

Mid Devon District Council

Communication and Engagement Strategy

Policy Number: CM 01

August 2018

Version Control Sheet

Title: Communication & Engagement Strategy

Purpose: To provide an efficient communications and engagement service which enhances the Council's reputation. To encourage two way communication which ensures our staff, customers, members and stakeholders influence, support and are well informed about the work of the Council.

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Leadership team
Group Managers
Community PDG
Cabinet

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This document obtained the following approvals.

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Community PDG	Due 20 November 2018	With an amendment. Now V2
Cabinet	03/01/19	V2

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This strategy includes

- Internal communication action plan
- Community engagement action plan
- Social media and media relations policy
- Stakeholder and community groups mapping

Background

1.2 The Council previously had separate communication and engagement strategies which were due for review at different times. The Council's Social Media Policy and Guidelines previously sat with IT, while the Media and Social Media Protocol sat with Communications. Now that there is a Communications team in place these policies and guidelines all sit within the Communication service area and are contained within this single document to provide an effective overarching strategic approach to the Council's communication and engagement activity.

1.3 The Communication team is a small entity, recently reinforced as a result of the Corporate Peer Review undertaken in 2017. The team sits as part of the corporate core of the organisation (under the Directorate of Business Transformation & Corporate Affairs) and works closely with all service areas of the council to provide a more effective approach to communication and engagement with all stakeholders. The team is made up of :

- Communication & Engagement Manager (part time)
- Web, Communication and Digital Administrator
- Communications Officer

1.4 The Communication function is split into three key areas, all of which are detailed in this strategy:

- Internal Communication
- Community engagement
- Media relations

1.5 Communication within the Council supports the Council's mission, as expressed through its internal operating framework:

Be an energetic, confident and agile organisation, with the ambition to change, the confidence to innovate, the compassion to care and the determination to succeed.

1.6 The Communication function can help achieve this by:

- sharing the achievements of staff, service areas and members
- supporting staff and members through changes and new ways of working
- providing advice on how service areas can consult and engage positively with our communities
- raising the profile of the Council within the district and beyond
- informing our community of changes in a timely and accessible way, using plain English

1.7 Each area of communication also supports the Council's Corporate Plan and annual priorities of the service areas.

1.8 Core functions of the Communications team include:

- Media relations and media monitoring
- Social media
- Staff communication
- Community consultation and engagement
- Stakeholder consultation and engagement
- Branding and corporate campaigns
- Communication advice and training for managers, leadership team and elected members
- Website editing

2.0 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all staff and members.

3.0 Related Documents

- a. Internal communication action plan
- b. Community engagement action plan
- c. Social media and media relations policy
- d. Stakeholder and community groups mapping
- e. Channel Access Strategy
- f. Tenant Involvement Strategy,
- g. Culm Garden Village Engagement Strategy
- h. Town and Parish Charter

4.0 Internal Communication

Background

4.1 The Council currently employs circa 580 staff, based across six sites (Phoenix House, Carlu Close, Old Road and three leisure centres based in Cullompton, Tiverton and Crediton.)

4.2 Internal communication matters because it ensures our staff have the right information to carry out their job well, have sufficient opportunities to communicate their views and feel valued and supported by their employer. Internal communication is also important as it can have a positive influence on performance, retention of staff, innovation and wellbeing. This in turn means our staff are more likely to support the Council's objectives, enabling the Council to deliver its corporate plan and ensuring it provides a quality and efficient service to residents, partners and stakeholders.

4.3 A satisfaction survey is sent out to staff annually. The most recent received 297 replies. Highlighted results from the 2017 staff survey show:

- 89% of staff enjoy their job
- 75% feel valued
- 91% say they know how their job contributes to delivering the priorities of the Council

- 58% say they sometimes feel stressed
- 12% of staff feel they don't have a good relationship with councillors
- 9% of staff don't think the leadership team has a clear vision for the future of the council

4.4 Following the 2017 survey Group Managers created a staff survey action plan which highlights areas to focus on from our recent survey results and looks at ways to improve these.

4.5 All staff should operate according to the Officer Code of Conduct.

4.6 All elected members should operate according to the Member Code of Conduct.

Aim

4.7 To provide an internal communication system which promotes interaction and ensures staff and elected members, at all levels, feel valued and informed and are in a position to support the mission and objectives of the Council.

4.8 We will do this by:

- Ensuring communication is shared with staff in a timely, easily accessible way, especially during periods of change and innovation, so that they feel better informed and engaged
- Help employees see the connection between their job and the organisation's aims and mission
- 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

Current methods of internal communication

Table 1:

Current staff channels	Purpose	Distribution	Responsibility
The Link	Round up of weekly news, key events and decisions	Weekly (Mon)	Communications team
Sharepoint	Information sharing portal	Ongoing	IT and service areas
Staff Q&As	To encourage questions, to provide face-to-face interaction from leaders to staff, To share wider aims of the Council To receive feedback from staff	Leader and Deputy Leader annual Q&A Leadership team biannual	Leadership team Leader Deputy leader
All officer emails	Time sensitive or urgent issues to inform	As required	Leadership team, Executive Assistant, Communications team
HR group services newsletter	Information sharing about payroll, HR, L&D, H&S	Quarterly	HR
Noticeboards	Printed information. Particularly useful for those who do not have access to IT	As required	Supervisors and site managers eg Carlu Close, Old Road
Staff survey	Receive feedback from staff on specific questions	Annual	Executive Assistant HR Group Managers

Table 2

Current member channels	Purpose	Distribution	Responsibility
WIS	Information about key dates, council news and events	Weekly (Thurs)	Member Services
Member briefings	For more complex issues requiring training or face-to-face discussion	As required	Member Services
All member emails	Urgent or time sensitive issues	As required	Member Services, Executive Assistant
Notices in Members' Room	Printed information	As required	Member Services/ Communications Team

Constraints

- No intranet for staff. Sharepoint is clunky, holds too much information which is poorly visible and has a poor search function.
- Not all staff have access to a computer for online internal communication
- Currently limited ways for staff to share their views, particularly anonymously
- Multiple sites for staff bases
- Budget

Proposed Internal Communication Action Plan

Table 3:

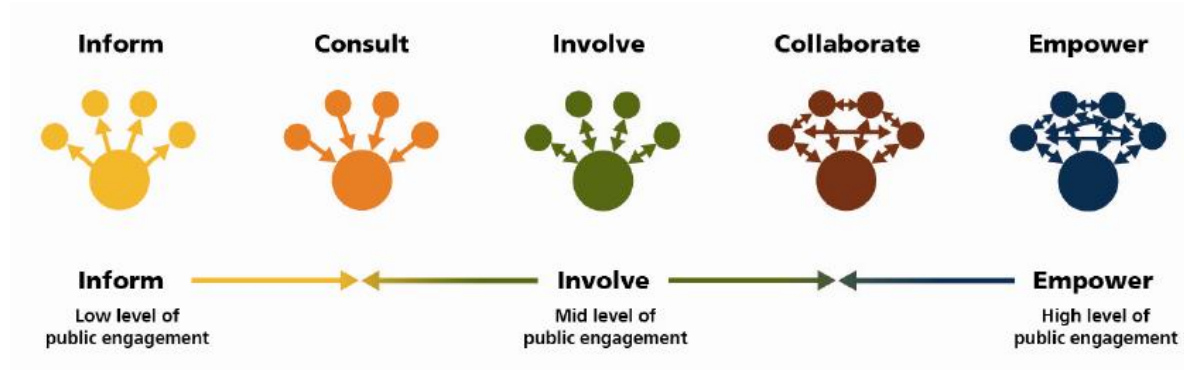
Objective	Method	Responsible	Evaluate
Create a more interactive staff newsletter	Exploring options to include: Gov Delivery, outsourced newsletter, in house IT development	Communications Team with input from IT, HR	Interactions and feedback directly via new newsletter Staff panel feedback A specific question in staff survey about it Ask for feedback via newsletter
Create a virtual staff panel	Potentially via Sharepoint or an email group	Communications Team	How many people on the panel Feedback from staff
Encourage and collate feedback from Q & As to improve format and attendance	Contact those who attend the 2018 sessions	Communications Team	How many responses from those who attended a Q&A How many attended the sessions compared to last year
Explore options to create a more user friendly intranet	IT liaison	Communications Team IT HR Finance	Staff survey results
Encourage greater uptake of annual staff survey	Promotion, Incentives, via newly formed staff panel, Cascade briefings /team meetings	Communications Team IT HR Executive Assistant to Directors Group Managers	Compare number of responses to previous years
Explore internal social media options	Yammer or Workplace	Communications Team	

5.0 Community engagement

Background

5.1 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 2016. 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.

5.2 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:



Aim

5.3 To develop and improve community engagement to ensure the Council can:

- 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

5.4 Effective engagement also means the local community will have a greater say and impact on the delivery of local services and be better informed about the Council's work.

5.5 We will do this by:

- Sharing information via multiple channels
- 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

5.6 Our community engagement methods will also support and adhere to our Single Equality Scheme 2018.

Elected Members

5.7 The Council's elected members represent the views of the district and in particular their ward and are an essential part of creating effective community engagement.

5.8 A channel of communication from constituents to the Council through elected representatives, and vice versa, should be explored. This channel could be utilised to enhance two way communication and be used to receive feedback from our wards but also to share district wide news at local level, such as via councillor led surgeries.

Table 4

Current Engagement Channels

Channel	Audience	Responsibility
MDDC website	Residents, businesses and media	Communications team and IT
Devon Newscentre	Media	Devon County Council
Press releases	Media	Communications team
Facebook pages: <i>Mid Devon Council</i> <i>Mid Devon Leisure</i> <i>Tiverton Pannier Market</i> <i>Electric Nights</i> <i>Mid Devon Housing</i> <i>Community Safety</i> <i>Partnership</i>	Residents & media	Communications Leisure Market Officer Economic Regeneration and Growth Officer Housing Community Safety and Emergency Planning Officer
Twitter accounts: <i>Mid Devon Council</i> <i>Mid Devon Leisure</i> <i>Tiverton Pannier Market</i> <i>Electric Nights</i> <i>Mid Devon Housing</i> <i>Community Safety</i> <i>partnership</i>	Residents and businesses and media	Communications Leisure Market Officer Economic Regeneration and Growth Officer Housing Community Safety and Emergency Planning Officer
Gov Delivery	Residents	Communications team
Statutory notice eg <i>planning, licensing and elections</i>	Residents and businesses	Service area leads See Statement of Community Involvement
Annual council tax bill and letter	Residents	Revenues
Tiverton Town Centre Partnership	Tiverton businesses	Town Centre Manager
Customer First	Residents	Customer Service Manager
Town and Parish Newsletter	Clerks, town and parish councillors	Parish Liaison Officer
Housing News 4 U	Council tenants	See Tenant Involvement Strategy
Tenant involvement group	Council tenants	See Tenant Involvement Strategy
Support of Mid Devon Business Forum	Businesses	Economic Development Officer

Table 5

Proposed Community Engagement Action Plan

Objective	Method	Responsible	Evaluate
Produce newsletter for residents	Quarterly newsletter distributed via Gov Delivery (available to print off)	Communications Team	Interactions from readers Residents survey
Increase Gov Delivery sign up	Launch a campaign: Promotion via media, online, events, WIS, councillor surgeries, parishes, via staff.	Communications Team	Number of new accounts
Grow social media presence	Generate more own content. Create videos. Facebook Live. Spend time sharing community events.	Communications Team	Social media interactions and followers
Increase council generated news content	Attendance at PDGs. Use agendas for news generation. Communications officers to have PDG portfolios	Communications Team	Number of press releases generated and importantly the coverage generated
Create joint campaigns with local media	Paid for advertising and editorial articles	Communications Team	How many campaigns launched and of those use analytics to show the impact
Support the business transformation project	Specific campaigns depending on the business change eg going cashless	Communications Team	Evidence change in how people access council services
Launch annual residents survey	Online, via Gov Delivery, via Parish and Town clerks. Consider mailing with council tax bill	Communications Team with support from Customer First	Satisfaction results compared to previous year and LGA comparison figures
Launch a new community panel/recruit community champions	Ask new residents when they receive first council tax bill. Send a recruitment alert via Gov Delivery. Direct from Customer First contact. Campaign	Communications Team	Number of people acting as champions Feedback from these people
Improve work with town and parishes	Attendance at Parish Clerk meetings. Articles in Parish Newsletter. Consider joint	Communications Team and Member Services	Parish clerk survey results Feedback from parish clerk

	<p>campaigns. Seek support for initiatives and campaigns Parish clerk survey Support Town and Parish Charter</p>		forum/meeting
Create a database of social media groups to utilise	<p>Online searches. Parish and town liaison</p>	Communications Team	Analyse how many times in the year we have used these groups and how many times they have been shared with their own followers
Work with national campaigns to engage the younger electorate and future electorate	<p>National Democracy Week National Youth Agency events and publications Continue to support the Recycling Officer with school liaison and projects.</p>	<p>Communications Team and Elections team Recycling Officer</p>	<p>Number of school pupils entered into competitions</p>
Engage with hard to reach groups	<p>Support the reformation of the Corporate Equalities Group. Ensure all communication and engagement adheres to the council's Single Equality Scheme</p>	<p>Communications Team Supported by GM for Performance and Data Security</p>	<p>Number of Equalities group forums held and the turnout and feedback from each.</p>

6.0 Media relations

6.1 See Social Media and Media Relations Policy in appendix one.

6.2 Core functions include:

- Responding to press enquiries in a timely manner with an appropriate, informed response
- Generating press releases and supporting service areas with their own media coverage
- Providing a media monitoring service
- Supporting Members and officers with media interviews and responses
- Reputation management
- Generating social media content
- Managing social media pages and responding to comments
- Responding to customer enquiries which come in via social media

Aim

6.3 To work closely with existing media, and to develop relationships with new media channels, to inform and engage the public about the work of the Council, ensuring the reputation of the Council is upheld and enhanced.

6.4 We will do this by:

- Meeting regularly with local reporters and editors
- Considering the use of paid for adverts and boosted posts, particularly for campaigns
- Generating news content
- Generating photo and video content
- Monitoring local and national news
- Linking trending articles to the Council's work on social media
- Working closely with Members on issues that matter to them
- Supporting Group Managers to deliver their annual work plans

Constraints

- We cannot control the media, including their angle or the timing of their articles
- Leaks of information
- Staffing – the resources of the Communication Team are limited particularly with regards to monitoring social media platforms
- Budget – the Communication Team does not currently have an advertising budget

Evaluation and monitoring

6.5 Media enquiries are monitored in Comms Flow

6.6 A monthly communication report is presented to the Leadership Team which includes social media and website analysis.

6.7 The Council receives a copy of the Tiverton Gazette and, on an ad hoc basis, the Crediton Courier and sends out a weekly media monitoring email, including links to online articles. The Council does not have a license with the NLA (Newspaper License Authority) to create photocopies of articles, but a copy of this newspaper is kept in the post room.

7.0 Emergency planning

7.1 The Communication Team does not take part in an official standby rota but is available to be contacted out of hours through the Devon Emergency Planning Service (DEPS) telephone directory.

7.2 The three members of the Communication Team are all detailed in this document which is available to standby officers, senior leadership team and the emergency planning officer.

7.3 There is also a team of staff, who do not form part of the Communication Team, but who have the capability to edit the website. These members of staff are also detailed in DEPS directory.

7.4 In addition the Council's IT team will have capability to update the website during an emergency or out of hours event.

8.0 Corporate branding

8.1 The Council does not have an up-to-date branding policy or guidelines. There would be a significant cost implication for a full rebrand, but with the Council actively embarking on a business transformation project, it may be a suitable time to consider if such an exercise needs to be undertaken.

9.0 Media training

9.1 All elected members are offered media training as part of their induction programme. The Communications Team can also offer media training and guidance for media interviews to officers. This will be tailored to the individual.

10.0 Appendices

- Appendix one: Social Media and Media Relations policy
- Appendix two: Suggested stakeholder and community groups