

Report for: Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	8 July 2025
Subject:	Communications & Engagement Strategy
Cabinet Member:	Cllr David Wulff, Cabinet member for Quality of Living, Equalities and Public Health
Responsible Officer:	Head of Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement
Exempt:	Not applicable
Wards Affected:	All
Enclosures:	Appendices 1 & 2

Section 1 - Summary and Recommendation(s)

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with the revised Communication and Engagement Strategy and accompanying Media and Social Media Policy.

Recommendation:

- 1. That the content of the reviewed Communication and Engagement Strategy and the Media and Social Media Policy to be adopted as recommended by the Community, People and Equalities Policy development group.**

Section 2 – Report**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1. The Council has a duty to consult and engage effectively with residents, partners, employees and other stakeholders when deciding about future changes to services and new developments.
- 1.2. As a council we must offer value for money and customer satisfaction, therefore two-way engagement is an essential part of delivering our services.
- 1.3. This engagement must be delivered in an open and transparent way that is accessible to our audience.

- 1.4. Since the last strategy was revised in 2023 the Communications Team has continued to support services across the Council.
- 1.5. The team has supported the elections service, with the UK Parliamentary Election, Police and Crime Commissioner Election, Devon County Council Election and a number of town, parish and by elections.
- 1.6. Each year the Communications Team organises the Council's stand at the Mid Devon Show, which in 2024 focused on housing and leisure with support from both services.
- 1.7. A drive to improve engagement with our residents has also seen our engagement platform Let's Talk Mid Devon utilised further. In the two years since the last strategy was produced the platform has gained 592 registrations, been visited 18,801 times and had an engagement rate of 20%.
- 1.8. In the past year two years the team has attracted an extra 2,330 followers to our social media channels with our channels now having a total of 25,002 followers across the platforms.
- 1.9. GovDelivery is our e-bulletin system which is used to send out news stories and service changes. We now have 14,420 subscribers who regularly receive bulletins.
- 1.10. A web review is underway which has already streamlined content. This review will also consider the need for a new website design and hosting, but this project may be impacted by LGR.
- 1.11. The team has also launched two full resident surveys, in 2023 and 2024. The most recent survey showed 59.6% of respondents felt very or fairly well informed about the Council's work, an increase from 52.8% in 2023. We are continuing to explore ways to improve the survey response rate across the district.
- 1.12. A number of civic events, which have been organised by Democratic Services, have been supported by the Communications Team such as VE Day commemorations and Chairman events.
- 1.13. Most recently the Communications Team has taken on a large proportion of Active Mid Devon communication work, including managing social media pages and supporting the Active Mid Devon website, campaigns and branding.

2. Future

- 2.1. The Communications Team will continue to support services across the authority.
- 2.2. Upcoming projects in 2025 and beyond include the completion of a website review and potential for a new website, Local Government Reorganisation

(LGR) communications and further Active Mid Devon campaigns. The team will also be exploring the Council's use of AI as a communication tool for different services, ensuring it is used in a transparent and controlled way. The creation of a comprehensive emergency planning toolkit is also being planned.

It is anticipated this Communications Strategy and accompanying policies will be revised again in three years, potentially to coincide with LGR depending on timeframe.

Financial Implications: The revised strategy does not have any specific financial implications. Should the Council wish to implement larger scale communication changes, such as to develop a new intranet or website, or carry out a full rebranding exercise, this would involve a financial cost and these would be accompanied by a business case

Legal Implications: To ensure that all communication and methods of consultation are GDPR compliant and adhere to the Council's Single Equality Scheme.

Risk Assessment: Failure to engage with the Council's stakeholders could mean the Council's actions and objectives are not understood, risking reputational damage.

Impact on Climate Change: The Communication and Engagement Strategy includes work to support the Council's Climate Strategy and Climate Action Plan. The Council's communication utilises a digital first approach, contributing to a reduction of our carbon footprint from printing and postage. However, we always include alternative formats for those who need or prefer different communication channels.

Equalities Impact Assessment: Any consultation and communication channels would have regard to the Council's Single Equality Scheme.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: To ensure that our customers, staff, members and stakeholders are informed about Council services, news and changes through appropriate and varied channels.

SECTION 3 – STATUTORY OFFICER SIGN-OFF/MANDATORY CHECKS

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151 Officer
Date: 25.6.25

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 25.6.25

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford
Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director
Date: 25.6.25

Performance and risk: Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 29/05/2025

Cabinet member notified: yes

Report: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No

Appendix: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No

SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact: Jane Lewis, Communications and Engagement Manager

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Background Papers:

Appendix one: Communication and Engagement Strategy 2025

Appendix two: Media and Social Media Policy 2025