc. Consider setting up e-Newsletters for specific voices or issues where not currently available as service users may only be interested in those services and not general council news.
- **Clear calls to actions:** Regardless of the format the Council should be encouraging participation and engagement. Consider setting out regular calls to actions, for instance, asking for feedback or survey participation. The December 2021 edition of the newsletter had calls to actions, but none of them were clearly stated.

Public facing communications by officers

Little thought seems to have been given to the key role officers play in interfacing with members of the public. Whilst it was recognised that officers did engage with the public, no steps have been taken to provide messages or training. In other words the Council is not making the most of one of its most important external communication channels.

What's working well

- The enthusiasm of public facing officers to engage with the community
- Officers who are visible in the community and able to engage in face-to-face communications
- Project Officer has generated widespread and positive community engagement

What could be improved

- **Need clear messages:** It was felt that all officers, but particularly those in a public facing role, lacked clear messages for engaging with the community.
- **Training:** As part of the induction programme public facing members of staff should be provided with basic messages and training in how to communicate the council's objectives. For officers involved with communications there might also be a requirement for crisis communications training.
- **Internal communications:** A more consistent and strategic approach should be developed in relation to internal communications. The goal would be to ensure that all staff understand key messages, developments and issues.

Elected members communications

Elected Members can be effective ambassadors for the Council. The role of the Mayor is particularly important as they are often present at important events. Whilst there was recognition of this from the Council it was clear that more could be done in this area.

What's working well

- The general enthusiasm of Members to engage with communications
- A desire to connect with the community and create a genuine conversation
- An understanding of the importance of effective communications
- Current and past Mayors taking a lead
- Participation through community organisations and networks - this work is being undertaken but could be expanded on

What could be improved

- **More engagement:** The possibility of elected Members working to achieve more engagement with the community was mentioned both in the council-wide survey and during the workshops. This could take many forms, such as, talking to people in the street, attending meetings of local groups and giving a talk to a school council.
- **Surgeries:** Councillors could consider developing surgeries. These could take many forms, such as, traditional surgeries in community centres or street surgeries. Regardless of the physical format the Council should consider the digital options as well to reach as many people as possible.
- **Communications training:** Members could benefit from regular training in how to build two way conversations with the community and effective communications.

Press release and articles

The Council makes little use of press releases or having its articles in other organisations publications. The last press release posted on the Council's website is from December 2020.

The Council should consider making more of the opportunities that press releases and articles give. They allow the Council to reach out to new and hard to reach audiences. It will also help the Council to develop relationships with the local and regional media.

What could be improved

- **Quick wins:** There are some quick wins that the Council could pursue in the creation of press releases. For instance, making announcements about upcoming events, the current photography competition, the Platinum Jubilee, advertising the Annual Town Meeting. If the Council starts to undertake activities such as live streaming meetings that could also form the basis of a press release.

- **Reuse press releases and articles:** An advantage of writing press releases is that the information can be reused for posts on the website, social media posts and newsletter content. The same is also true in reverse. The Council could look to quickly turn newsletter articles into press releases for instance.
- **Develop a plan:** The Council should consider the development of an informal plan for the creation of press releases. This would be a particularly useful step in relation to events and making major announcements. The plan should be informal and adaptable, but still provide a framework to work towards.

Town Guide

It appears the Town Council has in the past produced a Town Guide. The latest edition available on the Council's website was published in June 2014.

There is clearly an exercise in updating the document. However, beyond that the Guide could provide a useful platform for the Council to get across key messages. It could also help the Council forge ties with business, partners, local organisations and other stakeholders.

What could be improved

- **Review:** The Town Guide could be reviewed and an updated one created. The review process should be used as an opportunity to strengthen existing relationships with external groups and to create new ones.

Section 3: Strategy

Introduction

A central part of this Strategy is to better showcase the work of the council to residents and build a stronger sense of brand identity for the council. This requires that key audiences are identified, as well as, communications objectives and messages.

Every officer and elected Member has an active role to play in communications.

The Council will support them to share our story through their work. In difficult situations which challenge our reputation clear leadership will be provided. Through their work officers and elected Members can act as champions for both the Council and our community.

Audiences

The Council's audiences are:

- Residents
- Visitors
- Those working in the town
- Businesses
- Cornwall Council
- MP / PCC / regional and national government
- Press and media
- Emergency Services
- Other parishes and town councils
- Third Sector - Charity/Voluntary groups
- Community Organisations - Neighbourhood Watch
- Service Users
- Staff and contractors
- Councillors

Audiences requiring a specific focus were identified during the workshop. These will be considered in further detail in this Strategy. However, for they are for sake of completeness:

- Young people
- Those in financial or social hardship
- Non-digital natives - audiences that don't use the internet or use it to a limited extent

Our approach to communications

Our approaches is to:

- Take a strategic and proactive approach to communications;
- Recognise that our communications are more than just our formal communications;
- Be transparent and open;
- Be inclusive and accessible;
- Have an informal and accessible tone of voice;
- Be consistent, clear and proactive in communications written in plain English
- Keep communications up to date and accurate
- Consult on significant matters;
- Embrace all forms of communications that help us to engage with our audiences;
- Build a two way conversation with our audiences, and;
- Listen to, and where possible, allow the community and stakeholders to shape our priorities, services and budgets.

We will focus on:

- Developing a genuine two-way conversation with our audiences;
- Supporting the development and improvement of the local economy;
- Climate change and the aim for Helston to become carbon neutral by 2030;
- Developing a greater understanding of the history and traditions of the town;
- Event and community interactions;
- Ensuring all of our communications are accessible and inclusive, and;
- Developing the use of kernewek (the Cornish language) wherever possible.

Key messages

Our key messages:

- We are committed to engaging with our community in an open, clear and accessible way.
We want to hear what you have to say.
- Everyone should have the chance to play an active role in **making Helston an even better place to live, work and visit.**
- **We serve Helston** and are focused on developing our services, securing improvements and creating a sustainable community.

Our communications will:

- Make clear what the Council's role is and the limitations placed upon it. **We will clearly set out what our vision is and what functions and services we provide.**

Communications Objectives

This Strategy will use the six overarching objectives identified in its 'Strategic Plan 2021-2025' document to develop specific communications objectives. Key messages, audiences and communications channels will be considered in relation to each.

The two specific areas of focus of 'Community Leadership' and 'Communication and Consultation' were initially going to have separate sections. However, on reflection it was felt that elements of both came under one of the six overarching strategic objectives. To avoid repetition they have therefore been considered as part of the six overarching objects.

Objective 1: Provide services responsive to the needs and aspirations of the residents of Helston

Key priority

- Helston Town Council is committed to providing a democratic representational voice for the people of Helston and will engage with the local community in a proactive and meaningful way.

Key operational or policy objectives

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions that affect them.
- Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc obtained from community engagement and co-design to have an impact on decision-making and the way in which services are being delivered.
- The Council actively seeks to listen to the needs of the community and to positively respond within its powers and budgetary limits.
- Encourage public attendance and participation at meetings.
- Ensure meetings are accessible to the public.
- Consult on matters that will have a significant impact on the community.

Communications objectives

- Develop responsive mechanisms to measure the communities' needs and aspirations
- Gather information that demonstrates that projects and funding are meeting the communities needs and aspirations
- Undertake regular reviews of documents, content, surveys, etc. The objective is to ensure that they are clear, accessible and in plain English
- Ensure that all sections of the community can access and take part in surveys and consultations

- Highlight successful projects and initiatives that meet the communities needs and aspirations
- Develop ways to co-design communications materials with key audiences
- Proactively listen to and seek views from all parts of the community, as well as from individuals and groups that may not regularly interact with the council
- Specifically reach out to under-represented audiences and those that have lower engagement with the Council
- Embrace the benefits of face-to-face communications when it is possible to do so
- Ensure that community needs and aspirations are reflected in our plans and strategies

Key audiences

- Residents
- Businesses
- Third Sector - Charity/Voluntary groups
- Community Organisations - Neighbourhood Watch
- Service Users
- Young people
- Those in financial or social hardship
- Non-digital natives - audiences that don't use the internet or use it to a limited extent

Communications channels to promote the communication objectives

- Council noticeboards - QR code poster with further information and access to surveys
- Community noticeboards - QR code poster with further information and access to surveys
- The Council's website - Detailed information and feedback.survey channels
- Social media - Simple FAQs, links to further information, simple polls
- Printed newsletters - Clear calls to action and information about services
- Public facing communications by officers - Provide key message and signpost to further information
- Elected members communications - Gather information particularly from those unable to use the internet
- Press release and articles - Provide clear calls to action

Council Objective 2: Provide services that are sustainable and represent good value for money

Key priorities

- The Council is responsible in law for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that the Council has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.

- As Cornwall Council strives to make financial savings, the Town Council is poised to take over any non-mandatory services that might otherwise be lost. The Town Council has already taken over the public conveniences and public realm CCTV which would have been closed down had the Council not stepped in.

Key operational or policy objectives

- The Town Council will source materials and services locally so long as the requirements for value for money, environmental and social factors and quality are met.
- The Town Council will wherever possible promote and support modern working practices, such as remote working, amongst staff and councillors.
- All Members and Officers are responsible for obtaining value for money at all times. An officer issuing an official order shall ensure as far as reasonable and practicable that the best available terms are obtained in respect of each transaction.

Communications objectives

- Capture sufficient data to be able to develop insights and to demonstrate sustainability ue for money
- Highlight the work undertaken to by the Council to promote and build sustainability into the work it does
- Regularly report back to residents on progress made on sustainability projects
- Demonstrate value for money regularly but particularly during the budget setting process

Key audiences

- Residents
- Visitors
- Those working in the town
- Businesses
- Press and media
- Third Sector - Charity/Voluntary groups
- Community Organisations - Neighbourhood Watch
- Service Users
- Staff and contractors
- Councillors
- Young people
- Those in financial or social hardship
- Non-digital natives - audiences that don't use the internet or use it to a limited extent

Communications channels to promote the communication objectives

All communication channels to be used to highlight the sustainability and the good value for money that services offer. This will be particularly important during budget setting time.

- Council noticeboards

- Community noticeboards
- The Council's website
- Social media
- Printed newsletters
- Public facing communications by officers
- Elected members communications
- Press release and articles
- Town Guide

Council Objective 3: Deliver services with partners where this offers best value

Key priorities

- The Town Council is committed to working for, and with, the community to make a positive difference. We encourage local engagement and will work with groups to improve services and support a variety of activities and events.

Key operational or policy objectives

- Ensure that actions are inclusive of all sections of the community and services are accessible to all residents and visitors to the town;
- Work closely with Cornwall Council, and other organisations associated with the town;
- Engage with Cornwall Council to encourage devolution of assets and services to the Town Council;
- Continue to offer community grants to organisations for the benefit of Helston residents;
- Continue to work with Helston Community College and the Primary Schools to promote and encourage youth engagement;
- Help to sustain a healthy business community;
- Continue to work with the Helston Climate Action Group to support the aim for Helston to become carbon neutral by 2030;
- Support events such as Flora Day, Harvest Fair, Christmas Lights Switch-on and Remembrance Day.

Communications objectives

- Identify priorities to meet the needs of our community, both as an individual service provider and a partner, and ensure that these take account of national and regional priorities
- Work closely with Cornwall Council, and other organisations associated with the town
- Develop partnership working arrangements where possible
- Ensure that we reach as wide an audience as possible through partnership work
- Consistently deliver on shared priorities and objectives

- Amplify shared campaigns, particularly those relating to the Council's strategic objectives and key areas of focus
- Work with others to promote awareness of the visitor and tourism offer for the wider area
- Work with partners to make the Town's public spaces more accessible
- Develop mechanisms to promote collaboration and the sharing of information between partner organisations
- Celebrate and highlight success all year round
- Further develop and sustain partnership working arrangements to drive economic and employment growth
- Involve stakeholders through the use of user-satisfaction surveys and other customer feedback
- Work with partners to get them to more effectively signpost to the Town Council - particularly Cornwall Council

Key audiences

- Businesses
- Cornwall Council
- MP / PCC / regional and national government
- Emergency services
- Other parishes and town councils
- Third Sector - Charity/Voluntary groups
- Community Organisations - Neighbourhood Watch
- Staff and contractors
- Councillors

Communications channels to promote the communication objectives

- The Council's website - simple information about partnership arrangements and who to contact to develop them. Make clear projects that can be tendered for and have a clear process
- Newsletter - Consider development of a specific email newsletter for partners
- Public facing communications by officers - Officers to build working relationships with key stakeholders
- Elected members communications - Councillors to build working relationships with key stakeholders. There is a particularly important role for those who are voted onto external bodies.
- Press release and articles - Highlight success and advertise opportunities
- Town Guide

Objective 4: Provide services which will assist with the reduction of Helston's carbon footprint

Key priorities

- Continue to work with the Helston Climate Action Group to support the aim for Helston to become carbon neutral by 2030
- The Council acknowledges that whilst our activities may have adverse effects on the environment, we can take steps to minimise those impacts, and in many cases make a positive contribution by protecting and enhancing the local environment.
- The Council considers that the environment is important and will comply with and, where possible, exceed all environmental regulations, laws and codes of practice, as applicable.
- The Council recognises that making changes in how we function may impact some communities more than others, and will strive to ensure that choices made are equitable and do not disproportionately affect vulnerable communities.
- The Council will be guided by the precautionary principle i.e; that it will endeavour to only act where there is clear evidence that an action will do no harm.
- The Council will encourage good practice across Helston by acting as a role model and investigate a local accreditation scheme for businesses, organisations and groups who meet specified environmental criteria.

Key operational or policy objectives

- To protect and enhance the health of the environment and ecology across areas and assets where Helston Town Council has responsibility, for the benefit of the local community
- To promote the importance and value of a healthy environment, and to support local people in their involvement with and enjoyment of it
- To carry out our work in an efficient way that minimises or eliminates its adverse impact on our environment, and instead makes a positive contribution
- To promote the development of a Circular Economy, including the consideration of the needs of the vulnerable people within our community
- Continue to work through the actions set out in section 3 of the Council's Environmental Policy

Communications objectives

- Have a regular channel of communications with Helston Climate Action Group
- Highlight success and work towards achieving carbon neutrality
- Signpost residents to sources of advice and support
- Provide specific advice to businesses
- Work with the tourism sector to promote awareness with visitors
- Provide clear and simple calls to action. Help people identify ways they can get involved. An easy start might be litter picks under the Plastic Free Helston banner

- Report back to residents on progress made on projects
- Represent the community's views on issues
- Focus communications on the positive contribution that the Grounds Maintenance Team plays in creating a sustaining a functioning ecosystem
- Build, sustain and promote partnership arrangements with others with the goal of enhancing the economy and the environment
- Develop communications channels with audiences and parts of the community engaged in the protection and enhancement of the natural environment
- Promote specific aspects of the Council's services and events that support the natural environment and biodiversity
- Raise awareness about the emergency plan

Key audiences

- Residents
- Visitors
- Those working in the town
- Businesses
- Cornwall Council
- MP / PCC / regional and national government
- Press and media
- Third Sector - Charity/Voluntary groups
- Community Organisations - Neighbourhood Watch
- Service Users
- Staff and contractors
- Councillors
- Young people
- Those in financial or social hardship
- Non-digital natives - audiences that don't use the internet or use it to a limited extent

Communications channels to promote the communication objectives

All communication channels to be used to highlight the priority. Demonstrate success and the completion of milestones. Encourage participation. Seek feedback.

- Council noticeboards
- Community noticeboards
- The Council's website
- Social media
- Printed newsletters
- Public facing communications by officers
- Elected members communications
- Press release and articles
- Town Guide

Objective 5: Provide services that are recognisable as being delivered by Helston Town Council

Key priorities

- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard to reach groups).
- The Town Council is committed to working for, and with, the community to make a positive difference.

Key operational or policy objectives

- Ensure that actions are inclusive of all sections of the community and services are accessible to all residents and visitors to the town.
- Work closely with Cornwall Council, and other organisations associated with the town.
- Engage with Cornwall Council to encourage devolution of assets and services to the Town Council.
- Support events such as Flora Day, Harvest Fair, Christmas Lights Switch-on and Remembrance Day.
- Continue appropriate use of kernewek – the Cornish language.

Communications objectives

- Clearly communicate to residents, businesses, organisations, service users, partners and stakeholders the Council's priorities and work it undertakes across all council communications
- Build a narrative of what the council does do and what it does not do, furthering the council's culture of transparency, accessibility, and accountability
- Use council communications to consistently promote the Council's brand and achievements
- Develop a clear brand for the Town Council that is distinct from other councils and that reflects our aspirations for the Town
- Use council communications to consistently reach out to all areas of the community and build a strong sense of identity for the town
- Ensure that the objective is reflected in Council policy
- Development of a clear brand for the Council
- Utilise the role of the Project Officer to develop effective engagement and to promote initiatives and the Council's priorities
- Ensure front facing staff have a clear set of messages

Key audiences:

- Residents
- Visitors

- Those working in the town
- Businesses
- Press and media
- Third Sector - Charity/Voluntary groups
- Community Organisations - Neighbourhood Watch
- Service Users
- Staff and contractors
- Councillors
- Young people
- Those in financial or social hardship
- Non-digital natives - audiences that don't use the internet or use it to a limited extent

Communications channels to promote the communication objectives

All communication channels to be used to make clear what the Council's role (limitations placed upon it), functions, services and vision for the town are. All services managed by the Council should be clearly branded.

- Council noticeboards
- Community noticeboards
- The Council's website
- Social media
- Printed newsletters
- Public facing communications by officers
- Elected members communications
- Press release and articles
- Town Guide

Council Objective 6: Provide a channel for the residents of Helston to express their needs and preferences

Key priorities

- Helston Town Council strives to maintain openness and transparency in our actions and decision-making. The Council actively seeks to listen to the needs of the community and to positively respond within its powers and budgetary limits.
- Helston Town Council is committed to providing a democratic representational voice for the people of Helston and will engage with the local community in a proactive and meaningful way.

Key operational or policy objectives

- Encourage public attendance and participation at meetings;
- Ensure meetings are accessible to the public;

- Make documents such as Agendas, Minutes and Policies widely accessible;
- Maintain a Council website and Facebook page that are regularly updated;
- Publish and distribute an Annual Report and quarterly Newsletters;
- Consult on matters that will have a significant impact on the community;
- Maintain a Complaints Log and act quickly to resolve the issues or forward to the appropriate Authority;
- Encourage effective local community engagement
- Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions that affect them
- Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc obtained from community engagement and co-design to have an impact on decision-making and the way in which services are being delivered
- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard to reach groups).
- The Council will do its utmost to settle complaints and satisfy complainants in the interest of the good reputation of the Council.

Communications objectives

- Undertake regular reviews of documents, content, surveys, etc. The objective is to ensure that they are clear, accessible and in plain English
- Focus communications on projects that have provided opportunities or raised aspirations for certain specific groups (young people, those with disabilities, those with mental health issues)
- Gather information that demonstrates that projects and funding are having a material impact on increasing equality in the town
- Ensure that all sections of the community can access and take part in surveys and consultations
- Work with partners to promote activities that improve outcomes and highlight any successes
- Develop responsive mechanisms to measure the communities' assets, needs, opportunities, rights, and responsibilities. Such information should be gathered and regularly reviewed
- Demonstrate the measures the council has taken to encourage diversity within its workforce and amongst elected Members
- Clearly advertise the opportunities that the community has to make its voice heard or to have a say in decision making
- Develop ways of co-producing communications materials with key audiences
- Develop communications that support an asset based approach with the objective of supporting community initiatives
- Proactively listen to and seek views from all parts of the community, as well as from individuals and groups that may not regularly interact with the council
- Specifically reach out to under-represented audiences and those that have lower engagement with the Council

- Use face-to-face communications to understand the needs of the community that do not use the internet
- Utilise the role of the Project Officer to develop effective engagement and to promote initiatives and the Council's priorities

Key audiences

- Residents
- Businesses
- Third Sector - Charity/Voluntary groups
- Community Organisations - Neighbourhood Watch
- Service Users
- Staff and contractors
- Councillors
- Young people
- Those in financial or social hardship
- Non-digital natives - audiences that don't use the internet or use it to a limited extent

Communications channels to promote the communication objectives

All communication channels should provide a clear call to action to feedback information to the Council. Contact details should be visible. Social media and the website should be pushed as key communication channels. For those without the internet there should be the option of writing or calling the Council.

- Council noticeboards
- Community noticeboards
- The Council's website
- Social media
- Printed newsletters
- Public facing communications by officers
- Elected members communications
- Press release and articles

Development of identity and brands

Helston Town Council

The Council should undertake a branding exercise to develop the brand based on its core identity, that of 'Helston Town Council'. This exercise will be a detailed stand alone project separate to this Strategy. As such it will not be considered in detail at this stage. Specific recommendations have been made at section 4.

Development of the Council's other identities could be undertaken at the same time. Should the Council wish to develop them separately it might wish to consider the following.

Helston Guildhall, Weddings

Communications Objectives:

- Promote awareness of the venue and increase revenue
- Capture sufficient data so as to be able to develop insights into service users

Key Audiences:

- Helston and a radius of 20-30 miles
- Visitors - past, present and future

Key Messages across all Audiences:

- Helston's Guildhall is a truly exceptional venue for weddings, milestone and life events, business meetings and conferences, as well as for regular bookings from local community groups
- We offer a first-class service and great value for money. Our experienced team provides a truly personal service, always going the extra mile for our customers
- Helston's Guildhall is a unique, historic building in the heart of a beautiful Cornish seaside town.

Communications Channels to promote the Key Messages:

Recommended existing communications channels to continue using:

- Create a separate branded website
- Existing branded Facebook

Recommended new communications channels to start using:

- Google My Business listing
- Branded Instagram account
- Include in town guides/maps in the future
- Local/regional/national bridal directories
- Social media paid advertising

Branding and Communications Approach:

Helston Guildhall, Weddings could have its own distinct branding, website and social media, separate to that of the council. A new logo and colour scheme could be developed to assist with the promotion of the venue.

For the website and social media video clips from different events should be used to create a 'showreel'-style video. The Council is missing an opportunity in not having a branded Instagram account. We would strongly recommend this is set up.

In summary, more should be made of social media and online advertisement in general. A specific brand should be created and a communications plan developed.

Plastic Free Helston

Communications Objectives:

- Promote awareness of the venue and increase revenue
- Capture sufficient data so as to be able to develop insights into service users

Key Audiences:

- Residents and businesses in Helston town
- Schools and young people
- Visitors - unlikely to get involved in activities, but the messages are useful reminder to avoid single use plastic

Key Messages across all Audiences:

- Plastic Free Helston is committed to the reduction of single-use plastic within the town
- Only by working together can we kick our addiction to avoidable single-use plastic
- Join one of litter picks and become a plastic free champion for Helston

Communications Channels to promote the Key Messages:

Recommended existing communications channels to continue using:

- Existing page on the Council's website
- Existing branded Facebook Page

Recommended new communications channels to start using:

- Branded Instagram account
- Press releases
- Prominently and consistently in newsletters
- Community noticeboards
- Consider setting up a specific email newsletter - could be for environmental issues
- Include in town guides/maps in the future

Branding and Communications Approach:

The brand is fairly well developed. The Council is missing an opportunity in not having a branded Instagram account. We would advise the use of more video to develop awareness and show community participation with Plastic Free Helston.

Consideration of Specific Audiences

Three specific audiences of Young people, those in financial or social hardship and non-digital natives will be considered.

Audience: Young people

Communications Objectives

- Reach out to an audience that is under-represented in local government and has lower engagement with the council
- Proactively listen to and seek views from different parts of the community, as well as from individuals and groups that may not regularly have interaction with the council
- Build sustainable, two-way conversations with different parts of our community and encourage people to give their views and ideas, showing that we welcome feedback
- Use the key theme of environmental sustainability to engage this group
- Use targeted communications (particularly via social media) to get messages in front of this audience as much as possible

Key messages

- We are providing new services - we recently provided funding for a youth cafe and a youth worker
- Your Town Council is putting the environment at the heart of what we do
- Your opinions will help to shape our priorities and the services we provide

Communications channels to promote the key messages

- Public facing council officers
- Councillors acting as community representatives - specifically visiting educational facilities and youth groups
- Website
- Social Media
- Local education internal communications where possible - emails, newsletters and noticeboards

Audience: Those in financial or social hardship

Communications Objectives

- Reach out to an audience that is under-represented in local government and has lower engagement with the council
- Proactively listen to and seek views from different parts of the community, as well as from individuals and groups that may not regularly have interaction with the council

- Build sustainable, two-way conversations with different parts of our community and encourage people to give their views and ideas, showing that we welcome feedback
- Develop an understanding of what improvements would most assist those in financial or social hardship
- Represent the views of this group to regional and national decision makers

Key messages

- Your views matter to us and will help us to develop the services we provide and the decisions we make.
- We are focused on providing services that support people in our community and help the town to thrive.
- We are working with the community to make a positive difference. We encourage local engagement and will work with groups to improve services and support a variety of activities and events.

Communications channels to promote the key messages

- Community and shop noticeboards
- Public facing council officers
- Newsletter (physical and an email Newsletter)
- Councillors acting as community representatives - specifically street or area surgeries
- Website
- Social Media
- Press releases and articles

Audience: Non-digital natives

Communications Objectives

- Reach out to an audience that is under-represented in local government and has lower engagement with the council
- Proactively listen to and seek views from different parts of the community, as well as from individuals and groups that may not regularly have interaction with the council
- Build sustainable, two-way conversations with different parts of our community and encourage people to give their views and ideas, showing that we welcome feedback

Key messages

- Your views matter to us and will help us to develop the services we provide and the decisions we make.
- We put Helston first and are here to get the best for our town.
- We are working with the community to make a positive difference. We encourage local engagement and will work with groups to improve services and support a variety of activities and events.

Communications channels to promote the key messages

- Council noticeboards
- Community and shop noticeboards
- Public facing council officers
- Newsletter (principally a physical newsletter)
- Councillors acting as community representatives - specifically street or area surgeries
- Press releases and articles in community publications

Measuring reach and impact

The Council should consistently monitor the impact and effectiveness of its communications.

We would advise that the Council establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These would allow the Council to monitor the reach and effectiveness of its communications.

KPI tracking could be undertaken on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. It can also be done on an informal or formal basis. The Council is advised to consider the human resources requirements when setting out when and how KPIs will be reviewed.

The Council could consider utilising the following KPIs:

Digital (online):

- Digital surveys
 - Feedback and responses received
 - Participation rate
 - Analysis of surveys - tracked year on year
- Website page views and behaviours
- Length of visit on each website page
- Which pages are accessed by users and user journey
- Facebook 'Insights' data, and Twitter 'Analytics', including post views and engagement data, as well as more basic metrics such as page/account followers
 - For example key Facebook KPIs should include:
 - Page summary statistics
 - Reach and engagement levels for posts over time
 - No. minutes of video viewed for specific video content
 - Demographic breakdown (gender, age) for video content
- Number of messages received through digital channels, including email and via social media;
- Signposted clicks to other websites
- Email newsletter click through rate

Physical (print and event-based):

- Feedback and responses received to print-based surveys
- Analysis of surveys - tracked year on year
- Event based surveys - enquiring how people found about the event
- Press release coverage
- Articles in other organisations newsletters coverage
- Newsletter interaction - based on 'Call to Action' take up

Section 4: Our recommendations

Introduction

In this Strategy we have made a number of recommendations and suggested improvements to the Council's communication. We have summarised the key recommendations below and suggest that the Council consider each carefully.

Recommendation: Creation of a new role

Consideration should be given in the first instance as to how the recommendations and suggestions will be implemented. Most importantly, consideration should be given as to who will undertake the work.

It is clear that there are insufficient human resources at the Council to achieve a strategic change in approach to communications. Some work could be contracted out, however, even in that instance someone will still need to oversee those external arrangements.

We would recommend that the Council create a new role with strategic oversight and management of communications.

This has been recommended because human resources will be key to driving the changes the Council wants to see. Particularly a more strategic, accessible and proactive approach.

Our recommendation would lead to the creation of a Communications and Engagement Officer or a similarly titled role. There are clearly many issues to consider, such as budgets, job descriptions, etc. To assist with the initial discussions about the proposed role, we suggest that the focus of a Communications and Engagement Officer could be:

- Strategic oversight of external communications across the council;
- Lead on the overall delivery of the implementation of this communications strategy;
- Develop and implement a resource-appropriate council-wide communications plan, with key deliverables and timescales, across each service area and channel;
- Create and develop high-quality content;
- Monitor and report on KPIs;
- Assist in the development of an internal communications plan;
- Use a range of tools and techniques to proactively communicate and engage with different audiences using identified key messages, and;
- Regularly liaises with staff from each service area, to understand the issues, their needs and requirements, as well as, messaging issues.

The Council could opt not to create a new role. This approach would most likely lead to many of the recommendations not being realised. It is also unlikely to help the Council to become more strategic, proactive and accessible.

Recommendation: Undertake a branding exercise

The Council should employ a consistent brand across its print and digital communications output. The need for a stronger and clearer Council identity was consistently mentioned by both officers and elected Members.

Currently the only branding is the Council's logo, which is not used consistently across communications channels. There is no consistent corporate style or basic resources.

At a minimum the Council should look to get a high quality digital version of the current logo made. Ideally, the digital logo would be made so that it works in both colour and black and white. It should also 'work well' in both digital and print formats.

We would however recommend that the Council undertake a full branding exercise.

The goal of the exercise would be to establish a clear identity and to create a style guide. This would create a more consistent and clearer brand for the Council. It could also assist in:

- Making the distinction between the Council and Cornwall Council clearer;
- Helping to develop a more accessible tone and approach to communications, and;
- Greater consistency of language, messaging and imagery.

The Council needs to create a clear specification. We would recommend that the specification should make clear that any branding should reflect the history and traditions of the town. Consideration should however be given as to how those histories and traditions could be effectively utilised in the digital age.

We also recommend that consideration be given to creating a clear brand for the Helston, Guildhall Weddings. This should help the Council to market the service more effectively to the target audience.

Finally, the Council should keep in mind that it is managing three identities. When developing strategic plans, communications and budgets due regard should be given to each.

Recommendation: Carry out annual surveys

A key objective should be to understand how residents view the council and to what extent residents understand the work the Council does. Effectively, taking the pulse of the community.

To properly understand these issues, we recommend the Council should aim to carry out an annual survey.

This would ideally be done in both print and digital formats. The survey would ask a range of open and closed questions about residents' priorities. It would also seek to track public opinion

on Council messages, projects and initiatives. The findings of the survey could be included in the Council's annual report.

This annual cycle of survey and report will build up a picture of the shifting priorities of local residents as well as providing key measurables to allow the Council to assess effectiveness of its communications.

Key points to consider when conducting a survey:

- Ideally carry out a survey in both print and digital formats, to ensure maximum return
- Printed version of the survey: either delivered to every house through a reliable delivery service or through Royal Mail's Door To Door service (which delivers based on Post Code sectors). Alternatively deliver to local venues, such as cafes, leisure centres, libraries, etc and signpost people to collect from there, as well as having some centrally available at the council
- Digital version of the survey: promoted through the council's website, eNewsletter and across all social media channels. Make use of paid-for social media advertising (especially on Facebook and Instagram), which allows you to effectively target anyone living within Post Code sectors within the Council's boundaries, even if they don't currently engage/follow/like the council on social media
- Promote using local media - press releases to local newspapers, publications, radio etc all work well if the survey has the right media angle
- Consider what you're trying to achieve, and what you want to know. Ideally have a balance of open and closed questions, with the closed questions being binary choices, scales or multiple choice options
- Consider the effective use of digital surveys: Tools such as TypeForm or Survey Monkey are both powerful, inexpensive and provide reasonable built-in reports for closed questions
- Consider whether to outsource the entire process to a third-party company to manage the survey process end-to-end

Recommendation: Carry out regular surveys

Assuming there is sufficient capacity the Council should consider establishing a more regular cycle of surveys. This would complement the insights gained from the Annual Survey as well as providing more up to date feedback from the community. A recent example of this sort of survey would be the 'Three Wishes' one recently conducted by the Council after the second workshop.

The 'regular surveys' could also be targeted to specific audiences through specific communication channels. For instance, there could be a quick digital survey on social media focusing on youth issues. Alternatively, it could be a physical survey for service users that goes out with the newsletters.

The Council could have a formal plan or could take a more informal approach. There are pros and cons to both. However, having a plan in the short term might be preferable as it would provide a framework to work in.

Many of the key points raised in relation to the Annual Survey are also applicable to the more regular surveys. Other points to consider:

- Given the increased frequency, who will 'own' regular surveys and plan the work?
- How often will the regular surveys happen?
- How will the more regular feedback and information gathered in the surveys be integrated into the decision-making structures of the Council?
- How could regular surveys be used to encourage residents to engage with other communications channels, for instance, social media, the website, etc?

Recommendation: Create an e-newsletter

We would recommend that the Council set up an email newsletter (eNewsletter) through a dedicated email service. eNewsletters are a cost effective way to reach local residents.

Email is increasingly seen as an 'official' form of communication and building a mailing list of residents is a particularly effective way to both communicate the council's messages and signpost to social media and the council's website.

We would advise:

- The Council to review any existing email lists it holds and carries out a re-consenting programme in line with data compliance regulations to opt them in to a new e-newsletter
- Using MailChimp to start a monthly e-newsletter to residents
- The Council should use its social media and website to encourage residents to sign up for the newsletter service
- Over time consider setting up separate eNewsletters for specific audiences - Climate emergency, specific groups of residents, businesses, etc
- Consider content that is beyond regular 'newsletter' style content, such as videos, seasonal messages, key service updates and announcements, etc.
- Using the email newsletter to promote strategic conversations, for instance, encouraging participation in Annual Survey, the Council's programme of events, etc

Recommendation: Develop a social media strategy

We would recommend that the Council develop an annual social media strategy.

On a basic level it would summarise what the Council plans to do and what it hopes to achieve. It should have enough detail to guide actions, but remain flexible enough to respond to events.

We recommend that the social media strategy set out:

- How the Council will integrate social media with other communications channels;
- KPIs to allow the Council to understand what is working and what needs improvement;
- The staffing resources and technical capabilities required;
- Budgetary requirements (ads, paid for surveys, external professional fees, etc);

- Audiences focus;
- What social media channels will be used and how they will be used to communicate with different audiences;
- Broadley set out how stories will be developed and content shared;
- Support for partners, for example organisations that have Service Level Agreements with the Council;
- Consider how success and positive developments will be highlighted effectively, and;
- Measures that will be taken when there is a social media communications crisis.

Recommendation: Hold a series of virtual ‘Meet the Council’ events, streamed to social media

We recommend that the Council hold a series of virtual ‘Meet the Council’ events, streamed to social media. Digitally advertise and promote a series of ‘meet the council’-style events.

Ideally they would be a small group of councillors attending each one on a rota basis, with an officer in support. They could be held on Zoom/Teams and then live streamed to social media. They should be short, no longer than one hour and semi-structured (yet informal).

The Council should consider starting off with councillors and officers introducing themselves. Then a nominated councillor outlines a summary of the work of the council, its current priorities and areas of focus. Hopefully this would then lead to a semi-structured conversation and questions from members of the public.

We would recommend piloting one event initially. Consider attendance and reaction both during the meeting and afterwards on social media. After that consider whether to hold further events and how often.

Recommendation: Pilot the streaming of some or all council meetings to social media

Many town councils now regularly stream some or all of their committees or full council meetings to social media; usually either on Facebook or YouTube.

Despite some challenges faced by a small minority of councils, our experience is local councils of all shapes and sizes find this to be a great opportunity to positively shine a light on the work of the council to the wider community, many of whom may not have previously attended a previous council meeting.

We recommend therefore that the Council pilot the streaming of some or all council meetings to social media.

We suggest that the Council look beyond initial metrics (e.g. how many people watched live on Facebook) and analyse the data over a longer period of time. For instance how many have watched back parts of the subsequently saved videos. Local councils generally find this leads to longer-term positive engagement and awareness of the council.

Recommendation: Increase the use of video across communication channels

Video is one of the most powerful tools available to the Council to build positive engagement. Good video does not necessarily have to be high-end professionally edited, nor does it need to involve huge amounts of time or resources. Most videos can simply be taken on a mobile phone, with little editing required, if any.

It is important that captions are added wherever possible, either automatically (e.g. if being placed on YouTube, Facebook, etc) or manually using a caption-generating service.

Table Two: Ideas for video content that the Council could create

Area of service / channel	Time/Effort involved	Details
Council website home page	Quick win	Create a short (1-2 mins) 'welcome' video from the Mayor, welcoming users to the site and summarising what users can access, and signposting appropriately
Social media (including YouTube)	Quick win	As recommended above. Consider streaming some committees or full council to social media (preferably Facebook). This might require some investment in equipment
Social media (including YouTube)	Quick win	As recommended above. Hold a virtual meeting on key topics (or even just a 'meet the council'-style meeting) and stream to social media, to encourage and drive positive engagement with the council. This might require some investment in equipment
Council website Social media (including YouTube)	Quick win	Either pre-record or ideally go 'live' with short, seasonal or topical messages from officers/key members on social media

Social media (including YouTube)	Some time and effort required - including editing	A series of videos explaining in simple terms a complex issue such as the role the Council plays in the planning process
Social media (including YouTube)	Some time and effort required - including editing	A series of videos highlighting projects and initiatives relating to key overarching objectives of the Council

Recommendation: Develop a plan to reach specific audiences more effectively

During the workshops it was mentioned that the Council has difficulty in effectively engaging with certain audiences. No local council can communicate with every audience all the time. However, where a longstanding issue is identified consideration should be given to the practical steps that can be taken to reach a particular audience.

As part of this target we have started to map out how the Council could communicate more effectively with certain groups.

We would however still recommend that the Council develop a plan as to how it will communicate with 'hard to reach' audiences. The plan would include specific KPIs and a specific plan of action.

The goal would be to ensure that the Council considers all the actions it could take to reach such audiences. It would also seek to provide specific metrics by which the Council could measure its successes and identify areas for improvement.

The plan could incorporate:

- Citizen juries
- Focus groups
- Co-production stories
- Increasing engagement outside the Town Centre
- Focused communications for the groups identified
- Working with partners to increase the effectiveness of communications (for instance, doctors, libraries, businesses, community centres, etc)

Recommendation: Development of Radio Helston

The idea of creating a radio station was discussed during the workshop. Should the project go ahead it is likely to be a long term project. It will require planning, development and a considerable input from a range of different people to create the content for it.

We would recommend that the Council consider carefully how it prioritises its approach to communications and resource management. In the short term we recommend that the Council

focus on other issues, such as, the website, social media, development of an email newsletter and the publication of a physical newsletter.

Recommendation: Undertake a review of policies, procedures and forms

A consistent theme that arose during the Council-wide survey and workshops was the need for the Council to use clear language and plain English. The accessibility of information, documents, policies and procedures was also mentioned.

We recommend that the Council undertake a comprehensive review of the information and documents on the website. It would be advisable for the Council to establish a timetable and not to attempt to review everything in one go.

The Council might, given the recommendations and suggestions made as part of this Strategy, wish to consider specifically reviewing communications and engagement related policies, for instance:

- Community Engagement Strategy
- Community Emergency Plan
- Publication Scheme
- Complaints Procedure Policy
- Grant Awarding Policy
- Press Policy & Social Media Policy for Councillors
- Cornish Language Policy
- Training & Development Policy - in the respect that it supports communications and engagement training

We recommend that the Council consider if they represent current or desired future practice. Consideration should also be given to whether or not the policies are accessible, clear and in plain English.

We would further recommend that the Council review the Grant Awarding Policy. In particular how the grants are advertised and the degree of community involvement in the process.

Post grant advertisement should be more clearly and prominently mentioned in the Grant Awarding Policy. Those organisations that receive grant funding from the Council should have to make clear where the source of funding came from. Should the funding be for a physical project or an event it is not unreasonable to expect that the Council's logo be displayed.

Additionally the Council could consider ways to make it easier to apply for a grant. Currently it appears that people need to use a PDF or Word form. The Council could consider setting up a user friendly, secure and GDPR compliant electronic form.

Recommendation: Establish a communications budget

The Council currently has a budget specified for marketing which appears to be for the provision of place and destination marketing through Discover Helston. The Council does not appear to have a specific budget for communications beyond the supply of basic day to day consumables.

We recommend that the Council establish a communications budget as part of its annual budget. This would help the Council to plan resource appropriate community engagement for the coming year. It would also assist in making the Council more proactive rather than reactive.

The proposed Work Plan at Appendix A could provide a starting point for the creation of a communication budget. It would of course need to have 'day-to-day' expenditure, projects and figures attached to it.

Recommendation: Review of the Council's website

We recommend that the Council review the website. At section two we set out some ways in which we felt that the Council's website could be improved.

Our key recommendation for the website would be that the Council consider ways that it could set out a clear identity separate to Cornwall Council and other services providers.

We also recommend that the following be considered:

- Have a stronger branding and identity
- Have a page in plain English that clearly state the differences between different councils
- Consider creating a separate A-Z services guide for the Town Council
- Consider creating an FAQ section
- Make use of an introductory video on the home page
- Clearly highlight positive achievements of the Town Council
- Where appropriate reduce the use of PDFs
- Make greater use of analytics to understand how people use the website

The Council might within the next 3-5 years consider the creation of the current website. This could be based on the current website or be done from a 'blank slate'. Whatever the approach, a new website will require a significant amount of time and human resources.

We would therefore recommend in the short term that the Council review the current website and get the content right. This will ensure what is in place 'works' for now. It could provide a useful starting point for a new website in the future.

Recommendation: Review of internal communications and the creation of a specific strategy

Internal communications are central to ensure that staff and elected Members understand the Council's objectives, priorities, and key messages. It helps them to understand how their contribution supports the Council in the achievement of its objective.

Internal communications also set out how Officers and elected Members behaviour affects the way audiences and the community perceive the Council.

We recommend that the Council consider undertaking a separate review into internal communications with a view to creating a specific strategy. A particular focus of the plan should be the communications between:

- Councillors and councillors
- Staff and councillors

At a minimum we recommend that the Council's internal communications should include:

- The use of more regular informal meetings with elected Members - the issue of limited human resources will most likely need to be considered first
- Publication of quarterly internal newsletters - could be in the form of an email
- A regular staff survey and that staff are provided with the opportunity to give feedback
- Simple posters with key messages
- Regular communication briefings (Remote meetings for those working remotely)

Specific consideration should also be given to ways in which councillors can effectively communicate with other councillors. It was clear during the workshop that there was limited informal dialogue between elected Members. The pandemic, lock downs and remote meetings have clearly all had an impact on the Council as they have on some many other organisations.

However, it is critical to the functioning of the Council that elected Members regularly communicate with each other. We suggest that councillors consider:

- Having regular informal meetings (remote or in person)
- Identifying councillors who will play a key communications role
- Establishment of a mentor scheme
- Having an annual 'away day'

Appendix A: Proposed work plan

Recommendation	Year 1 - 2022/2023	Year 2 - 2023/2024	Year 3 - 2024/2025
Create a new role with strategic oversight and management of communications	Consider the creation of a Communications Officer style role	Look to appoint in early in 2023	Review in late 2025 to ensure that there are sufficient human resources for effective communications
Undertake a branding exercise	Create a specification for a branding exercise and commission it	Work to update communications to be in line with new branding	Continue to work to update communications to be in line with new branding
Carry out annual surveys	Consider the timings and budget requirement - if possible conduct the first one in the run up to the next budget setting round	Conduct an annual survey 2023	Conduct an annual survey in 2024
Carry out regular surveys	Develop a plan of action and start to undertake more regular surveys	Start to undertake regular surveys if they have not already started	Continue to conduct regular surveys and review the plan
Create an e-newsletter	Set up a GDPR compliant email newsletter and develop a plan for content	Send regular eNewsletters and review the schedule	Send regular eNewsletters and review the schedule
Develop a social media strategy	Create a social media strategy	Implement and develop further with the proposed Communications Officer taking a lead	Continue to develop the Social Media Strategy
Hold a series of virtual 'Meet the Council' events, streamed to social	Consider the budget for equipment. Start to hold stream meetings as soon as	Continue to live stream events	Continue to live stream events

media	possible		
Pilot the streaming of some or all council meetings to social media	Consider the budget for equipment. Stream council meetings as soon as possible	Stream council meetings as soon as possible	Continue to stream meetings
Increase the use of video across communication channels	Work through the ideas set out in the table above	Continue to work through the ideas	Continue to work through the ideas
Develop a plan to reach specific audiences more effectively		Develop a plan once the proposed Communications Officer is in post	Carry out and review the plan
Development of Radio Helston	Develop costings, a project plan and consider the resources required	Consider the idea in detail once the proposed Communications Officer is in post	
Undertake a review of policies, procedures and forms	Create a plan and start to conduct a review of policies, procedures and forms	Continue to review policies, procedures and forms	Continue to review policies, procedures and forms
Establish a communications budget	Develop a budget based on the recommendations and any suggestions that are made	Review once the Communications Officer is in post	Review annually
Review of the Council's website	Implement where possible the suggestions that have been made	Review the website once the Communications Officer is in post	Review annually
Review of internal communications and the creation of a specific strategy	Conduct a review and consider the creation of a specific strategy for internal communications	Periodically review internal communications strategy	Periodically review internal communications strategy

Appendix B: Two Page Summary

Introduction

A central part of this Strategy is to better showcase the work of the council to residents and build a stronger sense of brand identity for the council. This requires that key audiences are identified, as well as, communications objectives and messages.

Every officer and elected Member has a role to play in communications.

The Council will support them to share our story through their work. In difficult situations which challenge our reputation clear leadership and communications will be provided. Through their work officers and elected Members can act as champions for both the Council and our community.

Our approach to communications

Our approaches is to:

- Take a strategic and proactive approach to communications;
- Recognise that our communications are more than just our formal communications;
- Be transparent and open;
- Be inclusive and accessible;
- Have an informal and accessible tone of voice;
- Be consistent, clear and proactive in communications written in plain English
- Keep communications up to date and accurate
- Consult on significant matters;
- Embrace all forms of communications that help us to engage with our audiences;
- Build a two way conversation with our audiences, and;
- Listen to, and where possible, allow the community and stakeholders to shape our priorities, services and budgets.

We will focus on:

- Developing a genuine two-way conversation with our audiences;
- Supporting the development and improvement of the local economy;
- Climate change and the aim for Helston to become carbon neutral by 2030;
- Developing a greater understanding of the history and traditions of the town;
- Event and community interactions;
- Ensuring all of our communications are accessible and inclusive, and;
- Developing the use of kernewek (the Cornish language) wherever possible.

Key messages

Our key messages:

- We are committed to engaging with our community in an open, clear and accessible way. **We want to hear what you have to say.**
- Everyone should have the chance to play an active role in **making Helston an even better place to live, work and visit.**
- **We serve Helston** and are focused on developing our services, securing improvements and creating a sustainable community.

Our communications will:

- Make clear what the Council's role is and the limitations placed upon it. **We will clearly set out what our vision is and what functions and services we provide.**

Recommendations

In the Strategy a number of recommendations and suggested improvements to the Council's communication have been made. We suggest that the Council consider each one very carefully. They are summarised as follows:

- Creation of a new role with strategic oversight and management of communications
- Undertake a branding exercise
- Carry out annual surveys
- Carry out regular surveys
- Create an e-newsletter
- Develop a social media strategy
- Hold a series of virtual 'Meet the Council' events, streamed to social media
- Pilot the streaming of some or all council meetings to social media
- Increase the use of video across communication channels
- Develop a plan to reach specific audiences more effectively
- Development of Radio Helston
- Undertake a review of policies, procedures and forms
- Establish a communications budget
- Review of the Council's website
- Review of internal communications and the creation of a specific strategy

It can take a long time to create a new position in local government. We therefore suggest that high priority should be given to the consideration of the recommendation that a new role be created with strategic oversight and management of communications.