

DIVERSIFYING THE STREET CHAMPIONS INITIATIVE – WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Name: Charlotte Stamper
Role: Communications Manager
Organisation: Hillingdon Council

CONTEXT

Corporate Communications currently supports various aspects of the Street Champions initiative. We have promoted the initiative in terms of the good work it does and have also encouraged people to sign up to being a champion through media relations, marketing, campaign and online communications work. We communicate with Street Champions as part of our general communications with residents on news, new initiatives, schemes and policies. There is often information relevant to Street Champions in the Council's bi-monthly magazine, Hillingdon People. Corporate Communications uses the following to communicate with residents and Street Champions: Media relations, publications, online (through the website, social media, email and other digital channels), marketing and advertising.

Corporate Communications also works closely with IT and the Contact Centre to continually improve the way in which all residents, and therefore including Street Champions, can interact with the Council online. More and more services are being put online as well as information and application forms. We actively encourage people to use online services wherever possible and ensure information is as easy as possible to find on our websites. There are web officers in Corporate Communications who are responsible for thousands of pages across the Council's websites and these are continually monitored and improved where possible. These officers talk to colleagues across the Council regularly to improve the way information is presented and to make it easier for residents and Street Champions to report information online. Reporting information online isn't just in the interests of the Council because online transactions are cheaper for the Authority – it is also very convenient for residents because these services can be accessed 24/7.

Particular campaigns of interest to Street Champions over the last few years will include Feel Proud and our anti-social behaviour campaign. The Feel Proud campaign has brought together a number of Council programmes and teams with the aim of improving the lives of residents. Feel Proud includes the promotion and support of town centre improvements, ward budgets, pride of place, civic pride and street champions.

Work done on anti-social behaviour by Corporate Communications has included a Borough-wide campaign focusing on what anti-social behaviour is, what the Council and partners are doing about it and how to report it. Much work around this was done to improve information on the Council website so information is easier to understand and so things are easier to report online.

The use of social media by residents is growing. The number of 'likes' the main Council Facebook page has got has doubled in 18 months. The number of followers of our main Twitter account has also doubled to 10,200 in the same period. These keep growing. The Council has ownership of more than 25 social media accounts in total. Many of these are managed by Corporate Communications but teams across the Council are gradually taking ownership of them. For example, members of staff in libraries run their own Twitter account and talk directly with residents through it.

It is now easier than ever for residents to contact the Council directly – it can be done via your mobile phone while waiting for the bus. Although residents can access the Council website via their phone or other device, they no longer need to do even this. They don't need to log in to their computer to register online and fill in a form to report something to the Council – they can use social media and snap a photo of the problem, say where the issue is and hit send in a matter of seconds. We get hundreds of contacts from residents this way every month. Again, these numbers are increasing quickly.

People we see using these channels vary hugely in their circumstances, ages and backgrounds. These tools are not simply for young people. A wide range of residents use these tools. Older people have been the fastest growing group of people to use social media over the last few years.

GAPS / CHALLENGES

- It is not possible to identify street champions who contact the Council through some online channels unless the resident self-identifies. Some residents remain anonymous, and wish to stay that way when reporting issues online. There is an increasing demand from residents for their contact through social media to count as an official complaint or reporting channel – residents often refuse to report things through the Council website when asked. This gives the team (usually Corporate Communications) the choice of either ignoring the request or progressing through social media – of course the latter course of action is taken.
- There are no social media channels that the Council has at the moment which are specifically run for Street Champions.
- At the moment we are missing some information and accurate reporting of issues from residents via digital channels because we do not have a system in place to do this.
- Enquiries through social media do not integrate with those in the Contact Centre – they are entirely separate.
- Despite the huge increases in demands for better online services and increased requests through social media, there has been no increase in resources to deal with this.

IMPROVEMENTS AND WORK FOR THE FUTURE

- It may be beneficial to review how we are using social media to interact with Street Champions. As mentioned, we do not know whether residents contacting us through social media are Street Champions or not. At the moment we don't know if knowing if they are or not is important, so we could look at this.
- A dedicated Twitter or Facebook (or other social media) account for Street Champions could be set up. Corporate Communications would set this up in conjunction with officers who regularly talk to and deal with enquiries from Street Champions who could then run the accounts. Some work could be done initially to see whether this is worth doing in consultation with existing champions and officers.
- People who in reality are already 'champions' of their areas should be encouraged to keep doing what they do. Some might want to officially become Street Champions so this should be encouraged. However, some might not want to, but their interest in their area and enthusiasm for improvements can still be used to advantage of the Council and neighbourhood watch.
- It is possible to get systems which monitor interactions from residents through social media and one could be put in place to better manage this. This would have the added benefit of better monitoring social channels, scheduling content and seeing what people are saying about the Council. There could be dedicated accounts added for Street Champions.
- Residents expect their contacts through social media to count as an official contact, as will Street Champions. The roles and responsibilities of dealing with this needs to be clarified and better links made with other channels and teams, such as the Contact Centre and online report functions.
- Corporate Communications do not currently use other emerging social media sites like Streetlife or, have input with other sites like Fix My Street so we could review this and see whether official Council contact would be beneficial to Street Champions long term.
- If more contact online is felt appropriate for contacting Street Champions we would need to review how we manage this.