Appendix A

London Borough of Tower Hamlets: Independent Digital Review for the Local Government Association

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The review was written by Dan Slee and Darren Caveney of public sector communications specialists comms2point0 in November 2015.

This was completed following a visit to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in November 2015 led by Matt Nicholls, LGA head of local government communications support with Richard Pearson, marketing and business development manager at Southampton City Council. Further research was also carried out to help shape the report and the report drew from materials supplied by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the Local Government Association.

Introduction

This independent digital communications review supports the wider independent communications review conducted by the Local Government Association in November 2015.

Communications at Tower Hamlets is often an afterthought and digital communications a poor relation. Activity is not linked with business objectives and a culture of evaluation is not present. Yet, there is evidence of a desire to change, innovate and deliver a good job for residents.

There has been an over-dominance of the council-produced East End Life newspaper in a borough which is digitally connected. Almost 90 per cent of adults use the internet, 80 per cent use email and almost 70 per cent social media.

A common theme was that the outsourced IT is an impediment to the council as is an approach to social media. An example of this is that staff are not able to follow what their council is saying on Twitter and service areas are held back from developing their own channels.

However, our research showed that there is a thirst for innovation and more than 600,000 people were reached through social media talking on behalf of Tower Hamlets Council in a single week.

We have set out recommendations and a roadmap for digital communications.

1. **Leadership and strategy**

For digital communications, there is a strong recognition that there is a need to evolve towards this within the team. The team has some dedicated and hardworking officers although this is not always fully recognised. There is a recognition of the need to evolve from the model of the past in the Tower Hamlets Digital Communications Strategy draft of July 2015. However, broadly, we found that communications is seen as an afterthought in parts of the council and that digital communications is seen as an add-on beyond that. The cause for digital communications has been hampered by the apparent lack of success of the MyTowerHamlets application which was not well thought of by interviewees and evidence of its success was not presented.

The council's new leadership and appointment of a new head of communications presents a perfect opportunity for digital communications to be refocussed. High internet connectivity in Tower Hamlets strongly underlines this opportunity. We welcome the commitment for digital inclusion in the Get Online Tower Hamlets: Tower Hamlets Partnership Digital Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan March 2015 - March 2018. Digital by Default is an aspiration to but not yet being delivered.

However, Tower Hamlets is strongly digitally connected with 87 per cent of adults using the internet - just one per cent less than the London average, 68 per cent

using social media and 80 per cent using email.[1] As things stand these figures present a missed opportunity but an opportunity the authority appears more willing to embrace.

Research carried out by the LGA also supports a transition to digital communications with 19 per cent of residents who may seek council information wanting to use the council website, 15 per cent preferring the East End Life newspaper, 13 per cent text and email and five per cent social media.[2] We would support the approach of a managed transition away from reliance on the weekly produced East End Life in order to provide information in a manner residents would like.

There is a large bank of experience and best practice of digital communications across local government available to Tower Hamlets Council. The first social media sites in the sector were trialled around 2007 with websites dating back to the mid-1990s. The number of councils innovating and reaching results with email marketing is also increasing.

To be truly successful, digital communications at Tower Hamlets Council needs to be seen as part of the overall communications mix, not just a channel or 'something extra'. This will evolve over time as will the support and reputation of the communications team as it moves more to deliver council priorities and have a direct hand in affecting change.

Communications strategies and best practice

There are a number of strategies but there is no compelling evidence that they tie in with clear business objectives. There is limited evidence that evaluation forms an important part of the communications mix. There is no sense that evaluation forms part of the ethos of the team. Interlinked to this is communications planning seems uneven. Digital communications is broadly seen as a secondary channel behind East End Life.

The team and leadership

The team have lacked clear leadership for some time. The head of communications post has been vacant for some months.

There is a defensiveness towards the East End Life publication and it is clear that this publication has formed an over-dominant cornerstone of communications for Tower Hamlets over several years.

Comments were made that as an authority change is not readily embraced. The digital communications strategy has not been widely shared and it is surprising that some staff who had worked in the field had not seen it or had been consulted.

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[1] Get Online Tower Hamlets p14.

[2] LGA research, November 2015.

Close working with the new council-wide digital strategy is vital in order for the communications team to understand and support the transformation of the transactional services offered by the council.

Despite political turbulence, restructures and changes within the team there is still a dedication to doing a good job for the people of Tower Hamlets. There are pockets of digital communications talent.

There appeared to be a lack of confidence from those we met with in senior level 'buy-in' for digital transformation - this is important to support the council's digital transformation work.

There appears to be skills gaps across some parts of the communications team, which will need to be addressed, in terms of the more effective use of digital communications. However, there is an appetite from the team to learn and develop.

East End Life and digital communications

The weekly newspaper was set-up in the 1990s as a response to extremism. It succeeded in its initial aim. However, it has maintained an overly dominant position in the communications suite for the authority. It has had the effect of chilling innovation in digital communications. Neighbouring authorities have moved away from concentrating on the newspaper as the key communications channel and have more developed digital communications footprints. Others have retained printed publications for hard-to-reach groups but have diversified in other areas.

From data supplied by the authority, Tower Hamlets is in a strong position for digital connectivity. Work has taken place to target digital engagement, Superfast broadband will soon connect 100 per cent of homes and public wifi is available and expanding. There is confidence that digital will form a key part of channel shift which can deliver savings for the authority and better services for residents.

Recommendations and a road map for improved digital communications through leadership and strategy:

❏ We would support a managed transformation from the current print-by-default communications approach to digital-by-default.

❏ Vital to deliver this, the new head of communications job description needs to include a track-record in working to develop digital communications.

❏ All communications strategies - digital or otherwise - need to tie in with council business objectives and be evaluated.

❏ Training in communications planning which looks at digital and traditional channels side-by-side and can be used to deliver evaluation against business objectives.

❏ Training in the tactical use of digital communications channels for the communications team.

❏ We support the need to maintain closer links with the Mayor, Chief Executive and service areas on digital issues.

2. Internet and intranet

Research shows that for citizen, there are 10.5 visits to a local government website.[3] A good council website is therefore an essential tool to communicate and also drive channel shift.

There is widespread frustration that problems with the website CMS have long been identified but solutions have not yet been developed. The council site towerhamlets.gov.uk compared to others in local government is considered 'poor' by SOCITM in their 2015 survey.[4] The Better Connected report rated the council website as one star (out of five). The site failed the mobile compatibility and accessibility tests:

> Mobile friendly - Increasing numbers of people are accessing the internet through mobile phones. Globally, 20 per cent of Google searches are done using a mobile phone.[5] In the UK, 66 per cent of people have a mobile smartphone and 45 per cent of people look to make transactions using their device.[6] A council website that does not work satisfactorily on a smartphone is disadvantaging its residents.

> Accessibility - Disabled people rely heavily on a website that they can access. There are web standards such as BS8878 which govern sites.

Content Management System

There is an appetite to further develop towerhamlets.gov.uk. The council is in the final stages of implementing a new CMS, which will go live on 17 December with a key aim of driving improvements to the website and increasing the council's SOCITM score.

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[3] Likaword http://benproctor.co.uk/key-facts-about-traffic-to-local-government-websites/

[4] SOCITM Better Connected 2015 https://betterconnected.socitm.net/councils/tower-hamlets

[5] Hubspot http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/responsive-design-list

[6] Ofcom Communications market report 2015 http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr15/

Pace of change and barriers

Several members of staff raised frustrations with having to raise improvement and development issues through the council's outsourced partner, Agilysys and this issue needs to be resolved in order to equip the council to make improvements to the website. This issue is further compounded because there is no web developer in the team meaning an extra reliance on the external supplier versus the reluctance to use them as the solution.

There is a lack of clarity on the priorities and plan for channel shift. This work will be informed by the new digital strategy and its launch will provide an opportunity to address this and build a sense of understanding and purpose.

The council has experienced a mixed reaction from the use of mobile apps through the MyTowerHamlets app. This has not proved to be a success and there is an exit strategy set out in the draft Digital Communications plan of July 2015 which refers to systems being removed from the website and functionality to be replaced by the new CMS. We believe that making a website mobile-friendly is more useful than making one-off apps that may not have a significant take-up and serve to repeat web content. It may be possible to move MyTowerHamlets app subscribers to become email subscribers.

Content

Work has taken place to reduce the number of pages and duplicated or out of date data on the website. As a result the site is now down to 3k pages. This is still significant in size and we would recommend further reductions in the number of pages on the site and with content based on 'what residents want' and where the site analytics show meaningful traffic, rather than content driven by services. This happens at many local authorities so is not solely a Tower Hamlets issue.

Working alongside the new email marketing strategy a key part of the next phase of work on the website is to actively promote sign-ups to email alerts. By offering a menu of subscriber updates to residents around the core council services the team can create greater resident engagement and increase web traffic. By doing this in conjunction with the wider digital strategy there can be a joined-up approach to prioritising these in line with the services being transformed by new online processes. Pop-up ads for email signups for residents should be adopted - intelligence from other local authorities highlights the benefits of this approach (for example, Nottinghamshire County Council generate a thousand new resident email sign-ups a month using pop-up ads on their site).

The Intranet

The intranet is overlooked and under-resourced and we heard complaints that this had become hard-to-use to find documents and guidance and was infrequently used to communicate significant announcements to staff. The intranet is just one channel of several that is available to internal communications and its future use should be part of an internal communications review. We welcome the intention in the Publicity Plan for a new internal communications function.

Recommendations and a roadmap for a new CMS and intranet

❏ A business case for a mobile-friendly towerhamlets.gov.uk and intranet should be built and support should be sought from the senior management team, Mayor, ICT and transformation team.

❏ The council should follow clear government advice and work with a web accessibility standards expert[7] and also with disabled people[8] when improving the site. This should be done in its current incarnation as well as in building the new site. This should also be done on microsites.

❏ The current CMS on which the website depends is obsolete and should be replaced with an accessible and mobile-friendly CMS speedily. Adequate resources should be made available to make this process effective.

❏ The current intranet is also obsolete and should be replaced with an accessible and mobile-friendly CMS.

❏ That work on the new CMS continue and that it ensures the website is mobile-compatible.

❏ That an audit of spending on microsites be carried out with the support of finance officers to establish and assess costs and identify potential savings.

❏ That the team responsible for the new CMS work with colleagues in local government and through the localgov digital network who can share best practice.

❏ We recommend that the relationship with Agilysis as outsourced web development partner be reviewed.

❏ Work needs to be done to make sure the current website is accessible with work with accessibility experts and the disabled community undertaken in line with Government recommendations. This learning informing the new website.

❏ The CMS work be a key part of the new council digital strategy.

❏ Continue to develop an exit strategy for the MyTowerHamlets app with a legal position taken on whether or not app subscribers can become email subscribers.

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[7] Web Accessibility https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/user-centred-design/accessibility
[8] Wikipedia BS8878 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_accessibility#United_Kingdom

❏ Work to rationalise the number of pages on the CMS driven by user need not internal drivers.

❏ The new CMS should work closely with a commissioned email marketing solution.

❏ Consult with colleagues from the localgovdigital group to share insight and lessons in developing a new CMS.

3. Social media

Overview

Social media has become an important communications channel but at Tower Hamlets its development remains in its infancy. It lags behind other authorities not just across London but across the country. The council's social media policy says that social media is important. This is a welcome statement of intent and one to encourage delivery against.

There is evidence of social media starting to be used imaginatively, such as with Instagram in the #tastebricklane campaign and centrally-produced content for the LGA's #ourday event.

However, we found blockages against the use of social media. There appears to be a block on routine staff access. This block means that people outside the authority can be more informed than those within. There are also barriers against devolving social media access to service areas to allow them to be pro-active.

While there are pockets of innovation, there seems to be a broad lack of understanding of the role that social media can play. There is also a lack of skills across the team with evidence that some staff think of social media as being someone else's job. This underlines the belief that social media appears to be an afterthought and is not yet a key component in communications planning or delivery.

With training and support for communications and in turn service areas this could be a vital addition to the digital communications footprint and capacity the council has to offer. At present, the council does not fully understand how social media may work. This is a significant stumbling block that needs be addressed.

Access to social media

It would appear that staff are not able to access social media as they can most websites. We would support the restriction by ICT of staff access to inappropriate websites such as gambling or pornography. However, we would not support the ban

on staff access to social media sites. This step contravenes the LGA Digital Councils advice to local government which encourages open access.[9]

By allowing staff access, they can be better informed and be enlisted as an army of advocates to support and share content. The recycling campaign, for example, can benefit from the support of staff online through sharing through their networks of friends, families and others. This step also builds trust in the staff.

Misuse is a management issue rather than an ICT issue.

There are a number of authorities across the UK who have opened social media access without concern. These include Monmouthshire County Council in Wales, Coventry City Council in the West Midlands, Crawley Borough Council in West Sussex and the London Borough of Enfield which allows access with some restrictions to financial staff.

Key UK Government departments such as Cabinet Office, DCLG, DWP and others have allowed staff social media access for at least seven years.[10] ICT blocking staff access is also not recommended advice by industry body SOCITM.[11]

Social media: letting service areas be pro-active

The communications team currently retains close central control over the corporate social media voice and from service areas. There is a concern that service areas 'could not be trusted' to deliver their own social media. This view has been formed through previous experiences.

Against this backdrop there is a time-consuming route for service areas to use social media for themselves.

Permission needs to be sought from the monthly Tower Hamlets Social Media Board which is made up of communications officers. A business case is expected but we saw no evidence of a template which set out what is needed.

Before approval, applicants must read seven policies including copyright and safeguarding before granting access. Some training is given on best practice. Once permission has been granted by the social media board we heard evidence that service areas were then expected to email each piece of content to a member of the communications team and for the content placed on the corporate Facebook or Twitter page. After an uncertain period, service areas may then be allowed their own account. This is time consuming and takes resources away from other functions.

A single corporate account in local government funnelling content from 1,200 services is an inefficient way of sharing social content and adding too much content

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[9] LGA Digital Councils http://www.local.gov.uk/digital-councils/get-started/-/journal_content/56/10180/6967645/ARTICLE

[10] Helpful Technology research, 2009 http://www.helpfultechnology.com/legacy/testsuiteresults.php

[11] SOCITM Briefing 38 2012

to a Facebook page can damage the reach and effectiveness of subsequent updates.

Following approval, it is not clear how records of which officers have been granted access or the names of the accounts are maintained. There is no publicly available register of social media accounts. A list of social media accounts operated by the council was requested by not provided. Once service areas are approved, there is no evidence they are supported through training, continuous professional development or informally through meet-ups and a private Facebook group to share best practice and ideas such as is done by other councils.

The process for granting of permission to service areas is unclear and overly complicated. It also severely limits the effectiveness of social media used by the council.

Once service areas are approved there is no strategy for how social media will be used and there is no minimum set of expectations. This leads to uncertainty and a lack of clarity. This hampers the day-to-day operation of social media. Many other councils adopt a uniform approach. They clearly set-out expectations and how the account will be used.

The council is taking small steps. Social media can and should play a role in the digital transformation and channel shift of the authority. To help this, the channels should be promoted offline through traditional marketing to allow people the choice to sign-up.

Social media: across the borough

As part of the review we looked at the role that social media has day-to-day across Tower Hamlets.

On Twitter, from October 20 to November 19, there were more than 5,662 references to the borough[12]. This included a spike of more than 800 tweets in a day caused by the stabbing of a police officer in the borough. There were 378 references to Tower Hamlets Council in the same period. Accounts are maintained by a number of community groups and political parties as well as individual residents.

On Facebook, there are 91 groups or pages with Tower Hamlets in the title. Within 17 kilometres of Poplar, there are 6.6 million registered users aged 13 and above. Of these, 30,000 are declared Bengali speakers.

On YouTube, there are 33,600 uploads with Tower Hamlets in the title. The top three ranked videos with more than 500,000 views combined all refer to religious extremism.

On instagram, there are 13,010 posts on the #towerhamlets hashtag. Globally, there are more than 400 million users.

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[12] Topsy.com

On LinkedIn, there are 14 groups with Tower Hamlets in the title and 5,450 with London. There are 12,840 professionals with Tower Hamlets in their profile which could indicate education or employment in the borough.

Overall, it is clear that social media is playing an important and demonstrable role in the life of the borough.

Social media: channels and content review

Social media remains undeveloped at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets with a limited number of accounts. There was no definitive list provided by the authority. The council website shows three sites all listed on the contact pages. These are the corporate Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Icons on webpages point people towards the corporate Twitter, Facebook, Instagram as well as YouTube.

Service area pages that have social media accounts do not appear to promote this on their own web pages. While there is a housing Twitter account, for example, this is not promoted on webpages and content is not embedded. This is a missed opportunity.

A desktop web search has revealed more sites speaking on behalf of the council. However, there is no Social Media directory which lists all council social media sites. As the use of social media sites develops experience shows this will be an important resource both internally and externally.

We have reviewed social media platforms that communicate on behalf of the council across seven days. This includes the arm's length management organisation of Tower Hamlets Homes which operate 22,000 homes on behalf of the authority.

Social media review across seven days

Service area	Social media channel	Followers and likes	Total updates	Last updated	7 day: updates	7 day: Business focussed / engagement (percentage)	7 day: interactions received	7 day: replies	7 day reach
Corporate	Twitter @towerhamletsnow	9,926	4,728	Today	147	21/79	196	22	454,754[13]
Corporate	Twitter @THHomes	2,911	2,371	Today	22	10/90	18	3	40,503[14]
Corporate	Instagram	386	159	Today	9	0/100	2	0	160[15]
Communities, Localities & Culture	Twitter Tower Hamlets Events @thevents	4,584	1,700	Today	16	25/75	25	3	131,193[16]
Communities, Localities & Culture	Tower Hamlets Events Facebook	2,391	n/a	Today	6	100/0	10	0	n/a
Corporate	London Borough of Tower Hamlets Facebook	755	n/a	Today	17	47/53	50	1	n/a
Instagram	Tower Hamlets Council YouTube	39	24	1 day ago	2	0/100	0	0	n/a
Google Plus	Tower Hamlets Council	22	n/a	277 days	0	0/0	0	0	n/a
TOTAL		20,992	8,982		219		301	29	626,610

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[13] Tweetreach report

[14] Tweetreach

[15] Simply Measured Analytics

[16] Tweetreach

Conclusions

- There is a **limited diversity of accounts** with the corporate model being followed.

- Combined, more than **626,610 social media accounts were reached** across a seven day period. There is no available data to suggest how many businesses, groups and individuals are directly connected to Tower Hamlets. The bulk of the figure comes from the corporate Twitter.

- The week covered **two annual national social media campaigns** and so may not be a typical week. The LGA-led **#ourday** on Twitter which councils across England and Wales during which councils were encouraged to tweet day-to-day activities and stories. The week also included **#housingday** which saw the housing sector also tweet day-to-day tasks and stories.

- **Special social content produced for #ourday and #housingday proved popular.** This saw the London Borough of Tower Hamlets chief executive interviewed along with frontline staff. A video of a resident recalling the war also proved popular.

- There is **low level engagement** with more than 300 messages directed to the authority. Many are unanswered customer services queries regarding traffic problems and fly-tipping. Some refer to the council in passing while others direct questions and comments. Not all questions are dealt with although while there is some evidence of sporadic engagement.

- **Tower Hamlets Council is failing to understand Facebook or engage there**. There are less than 800 people liking the corporate page and more than 2,000 for events. There are 6.6 million people with Facebook accounts within 17km of Poplar. However, there is recognition that this is an issue.

- **Video content proved popular.** This was produced for the #housingday campaign which was widely shared.

In channel and follower terms, Tower Hamlets Council is unevenly developed with a focus on the Tower Hamlets Twitter with 9,000 followers. There is no A-Z listings of social media accounts and no list has been provided, as requested.

Facebook is worryingly undeveloped with a single page identified with less than 500 followers.

Other platforms such as YouTube, LinkedIn and Pinterest appear to be undeveloped.

However, there is an Instagram account set-up to co-incide with the #tastebricklane campaign. This is encouraging and the skills and enthusiasm of newer members of staff in the field is encouraging.

There is a recognition in the council social media policy that this is an increasingly important channel of communication. While this is to be welcomed the pace of adoption lags behind that ambition.

Adoption of social media across the authority is limited and lags behind similar public sector organisations. For example:

Councils with wider social media access for service areas

Authority	Population	Social Media Accounts	Channels	BME
London Borough of Richmond	193,000[17]	50[18]	Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube	10.5 per cent
Bradford City Council	528,000[19]	55[20]	Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Vine, WordPress, Pinterest, Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram	33.0 per cent
Birmingham City Council	2,200,000	138[21]	Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google+	41.9 per cent
London Borough of Camden	230,000	16[22]	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube	31.5 per cent
London Borough of Merton	203,000	27[23]	Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube	33.8 per cent
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	284,000	7 (estimate)	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube	54.9 per cent

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[17] Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Borough_of_Richmond_upon_Thames

[18] Richmond.gov.uk https://www.richmond.gov.uk/social_media_index

[19] Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_Bradford

[20] Bradford.gov.uk http://www.bradford.gov.uk/bmdc/government_politics_and_public_administration/our_websites/social_media_directory

[21] Birmingham City Council http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/socialmedia

[22] Camden.gov.uk http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/council-and-democracy/about-the-council/about-this-site/camden-social-media-accounts/

[23] Merton.gov.uk http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/online-communities.htm

Recommendations and a roadmap to good social media

❏ Social media for all communications staff.

❏ Training and support on social media for the council leadership team, Mayor and cabinet members.

❏ Training in how to incorporate digital communications into communications planning and evaluation.

❏ Publish a social media policy in a searchable format.

❏ Closer work with service areas to support the transformation of the council through channel shift.

❏ The appointment of an officer whose role is both strategic and tactical with social media. It is to horizon-scan, experiment, innovate, support and train colleagues.

❏ Open access to social media for staff with clear expectations about use.

❏ That the council should encourage and work with service areas to use social media for themselves.

❏ Integrate social media into wider communications on digital innovation and channel shift.

❏ Produce a simple one page template to set out the business case to the Social Media Board.

❏ Speed up the Social Media Board turn-around time for social media approvals.

❏ The induction and training for service areas should be simplified.

❏ A register of staff with social media access and which channel be maintained internally.

❏ Create an external-facing social media directory.

❏ Create a social media policy. We would encourage that this is crowd-sourced amongst social media users. We recommend that this is publicly available and that staff who look after council social media sites are trained.

❏ Links to relevant social media channels be added to relevant web pages and promoted through off-line means, email signatures, posters and marketing.

❏ Engagement online is an issue. Improved training for staff in engaging with people on social media.

❏ A connection needs to be made between feeding back comments online and service areas. There is no evidence that comments made to online are captured and are fed to insight for service areas.

❏ Customer service needs to be closely involved with the evolution of social media and we suggest that they are given their own Twitter account and access to the Facebook page.

❏ Emergency planning and communications staff to be trained and be aware of which digital channels to use in a crisis.

❏ Develop an infographic which sets out the media landscape for all channels including social media.

4. Email

Email is widely used in the public sector for direct marketing.

There is a growing body of evidence that supports the use of email. Email continues to be a mainstay of communication and service delivery as it allows relatively complex messages and information to be actively 'pushed' to very specific users.[24] Research has concluded that the financial benefit of an email subscriber can be assessed as £1.51.[25]

The Information Commissioner's Office has clear guidance on using email as a marketing or information tool. This sets out the legal obligations on senders and covers such things as the need for people to opt-in and opt-out.[26]
Ofcom research in 2015 show that more than 80 per cent of UK adults have an email address.[27] This is a larger reach than those with web access, those who read East End Life or who have a social media account.

As mentioned, research carried out by the LGA also shows resident support for email with 19 per cent wanting to use the council website, 15 per cent East End Life, 13 per cent text and email and five per cent social media.[28]

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[24] Realising the Benefits whitepaper by Gerald Power http://govdelivery.co.uk/pdfs/whitepaper-channelshift.pdf
[25] Measuring the Value of Subscribers by Guy Duminy
http://www.govdelivery.com/pdfs/guide_MTVofSubscribers.pdf
[26] ICO https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/marketing/
[27] Ofcom Communications Market Report 2015 http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr15/
[28] LGA research, November 2015.

Tower Hamlets Council can learn from the work of other public sector bodies using social media. Increasing parts of the public sector are turning to email as part of their broad communications mix. The Local Government Association is due to publish guidance and best practice on email in December 2015.

Local government is leading the way with Norfolk Council, Southampton City Council and Central Bedfordshire Council examples of authorities pioneering their use of email. UK Government departments using email for communications include HMRC, Department for Health and the UK Space Agency. Their example shows that very often individual service areas are already running their own informal separate email mailing lists in isolation and without always regard for ICO guidance. A central approach means that governance is shared but also subscribers to one list can be offered the choice to opt-in to other lists to mutual benefit. A central approach can also help with marketing and publicity with visitors to the council website offered the chance to sign-up to a choice of lists. There are a number of providers for email marketing solutions.

Most offer extensive analytics that allow the opportunity to review the success of sent out content. After an email has been sent, open rates - who has opened the email - and click rates - which links have been opened can shape future campaigns.

We found no co-ordinated email strategy. However, there is recognition in the role that email has to play in the future communications strategy. We strongly believe that a centrally co-ordinated email marketing strategy can help service areas and the communications team to reach sections of the population that are hard to reach or who are not being reached. This could be especially useful in crafting content to people for whom English is not a first language. We believe that this could be a significant weapon in the future communications mix for Tower Hamlets.

Email marketing roadmap:

Recommendations and a plan to adopt and implement email marketing at Tower Hamlets.

- ❏ **Draw-up business case** to support an email marketing system.

- ❏ **Procure an email marketing system** as part of the communications mix.

- ❏ **Audit service areas** to assess the number of existing email lists.

- ❏ **Draw-up a list of email topics**. A topic is a subject that a resident can opt into, such as school closures in winter weather, council news or library news.

- ❏ **Train and brief the communications team and service areas** how and why to use the commissioned email marketing list exclusively.

❏ **Design templates** are designed that fit within the council's branding.

❏ **Appoint an email marketing lead** within the communications team to take the lead on developing.

❏ **Cross-sell and promote email lists** to all users.

❏ **Strongly promote email lists across other channels** such as off-line, email signatures, marketing and the website.

❏ **Plan an annual survey of subscribers** to assess if the success of the topics and content.

❏ **Continually review and create new topics.** This is in response to insight.

❏ **Evaluate and report back progress to senior management and service areas.** Ensure this data is included in communications summaries and reporting.

Photography and the image library

Tower Hamlets Council is looking to develop a new photo library solution. We recognise the need for a well-maintained photo library but we would also look for the council to explore releasing images under a creative commons licence to allow the re-use of images by all other media. We would also suggest that the council work more closely with amateur photographers who may use Flickr and Instagram. This offers the possibility of organised events for such photographers in order for them to help celebrate the borough through photography which can then be re-used by the council under agreement.

Recommendations and roadmap for photography

❏ Continue to develop a photo library solution and consult for best practice through the LGA and localgov digital networks.
❏ Explore closer ties with amateur photographers.
❏ Explore releasing images under a creative commons licence.

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