



**Full Council Meeting November 9<sup>th</sup> 2021  
Review of Communications and Customer Contact**

**For Approval**

**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

1.1 To report on the findings of the review of Communications and Customer Contact which has been carried out by the Communications Working Group

**2.0 Background Information**

2.1 The Council agreed to carry out the review of communications and customer contact in February 2021 and tasked the Communications Working Group with carrying out the work supported by the Marketing, Economic Development and Tourism co Ordinator. The terms of reference for the review are attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

2.2 Within the scope of the review the main areas to be examined are summarised as follows :

- The Council's Office accommodation requirements both for office and meeting space and for receiving in person enquiries
- Council leaflets and publications and whether suitable alternative methods of communicating information are available

2.3 The main drivers for the review which the Communications group focused on in examining a range of options were as follows :

**Accessibility** - How accessible is the Council through the various access channels and where is relative demand and interaction the strongest

**Technology** - technology, and particularly digital technology is impacting on the way in which people communicate

**Climate Change** - Digital formats are wholly Carbon Neutral whereas the production and delivery of printed materials carries a carbon footprint which is not desirable

**Finance** - Digital communications are much cheaper than paper and other Materials and there are a range of digital tools such as website , social media, emails QR codes, Aps etc which can be used as alternatives.

2.4 A separate piece of work has been undertaken on the Council's website and social media as agreed at the February 2021 Council meeting. The findings of this work, which was carried out by students from Derby University are detailed in sections 5.6 – 5.10 below



### **3.0 EVIDENCE GATHERING**

3.1 During the review the Communications working group gathered a wide range of evidence in order to assist in developing a number of options which the Council can assess. The options and the assessment of those options appear in later sections of this review. The full range of sources examined are listed as follows :

- Existing costs of maintaining the current Council location at St Johns Chapel
- Enquiries regarding how challenging it might be to make St Johns Chapel more energy efficient including the Governments Green Energy Grants scheme administered by Amber Valley Borough Council
- Accessibility arrangements at St John's Chapel
- A regularly updated listing of properties within Belper Town Centre which may be available for use as an office location
- A detailed comparison of the costs and access arrangements at St Johns Chapel with another location in the town to illustrate cost differences and opportunities
- Examination of trends in how people like to receive information
- Examination of Council paper and digital publications
- A site visit to examine potential alternative accommodation
- A Review of the Council's approach to providing information via the Council newsletter
- A survey of Town Council Members and Officers on customer contact requirements
- Enquiries with a number of community groups and organisations to determine if any might be interested in a shared office location with the Council
- Enquiries with other town Councils regarding their customer contact arrangements including information about visitor numbers
- Enquiries concerning the continued use of Information Points located at Strutts North Mill and De Bradelei
- An investigation into the potential use of video displays at public locations in the town including a presentation on how the technology works which included outline cost information

3.2 A number of key points to arise from the research are set out as follows. This is not a complete list as it would require all of the evidence documentation to be repeated here and make the report unnecessarily large and difficult to follow. The following provides a useful summary :

#### **St John's Chapel**

- Results of the Member survey reveal that Councillors believe that the



building is neither accessible enough or appropriate to be used as office accommodation, a view which is shared by staff

- There are mixed views on whether the building should be retained if the Council were to move to another location
- There are mixed views on the retention of the Car Park should the Council decide to move to another location
- Costs of running the building ( especially heating ) are disproportionately high at £28k ( with electricity contributing half of this cost )
- The building is not energy efficient and due to its design and listed status the challenge of improving its energy efficiency and securing the funding to do so would be considerable
- The current Lease requires part of the building to be retained for use as a Heritage Centre
- Accessible Belper regard the building as not being Accessible for wheelchair users and other people with disabling conditions
- The cost of maintaining the building may be prohibitive for any Community Groups interested in occupying the building
- The costs of terminating the current Lease with the Derby Diocese are relatively small
- COVID 19 has proved that Council Staff and Councillors can carry out their roles remotely without the need for a physical office location
- Evidence suggests that the more prominent locations in and around King Street are relatively expensive and as well as the ongoing rental and other costs some capital expenditure may be required for fitting out, signage etc. if the Council were to move locations.

### **Contact with Residents and Visitors**

- The Council does not provide a wide range of services unlike the Borough and County Councils; a large proportion of its budget is spent on floral displays and maintenance of open spaces, its day to day customer contacts are therefore fairly limited
- The holding of Council meetings in the Community has generally worked well
- The numbers of visitors to the offices to speak with the Council are very small and this situation is similar at other Town Councils in the area and further afield. Some of these Councils are based in more physically accessible and prominent locations in their Towns.
- As digital technology and the use of it expands and increases more and more people expect to receive only electronic communication, this includes Council and visitor information. ( *The visit Britain campaign reports that 87% of millennials use Facebook to inspire their holiday booking choices with 50% using Pinterest. 74% use a smartphone to research places to visit and 66% use their smartphone to book visits and attractions. This trend is likely to continue* )
- The quality of the Council's website and social media offer needs to



improve in order to meet expectations of residents, visitors and client groups

- The vast majority of the Council’s forms and documents for use by the public are small in number and are in a digital format and can be made available in paper format upon request
- Councils such as Amber Valley are reducing their Tourism services and physically located Tourist Information facilities have declined due to lack of demand ( as early as 2017 Visit Scotland closed 39 of its 56 Visitor Information Centres )
- Belper through its Ambassadors scheme has a large number of mini visitor information points in addition to those “officially” located at De Bradelei and Belper North Mill.
- An interactive digital information totem is due to be installed in King Street which the Council can use to provide local and visitor information
- The Council has developed its first “E Newsletter” which can be produced more frequently than traditional formats and more people are signing up for e mail alerts
- Subject to a Business Case it is possible to place video screens in places where people congregate frequently to provide Council and visitor information in a cost effective way.

3.3 There are a wide range of factors which impact on the Council’s future direction in terms of its approach to communications and customer contact and Members are likely to have their own individual opinions on the best way forward. The Communications Working Group have therefore not made any specific recommendations as to what that way forward might be but have instead identified a number of options for consideration and have set out the advantages and disadvantages of each. This will hopefully stimulate some useful discussions and an evidence based approach to a final decision as to the direction the Council will ultimately take.

#### 4.0 ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS ASSESSMENT

##### OPTION 1 - Maintain the existing arrangements at St John’s Chapel

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working arrangements are established and would not be disrupted</li> <li>• Secures the future of the building as a Heritage Centre</li> <li>• Allows the Council to have its own on site meeting space if required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expensive to maintain</li> <li>• Inefficient to heat with a high Carbon Footprint</li> <li>• Difficult to alter physically due to Listed Status</li> <li>• Poor accessibility as a location and as a building</li> <li>• Not really needed as an office space</li> <li>• Few in person queries, the</li> </ul>



vast majority are by telephone or e mail

- The Lease places some restrictions on alternative uses

**OPTION 2 - Move to a Digital based presence with no physical office location and Council meetings being held in physical locations around the town or via online meetings ( subject to Government decision )**

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost savings which can be reinvested in services</li> <li>• Council meetings in the Community sends a positive message</li> <li>• A reduction in the Council's Carbon Footprint</li> <li>• Is in line with a more digitally based approach which is becoming more common generally</li> <li>• Greater staff productivity due to reduced travel requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The future of St John's Chapel as a Heritage Centre may be uncertain</li> <li>• No "walk in" face to face contact with office based staff</li> <li>• The Council may need to invest more resources in its website and social media channels</li> </ul>

**OPTION 3 - Move from St John's Chapel to a more prominent and Accessible physical office location in the town possibly shared with other organisations. This could include space to hold Council or Committee Meetings or meetings could be held elsewhere in the Town**

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger visible presence for the Council</li> <li>• May encourage more people to interact with the Council</li> <li>• Sharing with other organisations would help to provide a more joined up approach to assist the public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More interactions may require more staff resources and add expense</li> <li>• Difficult to maintain confidential information when sharing with others</li> <li>• Organisations contacted do not wish to share costs so the Council may be incurring additional expenses if a larger space is required to</li> </ul>



- accommodate them
- This option could be more expensive than the status quo.

**OPTION 4a - Hybrid option where the Council retains St John's Chapel but refocuses its use for community activities with office accommodation moving elsewhere to another location or officers working remotely**

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May provide some Community Groups with a place to hold activities ( The Council already makes St Johns Chapel available for bookings by Community Groups )</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lease places restrictions on activities carried out in the building</li> <li>• Issues regarding Accessibility and energy efficiency remain</li> <li>• Community Groups would most likely not be able to afford some of the running costs of St John's Chapel</li> <li>• The Council's costs would most likely increase if another office location was secured</li> </ul>

**OPTION 4b – Hybrid option where the Council retains St John's Chapel but refocuses its use for community activities with office accommodation remaining on site**

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May provide some Community Groups with a place to hold activities ( The Council already makes St Johns Chapel available for bookings by Community Groups )</li> <li>• Less likely to increase current costs than option 4a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lease places restrictions on activities carried out in the building</li> <li>• Issues regarding Accessibility and energy efficiency remain</li> <li>• Community Groups would most likely not be able to afford some of the running costs of St John's Chapel</li> </ul>

4.1 There are most likely other options in addition to those outlined above and judgements about advantages and disadvantages can sometimes be subjective. Furthermore, an examination done in this way does not take into account what might be the most important factors and should possibly have



greater weighting than others. Furthermore, there are other factors and dependencies which may impact on moving to a final decision.

4.2 One way of assessing options to provide more of a “scorecard” approach is to use a set of criteria which are important to the Council. One obvious way of doing this is to use the drivers outlined and agreed in the terms of reference and to score each option as to how well they comply with the drivers. The table below sets out how this is done.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Scoring ( Range from 1 – 10 )</b>
Accessibility	How well does the option support the accessibility of the Council ?	Scoring needs to take account accessibility of physical locations where supplied as this could affect the scoring materially
Technology	How well does the option fit with the emerging “digital by default” way of working in society as a whole ?	Scoring will need to reflect how well the Council wishes to move to a more digital way of doing things
Climate Change	How well does the option respond positively to climate change ?	The more the Council can do to minimize its Carbon Footprint the higher the score
Funding / Costs	How well does the option demonstrate value for money and cost savings ?	Any potential increase in costs will score lower. Good value for money / efficiency and reducing costs will score more highly

4.3 Each of the options can be allocated a score according to how well they meet the criteria set out above. This is still a subjective judgement to some extent and there is a narrative needed to justify the scores. Each Member of the Working Group have scored the options and their individual scores are set out in Appendix 2 attached.

4.4 Using this scoring method which relates directly to the terms of reference for the review the Communications Working Group have concluded that options 2 and 3 to be the most relevant to the review criteria with the other options failing to solve fundamental issues about the suitability of St John’s Chapel for use by the Council. There is a recommendation that further work be carried out on these 2 options.

## **5.0 ANALYSIS OF COUNCIL LEAFLETS AND PUBLICATIONS**

5.1 The attached Appendix 3 sets out how the questions posed in the review have been answered in light of the information gathered by the working group. In terms of overall context the Council does not provide a wide range of services and therefore only provides a limited range of leaflets, forms and



other documents. The vast majority are available in a digital format but paper versions are available on request.

5.2 There are digital means by which the Council can provide better quality information and have a wider reach. The first way of doing this is to improve the information available on the Council's website and do more to encourage people to visit the site. This needs to be done in tandem with improving social media as the Council lags behind a number of community groups and organisations in terms of its overall reach. This must be tempered with the fact that the Town Council is just a small part of Local Government and the public sector is not perceived as an interesting place for people to source information on events, attractions, places to stay etc, the Council has to be realistic.

5.3 The use of video screens in public places would help to engage people digitally and reduce the need potentially to provide paper copies of the visitor guide and Council newsletter and the Council can use the soon to be installed digital totem in King Street to help assess the effectiveness of this communications tool before considering further investment. However, the review did consider a number of locations in the Town which may be suitable at some point in the future.

5.4 Of concern is the fact that there are a small number of people in Belper who either do not have access to the Internet or do not use the Internet and there is a significant minority of the population who have fairly limited IT skills. Although this number is reducing many are likely to be elderly people who could be isolated so it is important that the Council continues to do as it does now in terms of making information available in paper format on request.

5.5 This does not mean that the Council should not continue to do more to improve its communications. The recently introduced e newsletter aims to provide more frequent information to the community. This and the other suggestions discussed above will hopefully improve the overall effectiveness of communications and help ensure that no one gets left behind.

### **Website and Social Media**

5.6 Two students from Derby University carried out work reviewing the Council's website and social media marketing. The reports are quite lengthy and have not been attached as appendices but the main conclusions from the work are listed as follows

#### **Website**

5.7 Overall the website is considered fairly traditional using a template structure designed by the Council's website provider; this fairly formulaic approach hinders the Council's ability to make the website more dynamic and attractive as witnessed by the relatively small number of visitors to the site. Other points to note include:



- There is a lot of “White Space” on the Front Page which is a wasted opportunity to attract people to content
- The drop down menus are too long and require scrolling down which means content could be missed
- The content is dominated by Local Government information which could be reduced to allow more community visitor content
- The Content Management system is fairly limited in its capabilities compared with other Content Management systems, there is little flexibility to make changes to the overall structure.
- There is a user manual but there are not sufficient staff resources available to develop sufficient expertise on the system and significant changes require contact with the provider

5.8 In order to provide a more dynamic, attractive and user friendly website the Council would need to migrate from its current content management system to an alternative system and ensure that there are sufficient resources in place to run the site effectively. The review identified several open source software products which the Council could use which would mean not having to contract with a provider. Although this would mean that the Council would have to invest in the necessary resources to build and run the site it would provide much greater local control.

### **Social Media Marketing**

5.9 The review revealed quite starkly that the Council's social media presence is very underdeveloped with a number of comparisons indicating just how far behind the Council is in this area. Presently, the Council does not have the in house skills to develop a social media strategy or to use the various social media tools which would help enhance the reputation of the Town or the Council. Similar to the website review, in order to develop an effective social media presence the Council needs to invest in the necessary skilled resources to design and deliver an effective approach

5.10 The review also briefly examined the overall marketing of Belper highlighting where the Council might develop initiatives to improve the town's attractions in order to boost its marketing potential

### **6.0 Legislation –**

6.1 The Equality Act 2010 The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone on the grounds of any of these characteristics: **age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.**

6.2 Therefore, the Council must take care in its processes for communicating that it does not discriminate against any of the groups described above. The review does consider in Appendix 3 and paragraph 5.4, for example, that



elderly people who do not have access to digital communications must be considered in the Council's thinking.

## **6.0 Accessibility Implications**

6.1 The first aim of the Council's Accessibility Strategy states :  
***"To ensure that the needs of people with a disabling condition are taken in to account when designing and delivering Belper Town Council services"*** and, the terms of reference for the review identifies Accessibility as one of the main drivers.

6.2 A number of Accessibility issues have been identified and recommendations included in the findings, principally relating to the suitability of St John's Chapel.

## **7.0 Climate Emergency Implications**

7.1 Climate Change was another of the drivers for the review with the aim to consider what actions were needed to help the Council reduce its carbon footprint.

7.2 This creates a specific tension with regard to making information and documentation totally digital with the accessibility needs of some sections of the Community. i.e. people who do not have access to the Internet or have poor digital skills. This tension will need to be managed moving forward in order that both drivers can be approached positively

## **8.0 Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report but there are implications which will arise for the Council in future. This principally relates to the future revenue cost of Council Office accommodation should the Council formally resolve to move from its current location.

## **9.0 Recommendation(s)**

9.1 It is recommended that the Council :

- a) Agrees in principle to move from its current office accommodation to a more accessible location in the town
- b) Tasks the Communications Working Group with carrying out further work on options 2 and 3 as set out in section 4 above to develop suitable business case proposals
- c) Continues the successful practice of holding its meetings at locations in



the Community

- d) Considers making representations to Derbyshire County Council on making digital skills courses available in Belper
- e) Carries out further investigations into the deployment of video screens in public locations following the roll out of the Digital Display totem in King Street
- f) Promotes the take up of the Councils "E news / E Newsletter" alerts.
- g) Tasks the Communications Working Group to develop proposals for the Council to migrate from its current website provider to a newly designed site in order to improve the quality of its website offer.
- h) Tasks the communications working group to develop proposals for the development and resourcing of a social media strategy for the Council

#### **10. 0 Reasons for recommendation(s)**

10.1 The terms of reference agreed by the Council required a thorough review of the Council's Communication and Customer Contact arrangements. The recommendations which have emerged are due to answering the questions which have been asked in those terms of reference.

10.2 Although a number of improvements to the Council's arrangements have been identified there may be areas which will need to be re examined or explored in more detail in future. As the pace of change continues to accelerate it is likely that the Council's communication and customer contact arrangements will need to be kept under review