

Appendix One

Version Control Sheet

Title: Communication and Engagement Strategy
Purpose: To set out how the Council will inform, engage and listen to our communities, in order for the Council to provide services which are fit for purpose for our customers and provided in a cost effective and transparent way.

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Date: March 2023

Version Number: 1.0

Status: DRAFT

Review Frequency: Every two years or sooner if required

Next review date: March 2025

Consultation: This document will be sent out for consultation to the following:
Community PDG
Cabinet

Document History

This document obtained the following approvals.

Title	Date	Version Approved
Community PDG*		
Cabinet		

*- Delete if not applicable

1.0 Introduction

The Communications and Engagement Strategy sets out how the Council will inform, engage and listen to our communities, in order for the Council to provide services which are fit for purpose for our customers and provided in a cost effective and transparent way.

Communication within the Council supports the Council's values which are People, Pride, Performance and Place as well as and sharing the objectives and successes detailed in our Corporate Plan.

The Communication function is split into three key areas. These functions are:

- Community engagement
- Media relations
- Internal communication

This strategy works in conjunction with the Media and Social Media Policy, the Corporate Branding Guidelines and the Single Equality Scheme.

2.0 What we do

The core functions of the communication team are:

- Media relations and media monitoring
- Social media management
- Staff communication
- Community consultation and engagement
- Stakeholder consultation and engagement
- Branding and corporate campaigns
- Communication advice and training
- Website editing

The current structure of the Communication Team is a part time Communication and Engagement Manager, a part time Communications Officer and a full time Digital Communications Officer. The team sits within the Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement service and works closely with all service areas of the Council to provide a more effective approach to communication and engagement with our customers.

3.0 Who we communicate with

The Council has a wide audience in terms of demographics with a population of 82,800 spread over an area over a largely rural area.

The majority of the work carried out by the Communication Team is with our customers who live in the district and with our staff who run our services.

This communication may be directly with these audiences or via the local media, partners or stakeholders such as local charities, parish and town councils, MPs and schools, as well as visitors to the area.

Communication with Mid Devon businesses is an important part of the Council's work, but this strand of communication is led by the Growth and Economic Development Team.

4.0 Our aim

The Council aims to provide communication which is:

- accessible and clear
- planned and proactive
- creative and engaging
- cost-effective
- positive and transparent

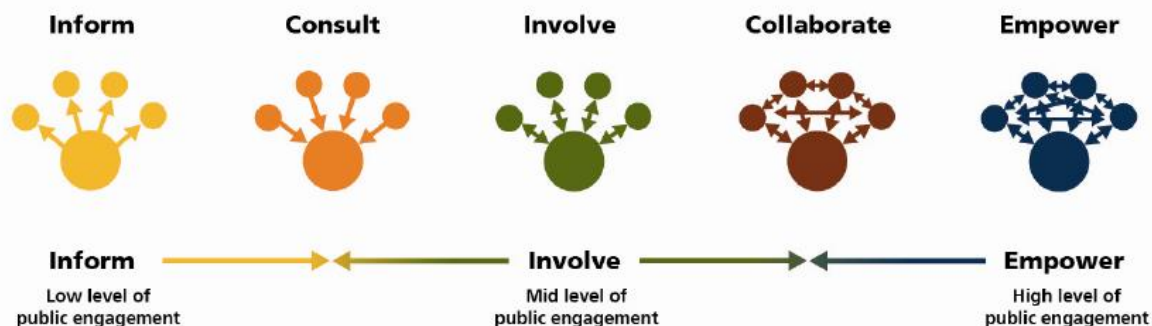
5.0 Community Engagement

The Communications Team provides effective engagement channels which aim to give the local community a greater say and impact on the delivery of local services, while being better informed about the Council's work.

Community engagement is about putting communities at the heart of their own local services. Effective community engagement is essential to ensure the services the Council operates are fit for the communities they serve.

In some areas of the Council there is a statutory consultation requirement when the Council has a duty to engage with the public, such as Planning and Licensing, which is supported by the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement 2020. At other times the Council voluntarily and actively seeks out the views of the community to ensure the Council is delivering a high quality, cost effective service which meets the needs of the customer.

There are different levels of engagement and this should be considered when embarking on any form of engagement. The most appropriate method of engagement will depend on the desired outcome and audience.



To develop and improve community engagement the Council should:

- understand and respond to the needs of our customers
- plan and deliver better and more efficient services
- take transparent decisions based on evidence and be held accountable for these decisions
- build relationships with the local community
- test out ideas and explore local issues
- measure the performance of the Council in delivering services

The Communications Team will support this by:

- Sharing information via multiple channels in multiple formats
- Exploring new partnerships, particularly with community and voluntary groups, as well as statutory/public sector partners
- Working with Members to promote the work of the Council and to receive feedback from constituents
- Encouraging service areas to share news and upcoming events and consultation
- Giving the community and stakeholders a means to express their views
- Listening to the feedback from our customers

Our community engagement methods will also support and adhere to our Single Equality Scheme 2021.

6.0 Media relations

The Communications Team works closely with existing and emerging media (local and national) to inform and engage the public about the work of the Council, ensuring the reputation of the Council is upheld and enhanced.

We will do this by:

- Generating news content
- Generating photo and video content
- Monitoring local and national news and sharing this information internally

- Liaising regularly with local reporters and editors
- Linking trending articles to the Council's work on social media
- Working closely with Members on issues that matter to them
- Using paid for adverts, when budget allows, particularly for campaigns

7.0 Media Training

The Communications Team can support Members and officers who wish to learn or improve their interview skills and media handling, as well as support them with the setting up of social media pages. The team can also support Members by utilising external training providers for media training, particularly as part of the Member Induction programme.

8.0 Internal communications

The Communications Team works closely with the Leadership Team, Corporate Management Team, Operations Managers and Human Resources to support staff communication across the organisation.

Our aim is to provide an internal communication system which promotes interaction and ensures staff and elected members, at all levels, feel valued and informed, giving them the best position to support the objectives and values of the Council.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring communication is shared with staff in a timely, easily accessible way, especially during periods of change, so that they feel better informed and engaged
- Help employees see the connection between their job and the organisation's aims and objectives
- Recognising that different methods of communication are needed depending on the audience and message
- Encouraging staff to share good practice and expertise
- Encouraging senior management to listen to staff feedback and questions and respond accordingly, creating a climate of two-way communication and improved levels of trust
- Facilitating free flowing communication

9.0 Emergency Planning

The Communications Team is on hand to support the Council during an emergency ensuring residents, staff, visitors and businesses are kept up to date in a time of crisis. The team is part of the Local Resilience Forum and liaises regularly with other local authorities within Devon. There is a mutual aid agreement in place with Devon County Council for use during an emergency if further communications resources are need.

10.0 Corporate Branding

The Council recognises the importance of communicating in a way that is clear, consistent and uses plain English. The Council has Corporate Branding Guidelines which should be adhered to when undertaking communications.

11.0 Accessibility

The Council must follow WCAG 2.1 AA standards on all public facing websites and business applications that the public can use such as apps. The standards required can be found here: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

Any software procured / commissioned by the authority should be checked to ensure it meets WCAG 2.1 AA standards. We would be breaking the law if we purchase publicly visible apps / websites that don't meet this criteria.

The Communications team and web developer manage a team of content editors/uploaders who are responsible for the accessibility of the content they upload to any Council run website or where a website is hosted by a third party supplier such as ModernGov.

Officers in the Council have a responsibility to ensure content they would like in the public domain is accessible following WCAG 2.1 AA Standards.