

Communications and Engagement Strategy

2018 to 2023



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Communications, consultation and engagement



Our ability to deliver effective communications, consultation and engagement will determine the success or failure of every service we deliver, and every project, initiative or partnership we are involved in.

Strong and positive relationships are integral to the council effectively serving our communities.

We recognise the importance of everyone in our communities knowing and understanding:

What the council does

- The wide variety of services we provide
- How and where we provide them
- How residents, businesses and visitors can access them
- How they benefit our communities

Why we do it

- Our legal obligations to deliver some services
- The reasons why we deliver other services that benefit our communities
- Our role in partnership working
- Our huge contribution to – and involvement in – our local communities
- Our role in helping to shape the future of our borough

How we do it

- The way we fund and deliver services
- How we are working to deliver our vision, Council Plan and priorities
- How they can get involved
- How we provide opportunities for customers and communities to participate and influence the way we deliver services, make decisions and develop our policies.

Why we need to do things differently in the future



To meet growing and changing customer expectations and demand

To respond to financial challenges

To respond to demographic changes (eg ageing population)

This strategy sets out the overall direction and principles behind all our communications, consultation and engagement work. It aims to focus our attention on some key transformational issues that will enable us to achieve this.

It should be read alongside all other policies and toolkits relating to communications, consultation and engagement which include our:

Consultation and engagement toolkit

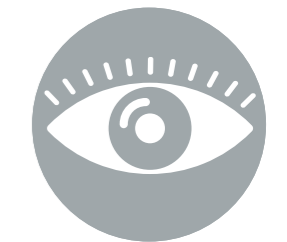
Social media policy

Brand guidelines

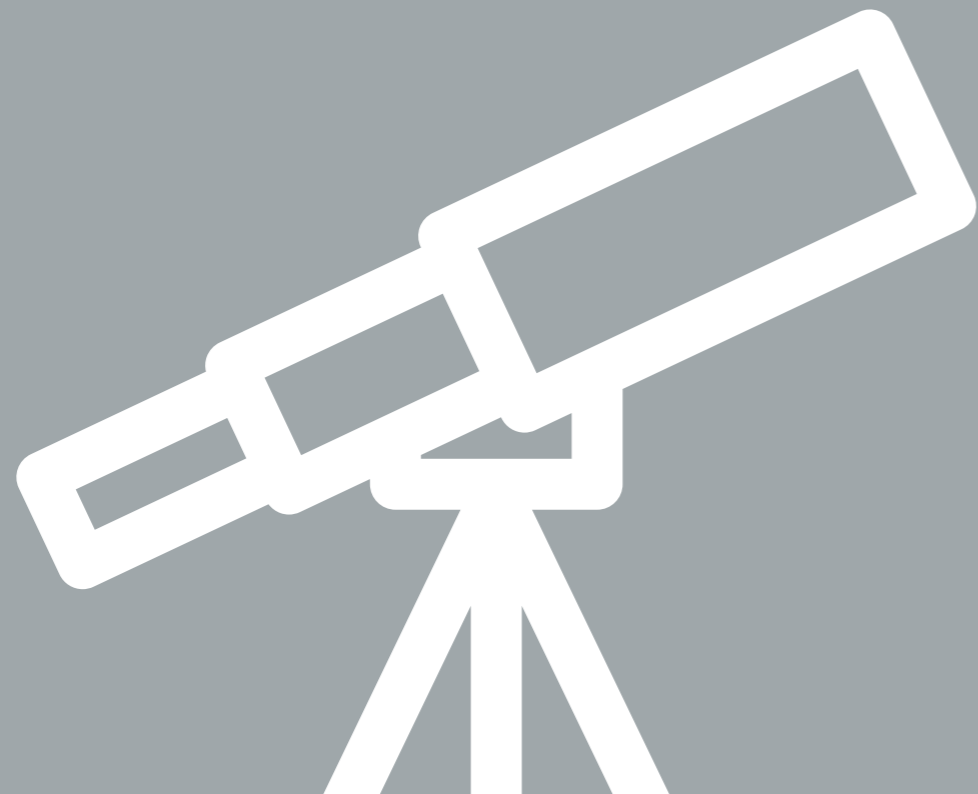
Style guide

Media protocol

Microsite (website) protocol



Our communications, consultation and engagement vision



That the public feels well informed about our work, meaning they view us as a trusted organisation that provides value for money services.

Delivering the Council Plan

All engagement and communications activity is aimed at delivering the objectives within the Council Plan, as well as the council's vision and values.

The existing Council Plan runs until 2019, when a new four-year plan will be produced. This strategy aims to ensure the tools are in place to deliver the communications and engagement activities required to deliver both the current and future Council Plan.

This will be achieved by setting communication and engagement objectives within yearly action plans, which will also contribute to the wider transformational objectives in this strategy.

The council has a well-established vision of 'Putting Our Communities First'.

The way we deliver this is through the three priorities set out in our Council Plan. These are to:

- To make Chesterfield a thriving borough
- To improve the quality of life for local people
- To provide value for money services

Our values drive the way we go about this task. These are:

- Customer focused: delivering great customer service, meeting customer needs
- Can do: striving to make a difference by adopting a positive attitude
- One council, one team: proud of what we do, working together for the greater good
- Honesty and respect: embracing diversity and treating everyone fairly

We need to bring all these elements together in a unified approach across all communications and marketing channels so that we are consistent in our messages, our tone and our look and feel.

Our aim



To build trust in the council through effective communications and engagement with our residents, businesses, customers, partners, councillors and staff.



Our objectives

1. Continue to do the basics well

While this strategy seeks to focus our energy on areas where we need to improve or adapt to changes in our communities and the world we live in our focus on the day-to-day basics must remain in place. This includes:

- Continuing to improve the council's website so that it becomes the go-to source of information and enables customers to increasingly do more of their business online
- Informing the public, businesses, visitors and the media about our work through the use of videos, the website and social media
- Producing high quality publications (eg Your Chesterfield/Our Homes newsletters) that inform people about the council's work and priorities
- Providing strategic communications advice and support to councillors and council officers
- Co-ordinating and providing support to teams across the council who are carrying out consultation and engagement activities
- Ensuring the views, needs, expectations and outcomes of engagement activities are used to help form council policy, service planning and decision making.
- Ensuring a consistent approach to community engagement activities
- Providing expert advice on consultation and engagement activities and ensuring they stand up to legal challenge
- Developing the aspire intranet as the key internal communications resource for staff and councillors to find out what is happening within the council, have their say, and engage and collaborate with colleagues.
- Delivering a quality, pro-active media relations service

2. Make better use of customer data, intelligence and feedback to improve communications and engagement

Across our services we engage with thousands of residents each day but the intelligence gained from these conversations is often only kept within individual services meaning opportunities to improve communications or engagement can be missed.

By identifying issues that are of common concern to residents we can change or develop communications, consultation and engagement activities to address them upfront or explain the reasoning behind them better.

As the council invests in new technology over the coming years it will become easier to get one view of all contacts with individuals which will assist with providing information in a way customers want, improve processes where issues are identified, and enable us to engage in a two-way conversation with them.



3. Tell a clear story (corporate narrative) to explain what we are doing and want to achieve

Our Council Plan sets out our vision, values and objectives but to be effective the plan needs to be brought alive as a story (corporate narrative). Through the heart of our communications, consultation and engagement work we need to be able to explain what the Council Plan means to the everyday lives of Chesterfield borough residents. We need to tell them where we are now, where we want to get to and how we are going to get there.



4. Increase the use of video and infographics to tell our story in a simple and engaging way

In an age of short attention spans the ability to engage audiences and tell stories in an interesting way is becoming more crucial. Over the past four years the council has successfully introduced video as a core element of our communications and engagement activities and we need to continue this development.

We will increasingly look to make greater use of shorter videos to provide updates on stories, combined with videos of two to four minutes that provide greater detail on bigger issues.

Alongside this we will increasingly look to use infographics to bring statistical information to life and help to tell a story.



5. Engage our residents in online conversations where they are happening (eg Facebook groups)

The growth of people contacting and engaging with the council through social media is continuing year-on-year. We intend to build on this by continuing our existing focus on increasing the numbers of people engaging with us in this way.

However, we also recognise that opinions about the council are often formed online in discussions about community issues. Sometimes these discussions can be based on rumours or fake news rather than facts. Unless we engage in the places where people are having conversations it is easy for false rumours to become accepted as the norm, effectively meaning that perception becomes reality.

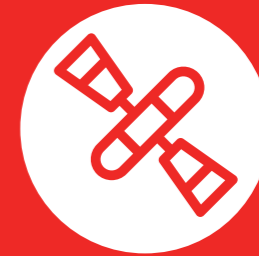
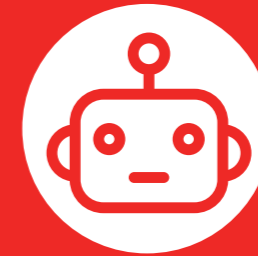
We will increasingly look to engage directly with residents in places where these conversations are happening, including community Facebook groups and on the social media pages of traditional media outlets (eg local newspaper, local radio).



6. Use technology upgrades and developments to have better conversations with our customers

Communications is a fast paced industry and over the course of this strategy there will be developments that we need to adapt to as we seek to provide a high quality service to our residents, businesses and customers.

Over the life of this strategy the council plans to begin a large scale investment in improving its IT to deliver a better customer service. While the exact detail will emerge over time we need to plan for these changes from a communications, engagement and consultation perspective so that we can take advantage of them when they arrive.



7. Complete the rollout of the visual identity aspect of our corporate branding to council buildings and land

One of the key achievements of the previous external communications strategy was the development of a clear council brand. While this encompasses many aspects the most visible way that people will see it is through our corporate identity.

Over the course of the last strategy this was successfully implemented for communications and marketing materials, on uniforms and on vehicles. While some progress was made on implementation of building signage and within buildings more work is still needed to fully embed it across our buildings and on signage within parks and council housing estates.

8. Reach out to our staff and councillors through engaging delivery of key corporate messages (eg infographics, video)

As the council invests in better IT more staff and councillors will have the ability to access digital communications. To take advantage of this opportunity, and continue to develop the aspire intranet, we need to mirror the approach being taken with customers and increase the engagement through video and infographics to tell our story to staff and encourage them to engage in two-way communications.



Our communications and engagement principles



Customers are at the heart of what we do

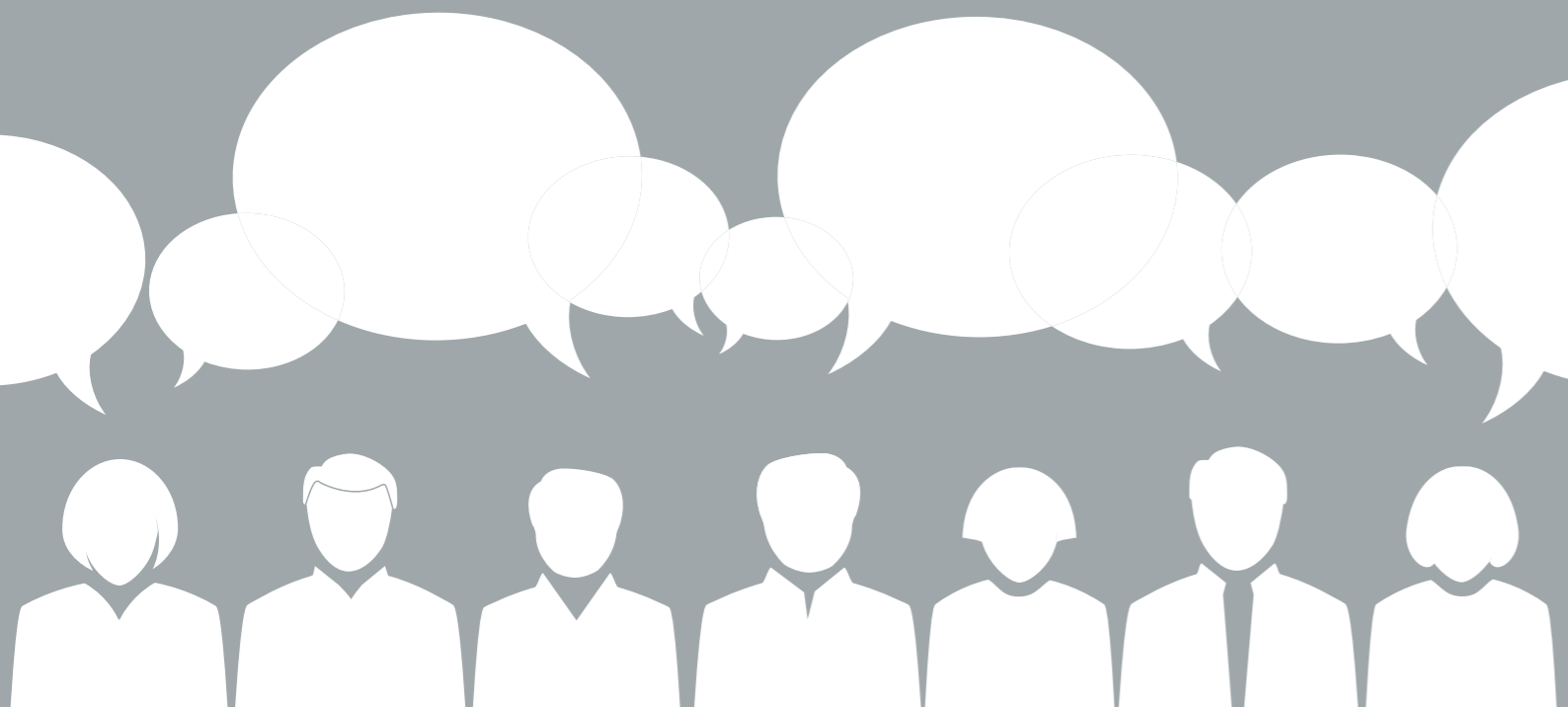
When addressing communication or engagement issues our starting point will be the needs or desires of the customer.

This requires us to know and understand our customers. We need to engage regularly – listening and opening up dialogue as opposed to simply informing. We need to ensure we provide opportunities for feedback and encourage our customers to help shape services.

To engage with customers we need to understand who they are, what they want, how best to engage with them and when it is most likely we will be able to. This will require us to bring together the customer insight and research gathered across the council to draw meaningful conclusions about the best way to achieve this.

Providing feedback following engagement and consultation processes will be an essential part of our approach.

We will engage in conversations rather than just broadcast information



We will use the correct communication and engagement tools to do the job.

While we will increasingly look to take a digital first approach to communications and engagement all activity we do will be planned to use the right mix of communication and/or engagement tools to achieve the desired objective.

A particular communication or engagement tool (eg poster, newsletter) will only be selected to meet an identified communication need. This will prevent us engaging in 'SOS' ('Send Out Stuff') communications. Decisions on what communication channels to use will depend on the best way of reaching and engaging with a particular audience. Communications will be evaluated to ensure we are achieving the desired results.

We recognise that communication and engagement activities are some of our most important frontline services.

No matter what the service being provided good communications and engagement will determine whether it is a success or not. Research shows that customers who are better informed about a council's work and priorities will be more satisfied with the performance of that council and have better perceptions about whether it offers value for money services.

If residents aren't well informed the likelihood of them engaging with the council and its work will also dramatically reduce.

We want our residents to feel informed about, and involved with, our services and activities.

Communications and engagement will be of demonstrable value to the council and the communities we serve.

Activity is only worth doing if it is contributing to a required end result. If something is not achieving a set objective then it is wasted activity.

To be effective communications and engagement activity needs to be evaluated so that lessons learnt can be used to amend an activity or campaign, or applied to a future one.

Our audiences



The audiences we engage with are many and varied. This means it is vitally important that each engagement or communication activity is carefully planned to consider which audiences (or parts of them) need to be targeted. What is appropriate for one initiative may be completely different for another.

Residents	Partners eg Derbyshire County Council, NHS	Trade unions
Tenants	Voluntary sector	Suppliers
Customers	Special interest groups (either permanent or established for a particular issue)	MPs
Businesses and investors	Staff	National government
Visitors	Councillors	Government agencies and/or regulatory bodies
Media (local, regional, national and trade) and hyperlocal news sites (community blogs, community social media pages, online forums, village newsletters)		

Resources



It is anticipated that most of the activities within this strategy can be delivered within existing resources

However, the ability to deliver some of the objectives will be enhanced or delayed by the availability of ICT systems, particularly media and social media monitoring and engagement platforms, as well as website quality assurance tools. Some of these tools may be delivered through wider council ICT investments.

We will monitor this during the life of the strategy and if additional resources are required a business case will be developed to be considered by senior managers and councillors.

Evaluation



While our previous communication and engagement strategies have delivered significant improvements to the way we engage with residents we still need a clearer focus on ensuring that activity adds value and makes a real difference to delivering our Council Plan objectives rather than being 'nice to do' activities.

The key to this is smartening up our evaluation techniques. This means the need to measure, where possible with the evaluation tools we have available:

All of our campaigns will take a rigorous and planned approach, following the ROSIE evaluation model advocated by the Government Communications Network:

Inputs

To capture what we did before or during an activity

Outputs

To record what is delivered against the objective and what audience is reached

Outtakes

Information on what the target audience thinks, feels or does

Outcomes

To capture the impact of our activities on the target audience

Organisational impact

To record, where relevant, the impact on the council's goals or objectives

Research and insight

Before we launch any of our campaigns, we will undertake research and insight to benchmark current positions so that we can clearly measure outcomes

Objectives

A clear set of measurable objectives

Strategy

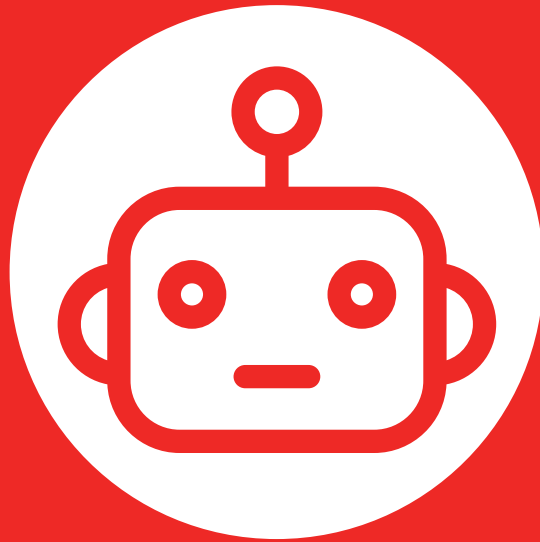
A clear plan setting out how we will achieve our objectives

Implementation

The tactics and channels we will employ

Evaluation and measurement

Did we achieve our objectives?



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