Members' Communications Survey 2013.

Findings Report

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Powys

Background:

In 2013 a staff and a members' communications survey were both produced and distributed to capture the views of both employees and councillors around the effectiveness of communication channels that currently exist in the council.

The Member Communication Survey was built as an online survey and an email circulated to all members in early autumn 2013 asking for views.

A number of paper copies of the survey were also printed out and sent to members who either requested them, or who were known to prefer paper correspondence to email.

The purpose of the survey was to consider which corporate communication channels members found the most useful, how to improve specific channels of communication and seek member opinions on issues such as webcasting, the members' intranet, scrutiny and democratic services work, member training and the member's bulletin.

The findings will help in the production of a corporate communication and engagement plan and ensure services working closely with members utilise the findings to best effect.

Response:

In total 28 members out of a possible 73 responded to the survey.   This gives a response rate of 38%. Of these 28, 18 surveys were complete – all questions were answered - and ten were incomplete.   It is apparent that for some of these ten members the survey was too long and responses dwindled after the first section. It is also clear that some questions were not deemed relevant to other members and thus they had skipped them but answered subsequent questions in the survey.

All 28 responses have been analysed to ensure that any comment has been considered. The number of members responding to each question is also given in the report.

19 members completed the profile information which provided the following information:

11 were members of a scrutiny committee or working group, eight were town and community councillors and eight were members of a regulatory or other committee. Five were vice-chairs and two stated they were Cabinet members. As members could select and have more than one role the numbers add up to more than 19.

Ten members stated they were from Montgomeryshire, five from Radnorshire and four from Brecknockshire.

13 were male and six female.

One member was under 25 years of age, two were aged between 24 – 45 years or age, eight were aged 46 – 64 and a further eight were over 65 years of age.

Report Layout:

The survey was split into sections. This report will firstly give a bullet point listing of the key findings followed by a section by section analysis. A summary with an overall conclusion and some recommendations is included.

Key Findings:

- Conversations, information exchange and relationships with senior managers and directors were deemed to be strong by 17/19 members who answered the questionnaire. Only two members felt it was poor or very poor.

- Members were in favour of some future communication channels namely general video messages to be produced by both officers and the leader plus a leader's blog and e-bulletins or newsletters to be produced and published on the members section of the intranet with a link emailed to them via the 'all councillors' listing.

- 27 out of the 28 members looked at emails sent to councillors@powys.gov.uk   18 felt these were one of the most useful communication methods and when asked towards the end of the survey 19 members said they either read them with interest or checked the heading and read these emails if they applied to them in their role.

- 22 out of the 28 members looked at or received the member's bulletin. 17 felt the bulletin was one of the most useful communication channels and 15 stated they currently read it later on when asked in the survey. 9 of these 15 went on to rate it as either excellent or good. One rated it as poor and 5 as average.   The majority wished to retain the bulletin as a fortnightly circular.

- 22 out of the 28 members looked at the council's web pages and 13 stated our website was one of the most useful channels for them.

- The member's section of the intranet and press releases issued to the local media were also deemed useful by a third of members.

- Just under a third of the 28 members were least familiar with the "Have Your Say" consultation pages, the Residents survey reports and the corporate communication advice pages (both of the latter are on the intranet).

- The least effective channels of communication were the council's Facebook and Twitter accounts and the local newspapers kept in the Corporate Communications team for reference purposes.

- Half the members who answered felt the corporate communications team played an important role in providing members with some key information. Five did not and six were non-committal.

- 19 out of the 22 who answered felt webcasting was a useful new addition for keeping citizens informed about democracy and our decision making processes. Just under half wanted to see both Full Council and Cabinet meetings webcast in the future.

- 18 out of 21 who answered accessed the member's intranet section – 2 members did so on a daily basis. The most popular pages were committee documents, the contacts section and planning pages followed by current news and information.

- Scrutiny and democratic services staff were deemed to be easy to contact and were courteous, knowledgeable and on the whole answered members' queries in a prompt manner.

- All 19 members who answered the question were satisfied with the process for Cabinet papers.

- Of the 18 members who gave feedback on their training needs, the vast majority found the schedule, reminders and detailed information about training either very or fairly useful.

- 11 out of 18 members carried their corporate member's diary with them at all times and the majority would like to continue receiving a printed Filofax type approach although 4 members were happy to move to an electronic version accessed via the intranet.

- 17 of the 19 members who answered said they read the staff magazine, with 14 rating it as either good or excellent. Nine would like to see a specific column or feature on members whether this was in their role as a local ward councillor, a scrutiny member or that of a Cabinet member.

- Email was deemed to take up between 0 – 25% of their time within a typical day for 9 members and between 25 – 50% for seven members. (18 responded to this question)

Section by section analysis

Section one of the questionnaire considered the role that corporate communications play in keeping members up-to-date. Members were asked what channels they were aware of, used and felt were either most or least effective. The table below shows the responses. All 28 members answered these initial questions.

Channels	Q1. Awareness. Channels aware of or looked at to receive information.	Q1a Unaware that these channels exist.	Q2. Most useful channels.	Q3. Least effective channels.
1.Member's Section – intranet pages	**20**	8	**12**	2
2.Weekly listing of all media stories	17	8	8	**5**
3.Member's bulletin	**22**	8	**17**	2
4.Member briefings	12	8	8	1
5.Staff magazine	18	8	8	3
6.Powys Change Plan stories (front page intranet)	9	7	2	3
7.Communication advice pages	8	**10**	1	4
8.Weekly summary email including information on the bulletin and links to the intranet	7	7	4	3
9.Emails sent to councillors@powys.gov.uk	**27**	7	**18**	1
10.Latest news items on front page of main website.	12	7	5	1
11.The "Have Your Say" consultation pages	4	**12**	3	4
12.Residents Survey reports 2007 onwards	8	**11**	4	2
13.Press releases issued to the local media	**21**	8	**11**	1
14.Local newspapers kept in the Comms Team for reference purposes	7	7	2	**6**
15. The council's Facebook and Twitter accounts	7	6	7	**8**
15 The Powys website and its various pages	**22**	8	**13**	2
16.None of the above	0	5	0	4
17.All of the above	0	0	0	0

As can be seen from the key findings members are both aware of and value the emails sent directly to all of them via the councillors@powys.gov.uk address plus the members bulletin, the members section of the intranet, copies of the press releases sent to the local media and the website.

When asked why these methods were the most useful 15 members gave their views.

One said: *"I believe that the four mentioned give me a good reflection of my particular way of communicating with my constituents and in my role as a councillor."*

Another said: *"These methods are most relevant to the way I conduct my council work."*

There is a clear correlation between awareness and usage which may suggest that better promotion of other channels such as the Have Your Say consultation pages and the growing use of social media channels may prove to be more interesting to members in the future once they know they exist and perhaps can access some training to aid confidence.

When members were asked what one thing could improve corporate communications they gave the following answers:

3	Have a Council Smart Phone, all those in positions of responsibility should have them to increase efficiency and improve communications
4	One source and everything available from it.
5	Laptop connectivity
7	Training in how to access them
9	That we receive copies of any important press releases issued by the Council and a regular email outlining and providing links to the various communication channels available
10	I am happy with the current form of communications
12	Facebook members only site that is private
13	I'm content with all I receive.
14	Not really sure I am quite happy with things.
15	Link to the newspaper stories in the summary
16	Introduce a briefing paper on what is coming our way.
18	More selective emailing
20	Information that the public would expect us to know
24	Make the Powys website easier to follow.
25	Receive up to date briefings on matters appertaining to the area you represent
26	Link for media briefing stories
29	List of Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee decision but would know if I followed all minutes.

When asked to rate how important the role of the corporate communications team was in providing members with information where 1 was very important and 5 was unimportant 21 members responded as follows:

Answer	Count
Very Important (1)	7
Fairly Important (2)	3
Neither/nor (3)	6
Fairly unimportant (4)	2
Unimportant (5)	3
Sum (Answers)	**21**

18 members went on to give a reason for their scores.

3	Good communications are vital.
4	If it had been just the Corporate Communications Staff I would have scored 2. Don't feel the PR / Comms staff are effective enough.
5	Whenever there's a request or query there is a positive 'can do' attitude.
7	They do a good job but I am not e-media savvy.
9	It is possibly the most essential information resource after attendance at meetings and reading County Council documentation.
10	As members we should be kept up to date with all the important information.
13	Always kept up to date.
14	Quite satisfied.
15	I seek information as required.
16	Excellent team.
18	They are an important link which provides us with information which we can utilise.
20	I know that they are there to support us and I have used their services in the past.
21	Relevant information is always important.
22	If I want information I usually look for it or ask where I can find it.
24	The team has a good understanding of councillors' requirements.
26	There seem to be a lot of people doing the job.
27	One needs to know how to 'use' the team and seek out contact. Shane is accessible and very helpful. Our member support staff Jen and Sue, plus members It are always helpful and can fill us in.
29	I find Shane extremely helpful and valuable. I read all press releases and contact Shane if I need any information.

Section two of the survey asked about the member's intranet and usage.

18 of the 21 members who chose to answer the first question had accessed the intranet section set up for members within the past six months.

When asked **"How often would you say you tend to look at these pages?"** 17 members responded to the question as follows:

Frequency	Number
Daily	2
Once or twice a week	5
Once or twice a fortnight	6
Once or twice a month	3
Once or twice every quarter	1
Total	17

Members were then give details of the key pages and asked four questions around which pages they looked at, which were the most useful, needed updated or could be deleted. The table below gives the responses to all three questions.

Channels	Q8 Pages looked at	Q8a. Most useful pages	Q8d. Require updating.	Q8e. Could be deleted
1.Current news and information	**10**	9	1	1
2.Local env. contacts + Mid Wales Trunk Rd Agency	5	2	0	1
3.Planning	**14**	**13**	**3**	1
4.Council diary	7	4	1	0
5.Committee documents	**17**	**15**	1	1
6.FAQs – frequently asked questions	0	0	1	0
7.Bulletins	**10**	7	1	0
8.Portfolio decisions	9	**10**	1	1
9.Council policy	4	3	1	0
10.Email and calendar	7	**11**	1	0
11.Find a person (contacts)	**15**	**11**	1	1
12.Members development	6	2	0	0
13.Members ICT development	2	2	1	0
14.Report a problem	3	2	0	0
15.Useful links	3	2	1	0
16.All of them	0	0	0	0

The table above shows that in relation to the member's section of the intranet the pages that were considered the most useful were:

- committee documents,
- planning,
- email and calendar

- the contacts page
- portfolio decisions
- current news and information.

Three members felt the planning pages required updating but most other pages had only one member stating the same. A few members felt some pages could be deleted. However five out of the six were pages that had been listed by others as the most useful.

Those members who stated they hadn't accessed the pages in the member's section over the past six months were asked to give their reasons why and also what would encourage them to use the pages more.

The five members who commented either hadn't been shown how to access the intranet pages, didn't feel the need or felt they didn't have enough time to do so. A bit of training would help those who felt lacking in confidence.

With regard to the members bulletin 15 members out of 19 who answered the question stated that they currently read it. Of these nine felt the look and design was either excellent/good, five rated it as average and one member felt it was poor.

In terms of the content seven felt it was excellent or good, five rated it as average and one stated it was very poor.

In total 12 members gave additional comments on the look and design and 11 did so on the content. Comments given by members tended to cover both aspects of the bulletin (look and content) and the first 12 are listed below.

3	Bulletin is only as good as the content, sometimes it seems that the editor is struggling for content.
4	It seems to have good poor over the last couple of years. Quality of information within it. It's more of a PR Journal. (Boring)
5	The online version is informative In this instance I would prefer an online version to a hard copy
10	The document is full of useful information
11	Average - useful but not essential as a means to accessing information
14	Seems fine to me
15	it is adequate
16	No flow. Poor lay out
18	Everything seems satisfactory
21	Too disparate in layout.
24	For me, this provides a great deal of what I need to carry out my role as a county councillor and to report to my community council on county matters/issues.
26	Keep me up to date with the news bulletins no need to look elsewhere

From the other 11 comments given with regard to content one members said:

"It is easy to read and contains useful information. However, if life is busy I just scan the content."

Another member said:

"It does not flow - it looks like it's been thrown together."

7 members had suggestions for improving the bulletin.

3	Making sure all areas provide the editor with good content in a timely manner.
4	Remove the PR's.
10	Does not need any improving.
15	Not sure.
16	Better layout.
21	If it were voice activated and controlled.
24	I'm perfectly happy with it as it is. I just want information.

The frequency of the bulletin was deemed to be about right with 10 members wanting to continue receiving it once a fortnight. Three members thought once a month would suffice. 15 out of the 28 didn't answer this question.

Section three of the survey looked at the role of the Scrutiny and Democratic services teams and their communication with members. The team consists of the following staff: Wyn Richards, Steve Boyd, Liz Patterson, Lisa Richards and Carol Johnson.

All 19 members who answered the first set of questions rated the team as being easy to contact and rated them highly in terms of their promptness when answering calls, courtesy and knowledge re- signposting them to the right person. (See table below)

Rating	Promptness of answering call	Courtesy of staff dealing with enquiry	Staff knowledge re-signposting to correct officer	Staff's own knowledge in resolving issue at first point of contact
Excellent	**14**	**18**	**16**	**12**
Good	5	1	2	6
Acceptable	0	0	0	1
Poor	0	0	0	0
Total	19	19	18	19

19 members answered on three aspects but one didn't answer the third sector – hence the total being 18 rather than 19.

In relation to the process established for distributing committee papers to all members the team were keen to double check which of the two options best suited them.

12 members stated they preferred to receive an email link to the committee papers with seven members preferring paper copies.   17 of the 19 members were satisfied with the process but two were fairly dissatisfied.

Following on from this members were asked to rate their satisfaction with the process for Cabinet papers which was described as follows.   "The agenda is either emailed out or hard copies provided to members.   The supporting papers are then distributed in the same way and two days post Cabinet the minutes are produced and circulated.

All 19 members were either very or fairly satisfied with this process and had no suggestions on how this could be improved.

9 comments were given with regard to the committee/cabinet paper process. These were as follows:

3	Cabinet papers are often missing and emailed then very close to meeting, makes it more difficult to track things, especially in the cabinet meeting. It would be good to have all reports embedded in the agenda document
4	Produce them in a smaller format for those that request it. (A5) Also do something similar to the WG Committees. (PDF Pack of the Meeting) Saves opening loads of links. (PDF Builder)
7	Sometimes things are delayed in the post. Posting one day earlier might avoid not receiving papers until after the weekend
10	None
11	Access to a home printer allowing paper copies of emailed committee papers/documents to be produced by a Member if required, is essential
15	Shire papers have reverted to paper a backward step
20	I should like to receive papers electronically however I do not like using my laptop in meetings, if I had a tablet such as an iPad to review papers in meetings that would be a different matter.
24	I am satisfied with the e-mailing system; but please, please ensure that the system is in working order, otherwise it is less than useless.
26	If there is a lengthy document one can always ask for a hard copy. We must consider the cost.

Section four of the questionnaire asked members to consider their training and development needs.   At this point the base (number of members responded) was 18 members.

The first question asked members to state how useful some of the member training information was that was provided to them. See the table overleaf.

Rating	Schedule of member development days	Notice/reminder of training development days	Detailed information about the training being given on the day
Very useful	**12**	**13**	**13**
Useful	5	3	2
Not very useful	0	1	2
Not at all useful	1	1	1
Total	18	18	18

One member suggested that future development days could be conducted via e learning.

15 out of the 18 members who answered Q21 thought it'd be fairly or very helpful if the notes/slides from development days were replicated in the member's bulletin.

Action point – a member of the team to ensure this happens in future.

With regard to members' diaries 11 out of the 18 members who responded carried their Filofax with them at all times, three used it sporadically and four didn't use it much at all.

When asked in what format they would like their 2015 diary, 12 of the 18 would prefer the same format as now, four would move to an electronic diary that all members could access via the intranet whilst one would prefer a paper listing of dates every quarter placed in their pigeon hole.   One members suggested

"Rather than a Filofax with printed inserts, produce a diary with all dates included. Also with bigger pages for writing other stuff."

In terms of training needs members were asked to express their interest in some new approaches. 14 members answered the first two options and 12 gave a view on the option of video streaming. See table below. In essence there is clear support from members to try out different modes of learning.

Rating	Training courses provided via a CD	Training provided by a learning pool	Training provided via video streaming
Very interested	**5**	5	3
Fairly interested	5	**6**	**6**
Not very interested	2	3	3
Not at all interested	2	0	0
Total	14	14	12

Section five of the survey was based around some of the key questions asked in the staff communications survey. The idea was to allow for member input and insight into the same question to allow for some comparisons to be drawn out and considered in the final communications and engagement plan.

The questions were about the staff magazine, emails, strategic communications with senior directors and future communication channels.

Between 15–19 members answered the questions in this final section.

Staff magazine:

17 out of 19 members said yes they read the staff magazine. Two didn't. Of the 17 that did read it nine preferred a paper copy, one read it via the staff intranet and seven did a mixture.

14 out of 17 members rated the look and the design of the magazine as either excellent or good with just three stating it looked average.   In terms of content and articles 12 said it was good and five felt it was average.

When asked if they'd like to see a specific section or column for member interest stories e.g. a day in the life of a councillor etc. nine members said yes and six didn't feel it was necessary.

Email:

Nine members felt they spend up a quarter of their day composing, responding to or reading emails whilst seven members said this was more likely to be between 25% - 50%. One member stated it was between 50 – 75% of a typical day and one member was sure it was more likely to be at the top end of the bracket 75% plus.

All members bar one rated themselves as being able to cope with the demands of email. Six felt they were excellent at keeping on top of them, 11 rated themselves as good and one member said he would look at emails in and amongst other work pressure but not necessarily respond immediately.   Finally one member felt a little inundated sometimes by the number of emails received and didn't respond due to capacity issues.

On the whole though members considered emails to be a help in their role as a councillor.   13 said emails were a help whilst five said they could be a both a hindrance and a help depending on who the sender was.   One member didn't have a view and felt they were another form of communication that existed nowadays.

As previously mentioned in Section One members rated and read the emails received via the councillors@powys.gov.uk email address.   19 members answered a question about their view when seeing they had an email in their account.   Three declared they read them with interest and 16 said they checked the heading out first and read if it applied.

When asked if they had any additional comments or concerns with regard to email ten members gave some additional insights which are listed in the table overleaf.

The comments were split into three key themes – email is an effective channel for members in their roles, the use of "all emails" and some frustrations at lost connection or security issues.

4	A better email system than the old, dated, boring, slow one that we have.
5	VPN connectivity is sometimes lost.
7	Stop officers sending "list at Powys" none of those apply to members. I would also like e-mails to show when I replied.
10	Could not manage without.
15	Emails are an essential tool in being an effective councillor.
20	There is too much security surrounding the email system. Why can't we have them pulled onto our smartphones? We are not MI5 after all!
21	I'm not sure if this is the right avenue to mention this point but I find it very frustrating when I email an officer (not specifically in information) any department to receive a reply saying they are on leave or off sick and referring me to another officer or saying they will respond on their return. Why can't the email be automatically referred to whoever is deputising for them?
24	E-mailing is the most-cost effective way of working, for the council myself. However, as I've mentioned elsewhere is this survey, please ensure that the system and/or the councillors laptop is working.
25	I would prefer not to receive emails which relate solely to members of staff.
29	I find email very useful.

Strategic Communications:

Members were asked to comment on their relationships with senior managers and directors by selecting the most appropriate statement from four given.

The results were as follows:

Statement	Number
It's an excellent relationship with a two way dialogue whereby I receive information from them but also sustain and provide insights and information to offices about constituents' needs and views.	4
It's a good relationship overall. There is room for improvement but on the whole it works.	**13**
It's poor. I'm not in touch with officers than often and would like to receive more information from officers on areas of specific interest.	1
It's very poor. I receive little or no contact with senior managers or directors and don't tend to have a need to contact them.	1
Total	**19**

<u>Future Channels:</u>

Members were finally asked about their thoughts around future communication channels and given a list of potential ideas for development and discussion.

Future communication channel	Number
A video message by the Leader on key issues	**7**
A blog by the Leader which allows you to keep up to date with Cabinet decisions and his working week	**7**
General video messages produced by officers re- new service developments, policy issues or topical issues	**9**
E-bulletins or newsletters published on the Members of staff intranet to which you are sent a link	**8**
A PCC You-tube channel which could be used for training, promoting services or for you to signpost to constituents	3
Social media pages for member engagement (closed Facebook member group or Yammer)	6
Text alerts direct to your mobile re- forthcoming full council dates, events and key issues	5
Electronic noticeboards like those in the post office which display information on a continuous loop	4
Other	2

The two "other ideas" were:

21	Wouldn't access any of the them.
27	more of the above

Eight comments were also given around future ideas and what members would like to see happening in Powys. These were:

4	Something similar to public organisations have been doing for years, rather than the same old PCC comms.
5	Upgrade of internal and exterior communication hardware.
7	As far as I am concerned I would need training in any of these futuristic ideas. There is an assumption that I can already use them. I cannot.
10	I am happy with the current way of communications.
13	Tablets instead of laptops.
15	Video conferencing of committees to reduce traveling.
20	Webcasting is a must!
24	Do well what we are currently doing with some improvement. Please do not start something that we will not be able to deliver.

The final question in the survey asked members to state if they would support any of the following ideas to improve internal communications.

Idea	Like	Don't like	Not sure
Create a combined monthly staff and members magazine (revamped cyswllt:connect) which was available in hard copy, on the intranet and emailed to all members.	10	3	4
Create a monthly member information sheet with links to key political decisions, forthcoming dates, member training updates, updates on topics like wind farms, care for older people or budgetary pressures etc.	**12**	**2**	**3**
Create a monthly information sheet on a ward/electoral division basis to which each department contributes.	12	3	0

Conclusion:

Members on the whole seem to be aware of and utilise a number of traditional channels of communication and are generally happy with these. They feel well supported by staff and know that their enquiries will be dealt with efficiently.

There is a clear link though between the channels that members feel are the least effective and those that they have stated that were and are unaware of. This is an area for clear action so that members are kept up to date with regard to any new channels or resources that could prove beneficial in their roles.

Members are happy to consider new modes of communication for the future like blogs and video messages as long as these can be sustained and training provided. They are also happy for their own training to be refreshed and new modes of training considered including the use of CDs and learning pools.

They appreciate the role that officers in the corporate centre play when they come into contact with them and praised both their helpfulness, promptness and courtesy when dealing with their enquiries.

One member wrote:

"One needs to know how to 'use' the team and seek out contact. Shane is accessible and very helpful. Our member support staff Jen and Sue, plus members IT are always helpful and can fill us in."

Most feel they can cope with the level of emails received and would like to see improvements to IT systems. They receive, read and generally rate the member's bulletin but would like to see it improved re design and content.

Recommendations:

Initial analysis indicates the following issues need to be addressed in the forthcoming communications and engagement strategy for both employees and members.   This strategy will be launched in the autumn 2014.

- Explore options for training members around the use of Facebook and Twitter.

- Better promote some of intranet pages that may be of particular help or relevance for members that they appear not to have been aware existed prior to the survey i.e. Residents' survey data, press releases issued to the local media, Have Your Say pages.

- Consider how to fund and webcast meetings in line with member's views – namely Full Council and Cabinet.

- Utilise the findings to help shape the member's section of the intranet and ensure the pages that members most value and use are kept up-to-date. This may require an officer chasing relevant service areas to ensure their pages are up-to-date as opposed to having to update them directly.

- Work on an improved design and content for the member's bulletin but sustain it as a fortnightly communication tool.

- Consider the comments given with regard to the committee process to see if any further improvements can be made.

- Explore options around future training needs taking into the account the appetite expressed by members for use of alternative modes like CD, a learning pool or video streaming.

- Consider and put in place some of the ideas around future channels of communication.

- Request that management team consider and disseminate the findings specifically in relation to strategic communications and endeavour to strengthen this over time.

- Share the findings with all related departments/section to ensure improved communications with members.