

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.

Owner: Communications & Engagement Manager
jlewis@middevon.gov.uk

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Review Frequency: Every three years or sooner if required. This date is suggested to coincide with LGR.

Next review date: May 2028

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

Document History

This document obtained the following approvals.

Title	Date	Version Approved
Community, People and Equalities 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 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 Communications 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 Communications 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 circa 82,800 spread over a largely rural area.

The majority of the work carried out by the Communications 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.

The Communications Team also supports Active Mid Devon with communication to its users and members, through campaigns, the Active Mid Devon app and their social media pages.

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

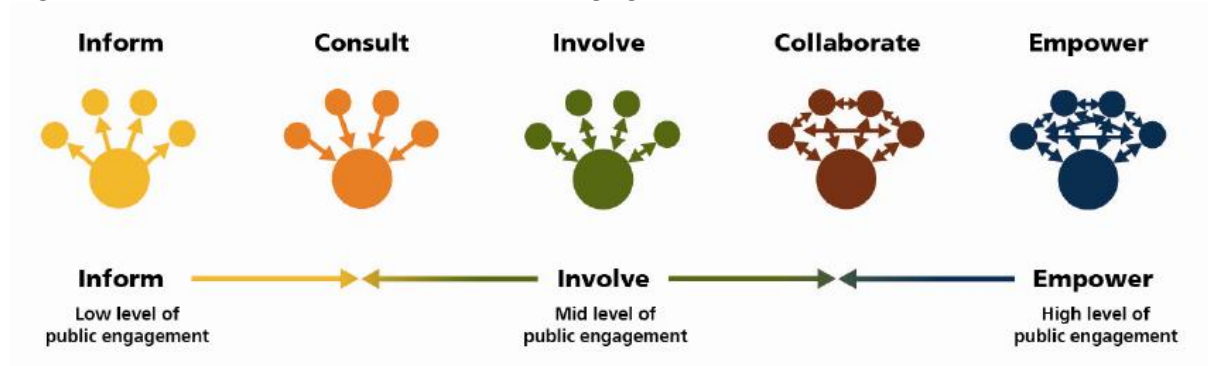
The Communications Team provides effective engagement channels which aim to give the local community a greater say and impact on the delivery of local services, while being better informed about the Council's work. Community engagement is about putting communities at the heart of their own local services.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

Figure 1: Shows the different levels of engagement



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 and partners
- 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 and Members to share news, upcoming events and consultation
- Giving the community and stakeholders clear means to express their views
- Listening to the feedback from our customers and acting on this feedback
- Working with partner organisations

Our community engagement methods will also support and adhere to our Single Equality Scheme 2025.

Our engagement can be split into three main areas: Customers, Members and Staff.

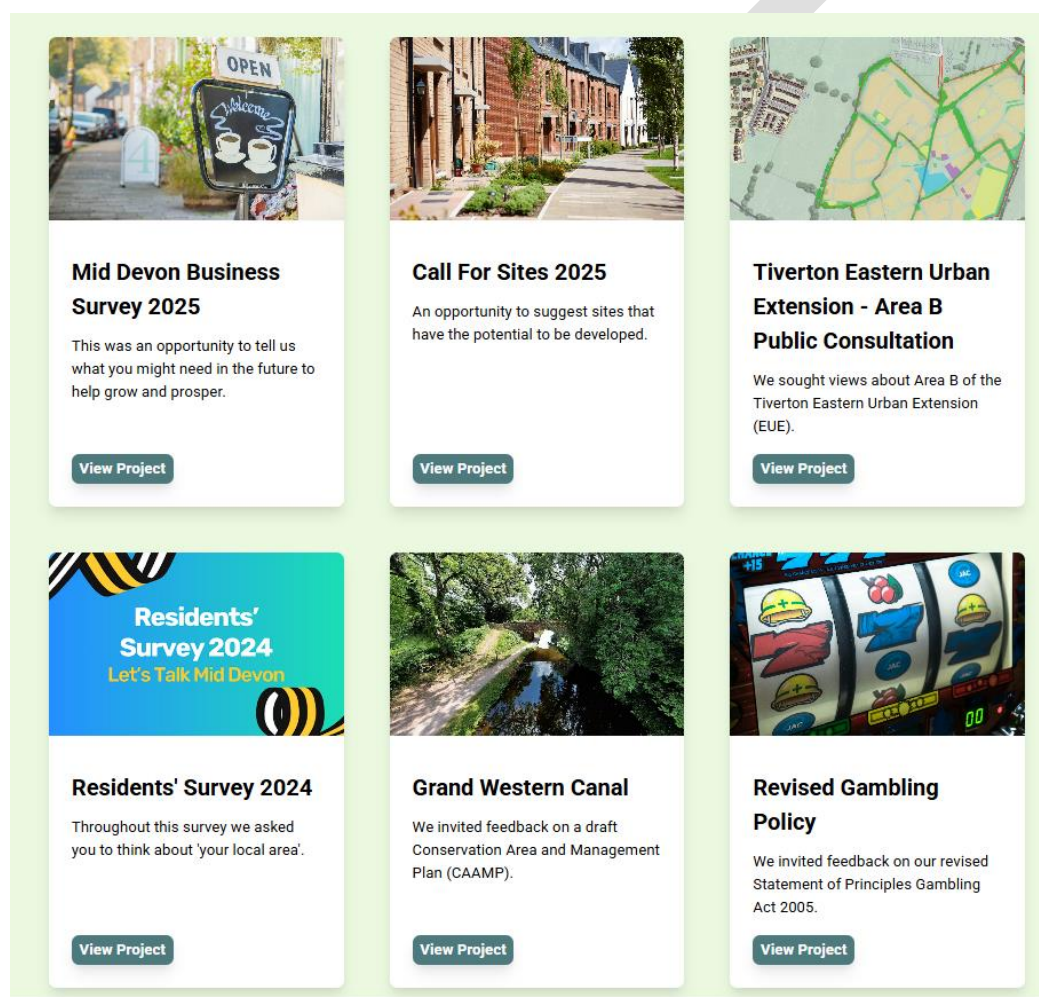
Customers

We share the work of the Council, its achievements and upcoming changes to services. We do this through a digital first approach, while ensuring all residents have

access to information by using a number of different communication methods including print, in-person events and online platforms.

The Council has an online engagement platform, Let's Talk Mid Devon which is steadily growing in use. The aim of this is to act as a hub for residents and businesses to communicate directly with the Council. The platform allows the Council to share information, ask questions, invite discussion and host forums directly with residents and businesses. It is a two-way communication tool that can be used for both statutory and non-statutory communication.

Figure 2: *Homepage of Mid Devon's Community Engagement Platform called Let's Talk Mid Devon*



Our communities already have a number of methods to engage with us including:

- An annual resident survey
- Service specific consultation exercises
- Service specific feedback processes
- An e-newsletter subscription service
- Multiple social media channels
- Business Forum
- Mid Devon Show event

- Specific in-person planning events
- Printed and online feedback forms

Elected Members

We aim to ensure our elected members, who represent our residents, are kept informed and engaged with our activities and we ask them to support this work by sharing information within their wards.

We will work closely with Democratic Services to:

- Share weekly key messages with councillors
- Share our news releases with all members
- Share media monitoring
- Host relevant councillor information on SharePoint and Teams
- Follow councillors' social media profiles on our official channels

We encourage Members to support community engagement, as they are the face of the Council in the community and can help ensure the Council's priorities reflect the community's wishes. It is important that our Members:

- Support and share council-run campaigns
- Share good news within their communities
- Feedback community ideas and issues
- Encourage participation with the Council
- Share community events and consultation

Staff Engagement / Internal communications

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

Our aim is to provide an internal communication system which promotes interaction and ensures staff 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
- Helping 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

The Council runs quarterly staff briefings which are hosted in a hybrid way, publish a fortnightly staff newsletter, send all officer emails when appropriate, host a staff consultation group and work with People Services to support regularly team meetings.

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.

AI

The Council's first Artificial Intelligence Policy was adopted in 2025. This policy ensures users are aware of the methods the Council uses to manage AI. Users must comply with this policy to ensure appropriate use of AI tools. It links with other policies, including Corporate Data Protection, Information Security, ICT Acceptable Use, and Freedom of Information Policy.

The Council recognises that the use of AI is becoming more accessible and more frequently used by organisations and individuals in the work place. While the Council is in the early stages of developing its use of AI, the Council acknowledges there will be many opportunities to use AI in the future, generating benefits to the Council and our customers. It is also aware of the risks and need for robust governance with the use of AI. AI tools may be used in the future for tasks within the Council such as document improvements, meeting notes, report writing, data analysis, summarising

complex documents, translation, drafting communications, content creation, workflow management, and reviewing accessibility. However, it is important to remember that these tools will be used in a manner that complements professional judgement and expertise, without replacing them. Users remain responsible and accountable for the quality and content of any AI-generated output, regardless of how it is generated or used.

8.0 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 needed.

9.0 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.

10.0 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.

11.0 Our success and accountability

It is important that our communities know how we are performing and what decisions we are making, so that they can challenge us and hold us accountable.

The Council is committed to working with communities to give them the chance to shape our priorities and to ensure they have the information they need to hold us to account for our performance.

This can be achieved by:

- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Tenant involvement
- Business forums
- Performance sharing
- Consultation exercises
- An open budget setting process
- A simple and transparent complaints process

We will measure communication and engagement success by:

- **Evaluating** website and digital analytics
- **Monitoring** media coverage
- **Increasing** our social media following and reach
- **Developing** partnership work
- **Implementing** an annual resident survey
- **Supporting** the annual staff survey
- **Developing** our two-way engagement platform Let's Talk Mid Devon