

Social Media Strategy – Burgess Hill Town Council

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with background information on the current status of the Social Media approach at the Town Council with information on nearby local councils. The report proposes a clear strategy for the way forward which in summary is

- To continue to focus on good news/positive stories about the town
- To deliver social media via Town Council channels only – Councillors have demonstrated they have access to other social media forums which supported the Town Council events.
- To focus on the Burgess Hill Town Council social media presence only and to encourage councillors and community groups to share events on our behalf, rather than spend additional resourcing managing other pages.

What's working, and what's not?

- Positivity – posts about community projects, improvements to the town, photos of nature in the town - tends to get well shared, and have a good level of engagement
- Video content, including live video, gets a large reach and good level of shares.
- Image based content is working well
- Informative posts, such as information on road works, improvement works in the town, get a wide reach, which is meeting our goals of keeping residents informed
- Posts looking for active engagement – e.g asking for people to send in photos – have not always been responded to as well as we have hoped – e.g the Easter Crafts competition in 2020. However, where there has been wider reach, such as the VE Day Stay at Home Street Parties, and Lockdown Projects, did have good engagement, with photos and videos being submitted

Who is engaging with us?

- People wanting to find out information on things in the town, eg. Roadworks, footpath works
- Beneficiaries of projects, for example recipients of the Carers Wellbeing Bags commented on these posts
- Negative commenters – a few people who are critical of the Town Council
- We are getting increased positive engagement on Instagram on the lighter content shared there, for example spring photos, including engagement with Instagram stories

Statistics and Comparisons

Correct as of 28 September 2021

Burgess Hill Town Council

Facebook: 2683 followers 2071 likes

Twitter: 977

Instagram: 1066

Haywards Heath Town Council (HHTC)

Facebook: 2170 followers 1745 likes

Twitter: 1701

Instagram: 149

East Grinstead Town Council (EGTC)

Facebook: 1706 followers 1316 likes

Twitter: 3227

Instagram: 893

Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC)

Facebook: 6985 followers 5734 likes

Twitter: 4949

Instagram: 1523

West Sussex County Council (WSCC)

Facebook: 17298 followers 14166 likes

Twitter: 50,400

Instagram: 3139

Looking at Burgess Hill Town Council's numbers in isolation, we can see that Facebook is our largest platform, followed by Instagram, then Twitter. The numbers of Instagram have grown at a faster rate than the other platforms, our follower count there has only recently surpassed Twitter. It is worth noting that our post frequency is lower on Instagram than Twitter and Facebook.

HHTC and EGTC are useful to compare to, as they are our equivalents. MSDC and WSCC are not directly comparable, as they have a much wider catchment of residents and therefore higher numbers, however it is useful to see which platforms are most successful for them. WSCC and MSDC are larger organisations, so also have more resources to spend on social media, particularly staff time.

WSCC and EGTC have their highest followings on Twitter, HHTC and MSDC on Facebook. Instagram has the lowest following for all four, we are the only organisation on the list where Instagram does not have the lowest following. HHTC have not updated their Instagram since 2018, so this is an inactive account.

Resources and Social Media Management Software

One officer manages the social media as part of their role, a Social Media and Communications Officer, with cover from other officers in the Community Engagement team for leave. The social media is monitored between the hours of 9am-5pm Monday – Friday. The amount of time resource available to be spent on social media varies depending on workload at the time, however with the recently changed resourcing in the team there is a clear focus on this as a primary communication channel within our community. The officer sources and produces a significant amount of the content, including photography, video and graphics. Content is also submitted by other officers to be shared. The officer also monitors some external pages, including those of MSDC and WSCC for

content to be shared. Monitoring other organisation's usage more closely and widely would require more time. There is no dedicated social media budget for boosting posts, paying for social media management software, or paying for assets (music, images). This will be reviewed as part of the Budget proposals for 2022.

We use the social media management programme Buffer, which allows for streamlined posting across all platforms, and scheduling of posts across all platforms. This is particularly beneficial for covering leave, as posts can be scheduled in for this time, and cover will just be needed for checking the inboxes, and posting any additional content that comes up during the time. We have recently upgraded our package to enable more planned posts at a cost of \$180 per annum .

External Pages

There are a number of Burgess Hill focussed external pages, such as Burgess Hill Advertising and Gossip; Burgess Hill Gossip; Burgess Hill Alive and Burgess Hill Uncovered. It has been suggested to post on these external pages, however the team felt this was not appropriate for the following reasons:

- It would be very time consuming to post on the groups and then have to monitor/reply to these, in addition to our page.
- The possibility of people picking an argument and issues snowballing.
- The groups have a large amount of content posted daily, mainly advertising for local businesses, anything we did post on there could have the potential to get lost.
- If we want to increase our reach we have the option of boosting posts, as we did for the market, which was an effective way to reach people who may not otherwise have seen them
- For some of these groups you have to post as an individual, rather than as a page so this would not be appropriate for an officer to post under their own name.

Our Audience

We have a wide audience, as our pages are aimed at all residents of Burgess Hill. Therefore our content needs to be widely accessible and understandable.

Frequency and type of content

Currently we post with around the same frequency on Facebook and Twitter – ideally once per day during weekdays. We post less frequently on Instagram, and in the past this has not been that regular. The current aim for Instagram posts is once per week. Buffer, a social media management tool, has recently been introduced to streamline the process of posting across different platforms, and allow for post scheduling on all three platforms, not just Facebook. This also means posts on weekends and evenings can be done where appropriate, although comments on out of hours posts will not be seen/responded to until the next working day. Only content that is important/relevant is posted, so that this content is not lost within higher quantities of less relevant content.

Facebook

Facebook is our largest platform and is our most important method of informing Burgess Hill residents of local updates, events, news and information. All formats of post can be used – text, image, video, and links – as appropriate. Our level of engagement – comments, shares, direct messages – is highest on Facebook. Event pages are used for our events, both one-offs, such as the Summer Fayre, and ongoing, such as the monthly market.

We have successfully used live streaming to promote events, for example, live streaming in the morning at the 1 August Community Day, which was used to encourage people to visit during the day, and highlight what activities were on. It was also successfully used at It's Christmas in Burgess Hill! 2019, and the Remembrance services in 2019 and 2020, which enabled people who were not able to visit in person to still see these events.

Types of post:

- Notice and publicity of our events
- Event pages
- Notice of meetings
- Local consultations
- Local events - e.g WSCC or MSDC events
- Information on road closures, flooding, traffic incidents
- News - our press releases, photographs of projects
- Live streams of events

Twitter

Twitter is a mainly text focussed platform, although we do include images. Twitter is the best platform for engagement with other pages. It would be possible to increase Twitter usage by engaging with others and retweeting more frequently, however this requires more time resources.

Types of post:

- Notice and publicity of BHTC events
- Notice of BHTC meetings
- Local consultations
- Local events - e.g WSCC or MSDC events
- Information on road closures, flooding, traffic incidents
- News - our press releases, photographs of projects

Instagram

Instagram is an image based platform, so we use it for sharing photos from events and projects, photos of Burgess Hill, posters for events and projects. We do not use it as a point of information in the same way as Facebook and Twitter. The aim for our Instagram page is to highlight the Town Council's community work and build a positive image of Burgess Hill. Instagram has been a focus over the last few months, with the use of Instagram Stories particularly built on. Requests have been sent out to staff for images to be sent with items for social media to the officer, to increase the amount of posts suitable to be shared to Instagram.

Types of post:

- Posters for events and projects
- Photos and videos from events and projects
- Stories - live on event days

Blogs

Historically we also ran a Mayor's Blog, this was hosted on Tumblr, and posted as a PDF on our website, updated by the officer with post content provided by the Mayor. This was inactive during 2020 and 2021, partly due to a lack of Mayor's Engagements. The blog did not have a large reach or

engagement level, with 14 followers on Tumblr. Text blogs are not a popular platform now, with the rise in use of other social media platforms, YouTube, Tiktok etc. being used to share regular content and updates that may previously have been hosted on text blogs. The lack of regular posting also limited the success of the blog, as people will not follow if there is not frequent content. As content on Mayor's Engagements was still wanted, a 'Burgess Hill Mayor' page was created on Facebook. The Mayor has direct access this to post, which reduces officer time. This also allows post frequency to be increased. This also shows the human face of the Town Mayor and it is hoped that this is continued as it can be less formal.

The Town Council also previously ran a 'Santa's Blog' in the lead-up to Christmas. This is again something that could be incorporated into the content for the Town Council's social media pages if wanted. Seasonal social media campaigns could be run – for example Santa visiting the shops in Burgess Hill to promote local businesses, or the Easter Bunny (potentially a soft toy, along the lines of travelling teddy bears) visiting walking spots in the town.

Strategy Going forward

Based on this information and analysis, this is the proposed Social Media Strategy for Burgess Hill Town Council:

Our aims are:

- Keep Burgess Hill residents informed on local projects, updates, information and news using the Town Council social media pages only;
- Promote a positive image of Burgess Hill and its Community;
- Show the 'human face' of the Town Council through more informal content, showing humour and creativity, where appropriate

Facebook and Twitter are our main platforms to inform residents, including information on Council meetings and operations. Instagram is not used as a point of information, instead it is used to share images and videos from events and projects, posters, and images of the town. Facebook and Twitter are used more formally. Instagram should continue to be used as a positive space, and, in particular Instagram Stories, can be used to engage with residents in a less formal manner. Instagram is a growth point for us, and is a space that can continue to grow and be used to connect with residents.

The post frequency for Facebook and Twitter should be on average at least one post per day during working hours, with weekend/evening posts as needed. This will vary as information and updates needs to be shared at different times. The post frequency for Instagram aims for once per week on the feed, and stories as appropriate. Resourcing should be taken into account to understand that sourcing and producing content takes officer time, and the amount of time available for this depends on workload. Facebook live streaming and Instagram stories should be used to provide live coverage and updates for Town Events. Post frequency for all platforms may increase when promoting events.

Content will be from a variety of sources, including in-house graphic design, photography and video content. Stock images will also be used, as well as sharing content from other pages. Wherever possible and appropriate, images should be used, rather than plain text posts, as this is more engaging.

Content from other Town Council departments should be increased, to show a wider range of the work we do, including before and after images of maintenance work completed.

Seasonal social media campaigns using our existing platforms should be considered, for example Santa visits Burgess Hill Shops, or the Easter Bunny visits walking spots. A series of content could be created and shared over the run up to holidays.

The Mayor's blog has been moved to a Facebook page and will be updated by the Mayor. Officers also have admin access to this page. Separate guidelines for posting of the blog have been given to the Mayor.

Our social media platforms are also a contact point for residents. Messages to these platforms should be addressed promptly within working hours, and in a consistent manner to enquiries dealt with by the Help Point. An auto-response is in place advising of the hours the page is monitored, and alternative ways to contact the Council.

Comments that are direct questions should be responded to, either answering the question where appropriate, or directing the commenter to the correct contact route. Comments that breach our Acceptable Use Policy will be deleted, and users blocked if this is a persistent issue.

Adverts/boosted posts will be used as required, funded out of the relevant budget code.

We can measure the success of our platforms by the level of positive engagement received, including comments, shares, and reactions, however must be aware that not all content shared can be positive and open for engagement, as one of our main aims is to keep residents informed. Growth in following and levels of reach and engagement are recorded on a monthly basis.