



Appendix 1: DRAFT Communications Plan
February 2023

Background

Following the formation of Dorset Council in 2019 through Local Government Reorganisation, Dorset Council became the Statutory Harbour Authority for Weymouth, Lyme Regis, and Bridport harbours. Shortly after reorganisation the Harbours Committee agreed that a strategy should be developed which would set out the key objectives for the harbours over the following 10 years.

The Dorset Council Harbours Strategy is owned by Dorset Council and is implemented by the Harbours Advisory Committee and Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and the Environment who is also the Duty Holder, and the harbour teams. The committee and portfolio holder provide strategic direction.

The strategy ensures that under the management of Dorset Council, each of the three harbours share a united, clear direction, striving to provide Dorset with harbours that are safe, sustainable and economically viable. It also acknowledges each harbour's unique qualities and the value they bring to each of their distinct communities.

This communications plan considers the uniqueness of all three harbours and follows the overarching vision and objectives as set out in the Harbours Strategy document.

Dorset's harbours contribute to a common sense of place while celebrating our local culture and heritage. They are steeped in history and are vitally important to the communities that live in and around them.

Objectives

We want all harbour users, local communities and key stakeholders to be aware of the developments and opportunities they can expect from Weymouth, Bridport and Lyme Regis harbours over the next 10 years.

This communications plan aims to:

- Raise awareness that Dorset Council has committed to ensuring its harbours remain safe, sustainable and economically viable for the next 10 years.
- Make all audiences and users of the harbour aware of the commercial opportunities each harbour offers to allow potential stakeholders to identify new areas for opportunity.
- Keep in regular contact with harbour users, building on and forging strong working relationships with stakeholders.
- Build-up people stories involving our staff and harbour users, demonstrating how harbours can be used to benefit all members of the community (such as the MV Freedom people story)
- To promote the harbours and their communities as a premium destination, contributing to the local economy
- Be honest, open and transparent about the harbours' financial viability (where not commercially sensitive)
- To promote each harbour's natural and cultural heritage and link back to the Dorset Council Plan commitment to protect Dorset's natural environment, climate and ecology.

Audiences

Each of the three harbours have their own user-based stakeholders, but all share some of the common high-level stakeholders, such as:

- Harbour users including berth holders, commercial fishing and charter boats (e.g., sea angling & diving) commercial passenger carrying vessels, training and education establishments and clubs, harbour traders and other leisure users

- Businesses which directly relate to or surround the harbours but may not be actively linked (e.g., hospitality businesses around Weymouth, Bridport or Lyme Regis Harbours)
- Businesses further afield in Dorset (to possibly include east Devon as part of the same AONB and WHS) within the harbour community.
- Dorset Councilors
- Senior officers at Dorset Council
- Residents
- Visitors
- Local schools (for conservation education purposes, such as Sea Hives marine ecosystems, art murals at Weymouth Harbour)
- Weymouth, Bridport and Lyme Regis town councils
- Dorset Council Staff

The plan

The prime objective of this communications plan is to establish and maintain close and regular liaison between the harbours and their valued stakeholders, raising awareness of each harbour and what it has to offer and what it brings to the local economy in each of the towns, but also, as a visitor destination.

Using all available communication channels, we will raise awareness of what each of the harbours offer is and how the actions in the Harbours Strategy will shape Dorset's harbours over the next 10 years, linking back to the priorities in the council plan.

For our social media posts promoting each harbour we will use one or more of the following hashtags:

- **#WeymouthHarbour / #BridportHarbour / #LymeRegisHarbour**
- **#Dorset**
- **#LoveWhereYouLive**
- **#LiveWorkVisit**
- **#MoorforLess**

The following activities will be delivered to ensure a high impact and high awareness campaign to target identified audiences:

- Organic social media across Dorset council, Dorset Coast Forum (DCF) and specific harbour related social media channels (i.e., not paid for advertising/sponsored posts).
- Regular e-news updates to harbour users via individual harbour offices (plus Working for Weymouth e-news and Dorset Coast Forum monthly e-news)
- Clear and concise messaging to local businesses and communities highlighting annual events, safety campaigns.

For each harbour this will be through current channels of communication and methods as set out in the communication appendix.

Key messages

The key messages will change through the course of the work. The initial key messages are:

- Dorset Council is proud of its three harbours and is committed to delivering positive change against the actions identified in the 10-year strategy.
- The council is committed to maintaining safe working harbours and providing high quality infrastructure and facilities.
- Harbours are at the heart of our coastal communities, and we will strive to strengthen relationships with stakeholders to achieve common goals.
- Harbours contribute significantly to the local economy, which in turn benefits the whole of Dorset.
- We want the harbours to become financially self-sufficient and reinvest to support the strategic goals set out in the strategy.
- We listened to what local people wanted through the findings of the consultation and this shaped the final strategy.
- We will continue to listen to what local people and businesses want to see from our harbours.
- Each harbour has its own unique history, character and community. We want to work closely with those communities to celebrate the individuality of the harbours and link into Dorset's wider natural and cultural offer.

Media Protocol

Any harbours related media enquiries should be directed to the council's Communications Team via comms@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk. The media representative for harbours is the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and the Environment, Cllr Ray Bryan, in conjunction with the Chair of the Harbours Advisory Committee Cllr Mark Roberts.

Implementation

Day-to-day running and promotion of the harbours and associated commercial marketing

These communications will traditionally be managed by each of the individual harbour teams and will involve communicating with their immediate, established audiences through locally managed channels of communication such as e-newsletters, emails, notices, social media, and wider reach of DC Communications where appropriate.

Corporate communications will always be on hand to offer advice and guidance during any unknown situations.

Corporate communications

While corporate communications will not get involved with the day-to-day communications via each of the harbours, it will assume the role as main point of contact and reference point during certain scenarios such as, but not limited to:

- Where there is likelihood of a level of disruption to members of the public
- Where a media release is considered necessary such as to alert members of the public to a planned safety exercise being carried out
- Where there is a safety concern which needs communication beyond the immediate stakeholder groups
- Where there is an emergency situation involving other organisations belonging to the Local Resilience Forum (such as an oil spill)
- Large developments within the harbours remit that are of public importance

Evaluation

Evaluation of our communications is important as the results can help us fine tune future comms messages, though it is acknowledged that some outcomes can be difficult to measure, whereas social media can be 100% measurable through specified analytics.

Inputs (what we did)

- Number of articles/media releases/social media posts /posters

Outputs (the result of our inputs)

- Reach on social media channels.
- Number of articles published.
- Number of paper/radio/TV interviews
- Number of click throughs to news page on DC website and/or Harbour website.

Outtakes (Responses of the target audiences)

- Tone of articles (positive, negative, neutral reactions)
- Social media engagement rates (likes, comments, shares etc)
- Customer reviews / mentions.

Outcomes (The effect our comms activity has had)

- Number of people who came to be aware of the event/topic and maybe changed their behaviour accordingly (this is tricky to establish)
- Number of people/businesses/communities that benefited from our communications.
- New markets/communities reached and increase in involvement.

Kirstie Snow . External Affairs Business Partner, January 2023

Communications Format Appendix 1 - Operational level communication channels and rationale

Current Methods & Frequency	Aims/Topics	Future Scope	Harbour
Harbours Consultative Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face, 4 times per year (Weymouth) • Face to face, twice per year (Bridport and Lyme Regis) 	The group exists to ensure strong and direct links with harbour users, local communities and other external organisations with an interest in the ports.	Increase harbour user awareness of their relevant representative and encourage communication through these channels.	All
Harbours Advisory Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face, 4 times per year 	The Harbour and its associated assets are managed by the Harbours Advisory Committee in accordance with its approved business plans.		All
Social Media/Email/Text Local <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook • Instagram • Email • Text Local 	Text Local is used for contacting Harbour berth holders, whilst the website, E-News, Instagram and Facebook audiences could include current or prospective customers, both short and long term.	<p>Most social media followers aren't berth holders, but visitors to the harbour itself or residents and businesses.</p> <p>Scope to increase Paid-for Facebook advertising</p>	All
E-News <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previously monthly, currently sporadic depending on content. 	Harbour related news, notices and achievements, information on local events, RYA/safety related articles.	Consider a Weekly Bulletin during the season; Notable Vessel Movements, Events, LNTMs, Safety Messages (disseminate MAIB reports etc)	Weymouth
Seasonal email	Biannual email to customers at start/end of season with reports and harbour notices.		Lyme Regis Bridport

External advertising/articles	Advertising/promotional editorials for national magazines Job advertisements/notices for local press	Visit Britain, local harbour communities, Visit England, Visit Dorset integration – customer journey.	All
Customer feedback forms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Customers • Leavers • Visitor Comment Card 		Visitor surveys to be redesigned with updated questions which are relevant to improvements. Data to be assessed periodically and action points identified.	Weymouth
External Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harbour Watch/Dorset Police 	Currently advertised on Dorset Police website with online contact form		Weymouth
Events (Harbours/3rd Party)	Dorset Seafood Festival Reel Masters West Bay Days Macmillan Cake Sale (Weymouth) Candles on the Cobb (Lyme Regis) West Bay Powerboat Race National/International Sailing events (Lyme Regis)	Events at Harbour Office i.e., Meet Your Harbour Team/Open Day	Weymouth Bridport Lyme Regis
Visit Dorset Website/Local Listings/other resources e.g. Google Business		Cross-marketing efforts with Visit Dorset.	