

Communications & Marketing Strategy and Action Plan

STRATEGY

Why have a strategy?

A strategy will reinforce good communications practice already undertaken by Healthwatch Reading (HWR) and will educate recently appointed staff and newly elected board members on what is expected. The strategy will also guide us in improving our image and impact. The strategy is backed by an action plan.

The proposed communications and marketing vision

HWR should deliver consistent, concise and clear messages that boost our credibility among those we seek to influence and inspire confidence, trust, and increased contact from those with whom we want to engage.

Proposed key communications/marketing principles:

1. All staff, board members and trustees have a part to play in representing accurately the role and official 'line' of HWR.
Why? To ensure we appear united and professional, and to avoid confusing external organisations and the public about what we believe or what we are doing. In particular, we need to make clear any distinctions between our personal views, opinions we hold wearing other professional 'hats', and the official stance of HWR.
2. All HWR communications should be concise, simple and jargon-free.
Why? Simple, brief, communications are more likely to be read, understood and acted upon. Using jargon, acronyms that have not been spelt out at first mention, and assuming prior knowledge on the complex health and social care landscape, could alienate audiences.
3. HWR should make its communications, marketing materials and events as accessible and inclusive as possible.
Why? To live up to our 'consumer champion' claim, we need to reflect the diversity of Reading people, and make it easy for people with disabilities or limitations to access our events and to read, hear or see our communications.
4. HWR should be transparent about its work programme and decision making, by promptly publishing documents such as board meeting minutes, and by adopting a permissive approach to requests for information about its work, unless this would breach confidentiality or a piece of work is subject to pending board approval.
Why? So we 'practise what we preach' to other organisations about the need for transparency.

5. HWR should ensure anything it publishes is proofread for accuracy, grammar, spelling, and jargon beforehand, and that the clarity and suitability of graphics and photos is also checked.
Why? To make HWR look professional and to ensure audiences understand our messages.
6. HWR should actively seek opportunities to gain good PR.
Why? By gaining publicity on how we have influenced improvements in health and social care, we will: inspire public trust and confidence; show providers we are 'doers', not just 'talkers'; make a good impression on those who commission our service; potentially gain national recognition for our work; and boost staff morale through the recognition of their efforts.
7. HWR should be prepared for how it would handle any 'bad press'.
Why? Although the chance of 'bad press' is slim for our type of organisation, it would be useful to think in advance how we might handle potential scenarios, in order to avoid a panicked, ad-hoc response that could further damage our reputation.
8. HWR should move away, over time, from using off-the-peg branding messages from Healthwatch England, towards Reading-specific messages.
Why? To ensure our messages are relevant to local people, to play up our strengths and to distinguish HWR from other local Healthwatch.
9. HWR should ensure our strong and colourful branding and logos is used as much as possible in all our communications and activities.
Why? To build a strong identity and a sense that we are part of the Reading community.
10. HWR should be creative in how it communicates, by embracing the use of technology and social media.
Why? Creative and social media-based communications could boost engagement with young people, raise our public profile, make us look innovative and give staff an opportunity to use creative skills.

ACTION PLAN

This Action Plan refers to the ten proposed principles set out in the strategy section of this document.

1. All staff, board members and trustees have a part to play in representing accurately the role and official 'line' of HWR.
Actions:
 - Board members matched to a designated HWR staff member they can contact to check HWR position on issues, if board member is unsure.
 - A new HWR 'explainer' card (A5 or A6) drawn up to consolidate existing marketing materials, with key HWR functions summarised in an easy-read format and all contact details included.
 - All board members, staff members and trustees sent a bundle of HWR 'explainer' cards to hand out to their contacts/the public when necessary.
 - HWR website to include a Q&A that explains HWR's functions, powers, funding, relationships with others, and also makes clear what it does *not* do.

2. All HWR communications should be concise, simple and jargon-free.
Actions:
 - Staff meet to debate and agree some plain English principles and draw up a brief pre-publication check-list. Free guides are available from the Plain English Campaign. Healthwatch England (HWE) also has some advice. We can also examine the worst examples of gobbledegook/clichés/jargon we have seen from other organisations, which we would want to avoid ourselves.

3. HWR should make its communications materials and events as accessible and inclusive as possible.
Actions:
 - Staff meet to decide whether to adopt a standard typeface and font size for board papers, reports, staff email and the HWR website - of Trebuchet typeface in 12 point size (which this document has used), or 16 point size for materials specifically for those with learning disabilities or vision impairments - as recommended by HWE and other bodies. Typeface colour and backgrounds also need consideration.
 - Staff to agree an 'accessibility' check-list for HWR events, that considers issues such as space and access for wheelchairs, hearing loops, sound on audio presentations/speeches, size of Powerpoint slides, disabled parking, and basic comfort and safety, of seating, temperature, light, refreshments, toilet facilities, and fire exits.
 - Staff to commission or find photos for HWR reports, slides and marketing material, which reflect diversity of Reading people in terms of age, gender, ethnic background, and ability. (Check copyright and also consent of any real people who have photos taken).

4. HWR should be transparent about its work programme and decision making and adopt a permissive approach to requests for information, unless this would breach confidentiality or a piece of work is pending board approval.

Actions:

- Board papers and minutes should be published on the website in a clearly marked board papers section, as soon as they are available.
- An easy-read summary of our progress on work programmes should feature in each e-newsletter.
- Requests for sensitive information about our work programme should be referred to the Healthwatch Manager and such requests should be handled within a suitable timeframe and no longer than 20 working days.
- Meet-the-team section on website should be updated with details of new staff and photos and photos with the brief biographies of board members.

5. HWR should ensure anything it publishes is proofread for accuracy, grammar, spelling, and jargon beforehand, and that the clarity, copyright and suitability of graphics and photos are also checked.

Actions:

- All staff should follow the pre-publication checklist before publishing items on website
- Final proofreading of HWR reports should be carried out by the Healthwatch Reading Manager.

6. HWR should actively seek opportunities to gain good PR.

Actions:

- HWR should designate one its staff as a press officer, whose role it is to forge relationships with local media, send out regular [need to decide frequency] press releases, arrange special press events for report launches and advise trustees, board members and staff on handling media inquiries
- HWR should ensure it is on email lists for media releases from relevant local and national organisations and these should be checked regularly the Healthwatch Reading Administrator
- HWR should identify who will be its named media spokesperson for set interviews and will be contacted via the Healthwatch Manager. Our suggestion going forward would be to have Board Members that represent key areas as below:
 - Healthwatch as an organisation - David Shepherd?
 - Health and Wellbeing Board - David Shepherd?
 - RBH - David Shepherd?
 - Social Care - Monica Collings?
 - Mental Health - Linda Dobraszcyk
 - Other Key areas to be identified

- HWR should identify a journalist/social media intern or volunteer for a week's work during the summer to carry out some of the admin associated with the above tasks
 - HWR should sponsor a category in a local health and social care awards, or run our own mini awards scheme from next year.
 - HWR should consider taking part in community, fundraising or sporting events, such as the Broad Street pancake day run, or half marathon
7. HWR should be prepared for how it would handle any 'bad press'.
- Actions:**
- Staff and/or board should meet to discuss how potential scenarios would be handled and/or prevented. E.g. hypothetical scenario: *Details of a service user's name connected to an issue logged with HWR is mistakenly included in a document printed on website and they are contacted by a journalist. The upset service user phones us. The story hasn't yet gone to press. How would HWR respond? Or: A journalist asks the HWR manager to comment on a local social care 'failure' that HWR had already been investigating but hadn't yet made recommendations on. The journalist asks for our reaction, and says they are about to go to press and need a quote straight away. They also reveal they've got a very critical comment from a HWR board member on the issue, who you suspect was speaking about the issue while wearing another professional 'hat'. Would we give a critical quote, and how might this affect a relationship we had built up with the provider in question? What would we do if a story was published that appeared to have two opposing views from within HWR?*
 - Key contact from the Board to provide comments and quotes to be given to journalists:
 - Healthwatch as an organisation - David Shepherd?
 - Health and Wellbeing Board - David Shepherd?
 - RBH - David Shepherd?
 - Social Care - Monica Collings?
 - Mental Health - Linda Dobraszczyk
 - Other Key areas to be identified
 - Staff and Board to be given advice on how to deal with pushy journalists.
8. HWR should move away, over time, from using off-the-peg branding messages from Healthwatch England, towards more Reading-specific messages.
- Actions:**
- Staff and/or board to meet to discuss adopting a Reading-specific catch phrase to use on our marketing materials. So replace 'consumer champion for health and social care', with something like: 'Shining a light on Reading's health and social care services', 'Your (or Reading's) independent health and social care watchdog'.

- Find for free, or commission, photos of well known Reading health and social care buildings, or people in local geographical landmarks, to use on our website and to illustrate any reports we carry out.

9. HWR should ensure our strong and colourful branding and logo is as used as much as possible in all HWR activities.

Actions:

- Develop a standard email sign off which includes the HWR logo
- Order staff photo/name badges with HWR logo to be worn at events
- Investigate gaining planning consent for a HWR pavement board to be placed on Duke Street to signpost to our building
- Order a range of branded 'freebies' that can be given away at events

10. HWR should be creative in how it communicates, by embracing the use of technology and social media.

Actions:

- Staff/social media intern meet to come up with creative ideas e.g. Carrying out a 'vox-pop' (asking the same, simple question of a few different people) in the town centre on an 'issue of the week' using a camcorder, and posting film of responses on our website and/or Facebook page, to generate debate and feedback to HWR.
- Research how other charities and organisations carry out communications creatively
- Invest in digital equipment to help capture views of public and others.