



West Bletchley Council

Engagement and Communication Strategy

Background

West Bletchley is one of the largest of some 48 parish and town councils within the borough of Milton Keynes. It is comprised of some 9,000+ households and in excess of 22,200 residents. Predominantly residential, there is little in the way of commerce or industry within the parish boundary. The Council is currently made up of 28 Members, representing 10 parish wards.

West Bletchley Council is a parish council, which represents the first tier of local government and, as such, is 'closer to residents'.

The Council's Mission Statement, included in the Business plan, states:

"West Bletchley Council undertakes to provide democratic representation on behalf of the residents of West Bletchley and to deliver or facilitate delivery of projects and/or services that make a positive difference to the community."

West Bletchley Council undertakes or enables a broad range of activities on behalf of local residents, including:

- Representation on local issues e.g. objections or support for proposed building development within the parish and beyond
- Commenting on all proposed planning applications received by Milton Keynes Council, relating to land and /or buildings within the parish
- Responsibility for landscape, parks and open spaces maintenance
- Provision and management of allotment plots
- Provision and managements of local events including an annual carnival
- Provision of a local community resource centre

Target Audience

It is essential to consider our target audience when deciding the appropriate means to communicate with our community.

Compared with Milton Keynes borough area as a whole, the West Bletchley population is generally older, with a higher proportion of people aged 65 or over who live alone, and a lower proportion of people under 20 and is less ethnically mixed, with a predominantly White British population.

The socio-economic make up is mixed, with a higher proportion of home owners but also a higher proportion of council tenants and lower car ownership. Educational attainment is below the MK average with fewer people with 'A' levels, and degrees. In terms of employment, residents are more likely to work in fields such as wholesale and retail trades, manufacturing, construction or transport than in supervisory, management or professional roles, with a higher number of retired people.

The demographic profile suggests that some sections of our community may not have the means to readily access information electronically, therefore messages need to be conveyed in a variety of ways to ensure that we reach all members of our community.

Key Messages

As an organisation, West Bletchley Council has key messages that it wants and needs to convey to our stakeholders, particularly our parishioners, which are the core messages that we want our target audience to hear and remember. The aim of these key messages is to give direction to our communications and enhance relationships with our target audience.

Criteria for developing key messages are:

- Be believable – support with evidence
- Be understood – reflect resident and community group understanding
- Be distinctive – clear competitive awareness
- Be agreed – in line with the organisational strategy
- Be credible – information that can be trusted
- Avoid negativity
- Use the brand

Additionally each key message should be:

- **Strategic:** define, differentiate and address benefits and value proposition
- **Relevant:** balance what we need to communicate with what our audience needs to know
- **Compelling:** meaningful information designed to stimulate action
- **Simple:** easy to understand language, avoid jargon and acronyms
- **Memorable:** be easy to recall and repeat, avoid run on sentences
- **Real:** use active rather than passive voice.

Key messages MUST be consistent. Consistency gives comfort to people.

Key messages should form part of any interaction with the media or external communication.

West Bletchley Council beliefs and values

The shared beliefs and values that underpin West Bletchley Council's work and communications are:

- We believe in the value of community and we are proud to be MK3. West Bletchley is a community rich in purpose, togetherness and environmental beauty.
- We are here to make a difference in the community, we exist for the benefit of the people of MK3. We are passionate about making WB a better place to live socially, environmentally and relationally.
- We are here to help the community help themselves. We are committed to equipping and resourcing individual and community groups to know what systems, organisations and policies are in place that can help them achieve their objectives and contribute to the whole community.
- We are a warm, friendly and inviting place to be. Anyone who walks through our doors or attends an event, in whatever location, should feel welcomed and valued. We exist to serve the community of MK3, so anyone who belongs to that community should feel confident with our team.
- We are a team that will go the extra mile, both for the team and the community. If we believe we can help, we will do whatever we can to do so.
- We give the community of MK3 a voice. Often individuals do not feel they are heard by local or national government. We work to be a mouthpiece for local residents and give them a platform to be able to speak into local issues.
- We care about the environment, we believe that when people are proud of their physical locality they are more likely to be advocates for the area, more likely to enjoy increased quality of life and more likely to take responsibility for the environment themselves.
- West Bletchley Council are independent of Milton Keynes Council and look to be advocates for MK3 within the wider Milton Keynes context. We believe that, by working cooperatively, we can provide a healthy partnership through which real change can be achieved.
- West Bletchley Council are committed to finding creative, innovative and engaging ways to encourage community involvement and forge closer community ties.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of our communications strategy is to raise the profile of West Bletchley Council with our community and encourage greater understanding of the key messages that we wish to convey.

We will ensure that all communications are created and delivered with the aim of contributing to the overall organisational objectives and helping to meet these.

Our communications will create a clear distinction with our target audience between Milton Keynes Council and West Bletchley Council, inspiring greater interaction between our residents and ourselves.

We will communicate an authentic, engaging and meaningful message through a consistent tone and with clear content, and using the most appropriate platform/s at our disposal. This will include gathering personal and corporate stories that support our key messages and enable us to communicate to our key audiences, instilling a sense of belonging for our local community.

Means of communication and engagement

West Bletchley Council has a range of opportunities and platforms for both regular and periodic communication and engagement with our local community.

The purpose of each is outlined below:

- Open Door newsletter (4 issues per year):
 - To update local residents on new developments
 - To profile key services and publicise activities
 - To maintain accountability on commitments
- Social Media (Daily/continuous):
 - To provide a forum to build relationships with local residents
 - To develop an understanding of perceived needs within the MK3 area
 - To mitigate the need for more extensive or prolonged interaction by providing information/answers in a more timely way
 - To feature stories from local residents and agencies
 - To profile and raise awareness of local services and organisations
- Website (continuous):
 - To highlight the agreed key messages and build a consistent brand profile
 - To update local residents on new developments
 - To maintain accountability on commitments
 - To profile key services
 - To profile local organisations and community groups
- Events (annual programme)
 - To provide an environment which brings the community together
 - To encourage a greater sense of belonging to West Bletchley
 - To involve and profile local organisations and community groups.
- Groups and Forums (periodic):
 - To provide an environment which brings local services together
 - To profile key services
 - To involve and profile local organisations and community groups
 - To identify local development opportunities.

We will ensure that we fully utilise these platforms and opportunities to engage and communicate with our local community, to ensure that messages are conveyed as widely as possible.

Action Plan

Our Action Plan will set out in detail how the aims and objectives of this strategy will be achieved.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Action Plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Engagement and Events Officer.

The Strategy will be reviewed annually by the Community Services Manager to evaluate its success, which will be reported to Members.

November 2020