

Appendix A

# Runnymede Borough Council

Social Media Work Plan – DRAFT

December 2023

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# Background and information

Runnymede has an active presence on the most popular social media platforms, which are used to deliver important messages and information about the Council's work and priorities.

However, social media as a regular tool of communication at Runnymede Borough Council came comparatively late when viewed against other councils in Surrey. Runnymede was the penultimate local authority in the county to join Facebook and the last to join Twitter.

Since then, and especially in the past four years, the authority has made progress in growing its follower numbers and engagement rates to be on par with our peers. This vital work is carried out to support the Communications Team's efforts to deliver the Council's messages and information to a greater number of people both in the Borough and outside.

Growth has been achieved by carefully curating content and an insistence on very high standards on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. During this most recent time frame, the Council has, in addition to broadcasting news also increased engagement with audiences by replying to comments they post, sharing extra information, asking for their views on consultations, flagging potential issues to relevant service areas before they escalate and highlighting community led activity.

## Statistical snapshot of corporate Facebook profiles as of May 2023

| Council              | Borough population | Actual Followers (May 2023) | Percentage of Borough population following | Launch date      |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------|
| Surrey Heath         | 90500              | 7,500                       | 8.2  | July 2010        |
| Reigate and Banstead | 150800             | 12,000                      | 7.9  | March 2010       |
| Spelthorne           | 103000             | 7,500                       | 7.2  | July 2009        |
| Guildford            | 143600             | 10,000                      | 6.9  | July 2010        |
| Woking               | 103900             | 7,100                       | 6.8  | March 2015       |
| <b>Runnymede</b>     | <b>88000</b>       | <b>5,700</b>                | <b>6.4</b>                                 | <b>July 2016</b> |
| Epsom and Ewell      | 80900              | 5,000                       | 6.1  | July 2012        |
| Mole valley          | 87400              | 4,600                       | 5.2  | September 2010   |
| Waverley             | 128200             | 5,100                       | 3.9  | August 2011      |
| Tandridge            | 87900              | 2,700                       | 3.0  | January 2017     |
| Elmbridge            | 138800             | 3,900                       | 2.8  | August 2011      |

- Followers as a percentage of population: Runnymede is 6/11
- Followers: Runnymede is 6/11 in pure follower numbers
- Age: Runnymede 9/11 or the second youngest profile, which allows the second smallest time to grow an audience. Other councils have had up to seven years longer to do so.

## Social media channels operated by the Council

Across the Council there are a mix of corporate channels, which are managed by the Communications Team and sub channels, some of which are managed by relevant service areas and others by the Communications Team.

| <b>Platform</b> | <b>Active corporate profile (run by Communications Team)</b> | <b>Sub profile (run by service areas or Communications Team)</b>   |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Facebook        | Yes  | Chertsey Museum<br>Addlestone One<br>What's On in Runnymede  |
| Twitter         | Yes  | Chertsey Museum<br>Addlestone One<br>Community Services (Sports)<br>Development Management<br>Business Runnymede |
| Linkedin        | Yes  | No<br>(Many individual staff members have personal accounts)   |
| Nextdoor        | Yes  | (Individual staff members may have personal accounts)  |
| Instagram       | No   | Addlestone One<br>Magna Square<br>Town Centre Manager<br>Business Runnymede                                      |
| Youtube         | No   | Platform exists as a place to publish videos so they can be displayed on the Council's website or other outlets. |

# Objectives of this work plan

This work plan's objectives are to:

1. Codify the Council's approach to and use of social media.
2. Increase audiences and engagement rates.
3. Use social media to improve the reputation of the Council.

# Approach to and use of social media

The Council will be strategic in its use of social media and focus its limited resources to spend time and effort on the areas which best help the authority to meet the Corporate Business Plan and its underpinning strategies. Therefore the primary focus of social media content will be in the areas of:

1. Climate Change
2. Health and Wellbeing
3. Empowering our Communities
4. Economic Development
5. Organisational Development

In addition, social media will be used to help residents and customers access services and understand the Council's priorities and decisions.

There will be occasions when requests to publish content are turned down. These will usually be because they do not align with the Corporate Business Plan, or because individual posts are unlikely to achieve the desired outcome.

## Benefits of social media use

Social media is now the most used tool for the Council to reach its residents en masse, therefore it plays a vital role supporting its reputation and explaining its work. Social media provides a method for information sharing and exchange, and is the primary route used to signpost and link to relevant information on our website.

It provides the Council with a method of communication which reaches mass audiences, is quick, allows for two way communication and where factual inaccuracies or misconceptions can be corrected and the mood of the public can be gauged.

The growth of online audiences and use of social media channels enables us to work more effectively in three ways:

### Communication

Directly communicate important and timely messages news and information, promote events and improve awareness of services by providing direct digital access to them. Support two way communication and an increased ability for residents to highlight issues to the Council which can be acted on. Provides an early warning of issues which may arise.

### Engagement

Seek opinions, share conversations and better engage with residents. Help to improve residents' knowledge and correct misconceptions.

## **Collaboration**

Working together with partners and sharing information across platforms which can enhance partnership working, and demonstrate the effectiveness of working together.

## **Governance, management and ownership**

Messaging through social media is instant and wide reaching. In addition to reaching the followers of the Council's social media accounts, those users may share the Council's messages to their own contacts. The Council can also share its messages into dozens of groups based on local areas or interests. Both of these activities substantially increase the reach of individual content.

Given this, and the importance of good social media use to the reputation of the Council as a whole, it is essential that our social media accounts are:

- Well planned
- Effectively managed
- Regularly monitored,
- Used regularly,
- Fed with fresh content which promotes the good work the Council does.

The Communications Team, which focusses on the Council's reputation as a whole, owns the Council's corporate social media channels and carries out this work, using experience and judgement to make appropriate day to day decisions.

The team has an overview of the whole Council's work and therefore able to take a wide view of issues. It is best placed to judge what content to publish or not publish, appropriate messages to convey and how to respond to negative comments.

# Increasing audiences and engagement rates

To increase audience and engagement rates, and therefore improve the reputation of the Council, the Communications Team will use its limited staff resources for the greatest benefit, and will deliver growth by:

1. Defining the use and content focus for each platform.
2. Moving towards a social media first approach. (Telling stories and communicating online without the need for a press release or website news story.)
3. Giving more exposure to a smaller number of key announcements and services.
4. Making a significant jump forward in visual content, such as a greater range of graphics in the house style, gifs, infographics and videos.
5. Embedding the use of a set of house rules which staff and users will be expected to follow, and which will be the basis for decisions on dealing with negative comments.
6. Using carefully planned and targeted small scale spending.
7. Focussing on developing existing platforms while monitoring the benefits and take up of new platforms.

## Defining the use and content focus for each platform

### Facebook

1. Facebook will become the primary social media platform for the Council.
2. Content will be limited to messaging specific to Runnymede created by the Council or very select content from other partners.
3. Audience has grown substantially in the past two years and this platform provides the greatest ability for engagement and messaging due to the range of functionality and the demographic of the audience, which we have the most data on.

### General actions

1. Increase in good quality moving picture content, including video, showreels, slideshow and animation.
2. Greater focus will be placed on scheduling content at key times depending on likely audiences.
3. Greater use will be made of boosting posts (small scale payments to increase audience) and small-scale advertising of posts.
4. Regular reviews of platform tools such as moderation so the Council consistently makes the most of the functions available within Facebook.

### Groups

1. Consideration will be given to launching new groups administered by the Council on specific topics such as climate change.
2. The Communications Team will engage with administrators (controllers) of existing community groups to build a relationship and provide useful content ideas.
3. Content will be posted directly into community groups as an absolute priority, in addition to posting on the Council's own profile.



4. An audit of groups the Council is a member of, and could join, will be carried out to identify potential new communities which the Council can communicate messages to.
5. Increased use of Facebook groups to proactively talk about issues of interest eg controversial planning applications.

## **Engagement**

1. The Communications Team will increase number of accounts which the Council follows to demonstrate a two way relationship. This will include councillors, carefully selected community groups and community leaders and Surrey-wide organisations.
2. Increased engagement with people who comment on our posts has proved worthwhile, this will be maintained and more attention given to comments on posts we have shared into groups.

## **Analytics**

Greater use of analytics will be adopted to provide greater insight into which topics gain most traction and who audiences are by demographic. Use of this demographic information will be used to target weaknesses by developing tailored content.

## **Platform functionality**

Greater use will be made of:

1. Live streams
2. Events listings
3. Stories
4. Reels
5. Photo galleries

## **Meta Business Suite**

1. Training for staff to understand full scale of functionality.
2. Consultancy input to ensure the Council's accounts are correctly set up and that all accounts are linked through our Facebook pages

## **Nextdoor**

Nextdoor provides a substantial audience of verified local people and the Council will increase the level of content published on its channel, bringing it into the core of social media work.

Nextdoor allows for messages to be sent to single wards or neighbourhood areas, as well as to the whole Borough audience and the Council will make substantial use of this functionality.

In its operation and breadth of functions, Nextdoor is similar to Twitter in that it is designed to provide a rolling feed of posts rather than a wider environment to exist in.

## **Content focus and use:**

1. Content will be limited to messaging specific to Runnymede created by the Council or very select content from other partners.
2. Increase moving picture content.

3. Consultations.
4. Localised information relevant only to individual areas.
5. Local event sharing such as housing clean up days.

## **LinkedIn**

This platform provides a valuable route to both businesses and increasingly to a sector of the population who may not regularly engage with the Council or have need of its services, but who do live in the area and benefit from knowing about its work. It also allows the opportunity to project positive messages about the Council, and jobs, to potential future employees, and provides a way to present long-form articles on topics which require more detail than a post.

### **Content focus and use:**

1. Wider range of content, including corporate and service successes, news announcements and jobs, as well as information for businesses.
2. Moving from information for businesses towards using LinkedIn to reach the following audiences with messages relevant to them:
  - a. Professionals living in Runnymede (but working elsewhere) who may not use Council services and are therefore less likely to follow us on Facebook.
  - b. Current staff members.
  - c. Potential future staff members
3. The Communications Team will encourage existing staff to create LinkedIn profiles and to talk about their working life and sector. This is to create a community of active LinkedIn users around the Council, generating a 'buzz' among future employees.
4. Staff successes, projects and priorities will be showcases through features, articles, and Employee of the Month awards, to humanise our presence.
5. Recruiting managers and Human Resources will be encouraged to investigate the professional tools available through LinkedIn eg Talent Solutions, LinkedIn Learning.

## **X / Twitter**

The Council's Twitter profile still holds a large audience, but functionality of the platform is limited and following a change of ownership, the Council's ability to reach to its followers has reduced.

### **Content focus and use**

1. Day to day messaging about Council services.
2. Twitter will become the home for many of the partner requests we receive from NHS, SCC, Govt etc.
3. Greater sharing of posts by local organisations.
4. Greater use of advice from Twitter about types of content which work best so we can optimise our output.

## **Pausing use of X / Twitter to test Instagram**

Following the decline of engagement and reach on X / Twitter the Council will pause its use of this platform for a period of six months during 2024. This will allow capacity to launch and test the benefits of the Instagram platform.

A six month trial will be carried out on Instagram, sharing the Council's existing social media content and also prioritising material which is particularly relevant to younger audiences.

The trial will determine:

1. Follower numbers
2. Whether it is possible to gather broad location information to demonstrate that the audience built lives in or near Runnymede.
3. Ability of the Council to provide content which engages audiences on Instagram.
4. Volume of material available which is specific to under 25s.

## **Moving towards a ‘social media first’ approach**

Social media has grown substantially and is now a very well used place for residents to find out about their local area.

Starting to tell stories on social media first rather than through other channels means that messaging can be published in a more timely way. This is especially important when sharing news about decisions taken at committee as the Council will be able to inform residents faster.

By publishing faster, residents are better informed, the work of committees is shared much closer to the time it is undertaken and residents are likely to engage more with the content being shared.

Using social media as the starting point also allows more creativity in how the Council tells stories by using videos, slideshows, imagery, presentations, interviews etc.

Other methods of communication, on and offline, will still be used on a regular basis.

## **Giving more exposure to a smaller number of key announcements and services**

The Council’s audiences are deluged with information on their social media platforms. In order for its messaging to land with audiences, in the middle of their busy lives, a more focussed approach is needed, which will take two forms:

- 1) The Council will post more often about a smaller number of topics, which is intended to give key announcements and services which can benefit from exposure on social media the greatest chance of being seen by audiences. These topics are likely to be:
  - a) Items related to our Corporate Business Plan and strategies (primarily Empowering our Communities, Health and Wellbeing and Climate Change)
  - b) News announcements
  - c) Alerts (eg severe weather)
  - d) Campaigns (eg elections)
  - e) Key front facing services
  - f) Announcements affecting a large proportion of the population.
  - g) Announcements where publishing on social media is likely to help achieve the overall objective.
- 2) To allow for space within the publishing schedule, and not overloading platforms, which have an optimum numbers of posts per day, the number of one-off posts on individual topics will be substantially reduced. In some cases advice will be given about using other channels of communication.

This approach is aimed at giving the most important announcements and service area functions a better level of exposure so they are received by a higher number of residents.

## **Making a significant jump forward in visual content**

During the past year the Communications Team has brought a greater volume and range of visual content to social media posts. This will continue and be increased as social media platforms have prioritised video in recent years.

Within reasonable limits given the resource available, the team will put more time into creating the following content assets, which will be used multiple times to tell stories.

- Videos
- Showreels (videos without interviews)
- Animations
- Gifs
- Picture galleries
- Infographics

Content will be branded in line with the Council's Corporate Style Guide to build recognition and trust.

## **Embedding a set of house rules which staff and users will be expected to follow, and which will be the basis for decisions on dealing with negative comments.**

The Council's social media platforms are an important place where residents find accurate and up to date information, and discuss matters that interest them. However, with a follower count of over 13,000 across three corporate platforms, and the ability to reach many thousands more through engaging with groups, it is vital to provide some basic house rules on the community.

The first set of house rules were introduced in July 2023 and exist to maintain a healthy and productive online community, while also reducing the time spent by the Communications team on moderating and fielding inappropriate comments.

The rules were created following research into other local authorities' arrangements to ensure common practice across local government. The Communications Team has been specific where possible, such as requiring adherence to the Equality Act 2010.

By having a list of published rules, the Communications Team will have a greater ability to manage difficult social media users. The rules will create a clearer framework to judge the severity of an infringement, the repercussion for which can range from deleting comments, up to blocking users.

Under this work plan, the rules will be reviewed on an annual basis. The House Rules can be found on the Council's website at: [www.runnymede.gov.uk/news-media/social-media-1](http://www.runnymede.gov.uk/news-media/social-media-1)

## **Using carefully planned and targeted spending**

During the past year the Council has carefully increased the amount of very small scale advertising it carries out on Facebook and LinkedIn. This will be continued but with clear understanding that cost control is a priority.

Types of content which will be considered for advertising will be those where the audience is asked to do something, for example:

1. take part in a consultation,
2. subscribe to a service,
3. attend a meeting,
4. update information or
5. take part in the electoral process.

Requests for spend in other areas, such as when part of a wider communications campaign, will be discussed with the Corporate Head of Service and services will be expected to meet the cost from their own budgets.

The Council will not spend money to promote general awareness raising or 'news' posts.

Advertising allows the Council to reach beyond its existing audience. It also means specific demographics or audience groups can be targeted, so messages can be placed with the most appropriate people.

This advertising is similar to placing adverts in local newspapers, and is usually cheaper but more data is available on the success of the advert or post which is paid for in terms of the number of people reached. The amount of money spent is completely within the control of the Council.

Facebook's advertising offer is extensive and complex, and time will be dedicated to understanding it and using the functionality only when genuinely useful and relevant.

## **Focussing on developing existing platforms over expanding to new platforms**

The world of social media is a regularly changing landscape as new platforms are created and others decline. The Council will focus its efforts on the platforms it currently has corporate accounts on.

This position will be reviewed annually dependent on staff resource, changing interest levels in platforms and the overall behaviour of the platforms and their owners. Attention will also be paid to the benefits of other communications channels outside social media, such as newsletters. Where there is a genuine benefit to launching a presence on a new platform, this will be seriously considered. For example, the trial on Instagram referenced above may result in a permanent presence on that platform.

Resource within the Communications Team, and the need for a separate approach to content for other channels limits what can practically be achieved on a day to day basis.

# Using social media to improve the reputation of the Council

In today's digital era, social media serves as a window to organisations, providing an accessible platform for communication and engagement, as well as being an immediate snapshot of what kind of organisation they are, what their values are, and how they are perceived by their community.

It is essential that the Council's channels are a well-run, regularly updated and engaging social media presence. This will be delivered via all the actions listed above, and in doing so, this will improve and strengthen the reputation of the Council. The following are important steps towards building a good reputation via our social media accounts:

## **Establishing a strong online presence**

By actively maintaining social media accounts, the Council acknowledges the expectations of residents who turn to social media for information and updates. By doing so, the Council shows itself to be easily accessible and responsive to the interests, needs and concerns of the community.

## **Building trust and openness**

A corporate social media presence instils trust and transparency in the Council's operations. By sharing relevant information, updates, and insights, the Communications Team aims to foster an environment of openness and approachability. Through social media, the Council provides a place for direct communication, enabling staff to listen to the community's feedback, address their queries, and explain initiatives more effectively.

## **Amplifying positive stories and achievements**

Social media enables the Council to showcase the positive impact the Council has on the community. By highlighting success stories, initiatives, and achievements, the team can celebrate progress and promote a positive image of the Council. Engaging visuals, stories, and testimonials shared through social media channels can inspire and create a sense of pride among the community.

## **Facilitating dialogue and community engagement**

By engaging in two-way communication with the community, the Council show it is committed to fostering meaningful discussions, listening to diverse viewpoints, and inviting public input on important matters. By actively engaging with the community through comments, messages, and live Q&A sessions, people's voices are heard, promoting a sense of inclusivity.

## **Sharing timely and relevant information**

Social media enables the Council to release information quickly and efficiently. Whether it's sharing updates on upcoming events, community programmes, or vital announcements, the social media channels need to be perceived as a reliable source for timely and accurate information. By positioning these accounts now as a source of prompt and accurate information, they are in a better position should there be an emergency, and there is a need to communicate quickly with residents (eg during a flood). It is essential that residents trust the content and know to visit the channels regularly for vital information.

## **Managing and explaining issues**

Inevitably negative issues arise and social media provides a place for the Council to explain itself, justify or mitigate decisions actions or inactions and provide context as to why a situation may have arisen. Managing the Council's reputation in this way, whilst being able to reach wide audiences is an important function to calm frustrations and ease negative comment. While publishing this type of content can generate more negative comments, the Council believes in transparency and is also a public body. The number of people who may subsequently change their view of the Council on a specific topic may be out of all proportion to those who post negatively.

By codifying the Council's approach to and use of social media, the actions listed above and in the forthcoming Social Media Policy will all help to increase audiences and engagement rates, while at the same time raising the reputation of the Council.

With the support of residents, and by fostering a community that feels listened to and supported, the Communications Team will be able to provide better, faster and more effective information to the public.

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