

Mid Devon District Council

Communication and Engagement Strategy

Policy Number:

January 2021

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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Consultation This document was sent out for consultation to the following:

Leadership Team
Corporate Management Team
Community PDG
Cabinet

Document History

This document obtained the following approvals.

| Title | Date | Version Approved |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Leadership Team | | |
| Corporate Management Team | | |
| Community PDG | | |
| Cabinet | | |
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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 amalgamated in 2018 along with the Media and Social Media Protocol.

1.3 The current structure of the Communication team is a part time Communication and Engagement Manager, part time Communications Officer and a vacant post of full time Digital Communications Officer.

1.4 The team sits within Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement and works closely with all service areas of the Council to provide a more effective approach to communication and engagement with all stakeholders.

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

- Internal communication
- Community engagement (including social media)
- Media relations

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

To 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.

1.7 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

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

1.9 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

- Internal communication action plan
- Community engagement action plan
- Social media and media relations policy
- Stakeholder and community groups mapping
- Channel access strategy
- Tenant involvement strategy
- Culm Garden Village engagement strategy
- Town and Parish charter
- Climate action plan

4.0 Internal Communication

Background

4.1 The Council currently employs circa 508 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 jobs 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 All staff should operate according to the Officer Code of Conduct.

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

Aim

4.5 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.

4.6 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 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

Table 1: Current methods of internal communication - staff

| Current channels | staff 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 between leaders and 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 Corporate Management team |

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| | | | Communications team Executive Assistant |
| 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 | HR Corporate Management Team |
| Impact - staff consultation group | Agenda items to discuss specific topics each quarter | Quarterly | HR |

Table 2: Current methods of internal communication - members

| 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 | Chief Executive Member Services |
| Notices in Members' Room | Printed information | As required (post Covid remote working) | Member Services/ Communications Team |

Constraints

- No easy to read, searchable intranet for staff or Members
- Current version of 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, although all surveys are anonymised.
- Multiple sites for staff bases
- Budget

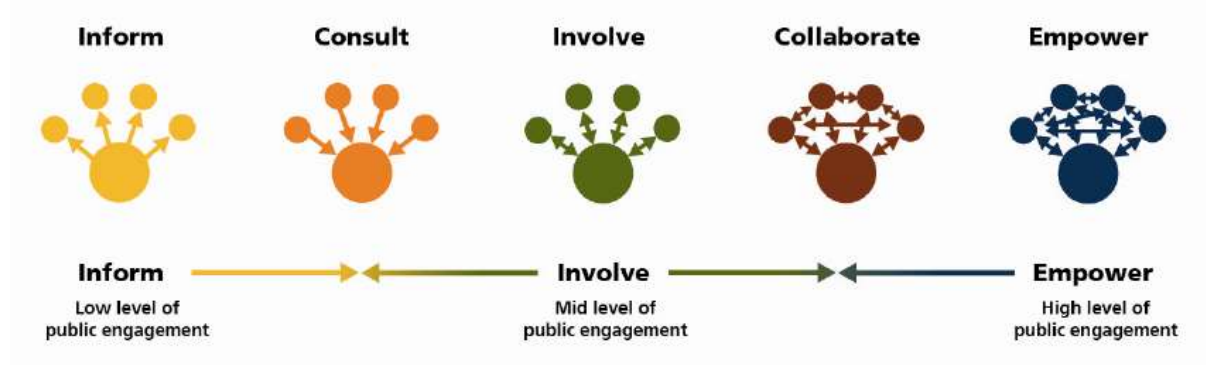
Table 3: Proposed internal communication action plan

| Objective | Responsible | Future |
|--|--|---|
| Create a more interactive staff newsletter | Communications Team with input from IT, HR | Create a new format of the Link Consider use of Umbraco 8 or MS365 |
| Improve communication liaison with staff Impact Group | Communications Team and HR | Ensure Comms is represented on the panel and that an article appears in the Link after each meeting |
| Support internal projects such as Evolve | Communications Team and L&D | Support promotion of appraisals, skills review etc Revisit coaching promotion which was put on hold due to Covid19. |
| Explore options to create a more user friendly intranet | Communications Team IT HR | A searchable intranet could help all services and reduce call/email time. Consider resourcing needed and potential business case. |
| Encourage greater uptake of annual staff survey | Communications Team HR Corporate Management Team | Promotion, incentives. Publicise actions taken following feedback from previous surveys – show staff it makes a difference and impact. |
| Explore internal social media options | Communications Team - would need admin support from services | To be added to the Impact group agenda |

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 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.
- 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 2021.

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 |
| Press releases | Media | Communications team |
| Facebook pages: Mid Devon Council Mid Devon Leisure Tiverton Pannier Market Electric Nights Mid Devon Housing Community Safety Partnership | Residents & media | Communications Leisure Market Officer Economic Regeneration and Growth Officer Housing Community Safety and Emergency Planning Officer |
| Twitter accounts: Mid Devon Council Mid Devon Leisure Tiverton Pannier Market Electric Nights Mid Devon Housing Community Safety partnership | 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 planning, licensing and elections | 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 | Economic Development Officer |
| 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 | Responsibility | Method |
|---|---|---|
| Promote newsletter to residents | Communications team | Promotional drive for newsletter Consider liaison with parishes/via parish newsletter |
| Increase GovDelivery sign up | Communications team | Continue to develop email subscribers. Look at alternative provider including via a new CRM |
| Continue to grow social media presence | Communications Team | Bring in a member of staff who can support this area of work. Improve forward SM content planning and to use the extra resource (replacement of previous role) to spot trending articles and improve two way interaction. |
| Increase Council generated news content | Communications Team | Once fully staffed and the Covid communication work has decreased to improve relationship with PDG chairs. To use Phoenix Portal committee reports system to forward plan and be proactive with press releases. The constraint here which causes an issue is the calling in period. |
| Create joint campaigns with local media | Communications Team supporting service specific campaigns | This is unlikely due to lack of advertising budget but can be considered and services can cost in for specific projects. |
| Support the business transformation project | Communications Team | On approval from Cabinet to pursue the procurement of a Customer Portal) and as part of a general review of customer service a small group of customers will be sought to provide feedback on service redesign and the user experience. Continue to promote Do it Online pages. Support all services with new projects. |
| Explore options for an annual residents survey | Communications Team with support from Customer First | If the Council decides to run an annual survey this needs to be resourced and budgeted for appropriately. Members also need to be mindful that any questions do not lead to false hope about future funding for desirable projects. Members also need to be aware of survey fatigue. |

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| Launch a new community panel/recruit community champions | Communications Team | To be considered in future with the Community Engagement Working Group. To involve members of the public to be actively involved in elements of business transformation as well as service specific projects. This may also tie in with extending the Equality Forum with outside representation |
| Continue liaison work with town and parishes | Communications Team and Member Services | Regular contact, WIS, monthly newsletter, member briefings etc |
| Maintain a database of social media groups to utilise | Communications Team | To maintain and update this database. To use it more frequently as part of the social media planning calendar |
| Work with national campaigns and support national promotional weeks | Communications Team and Elections team Recycling Officer | This will form part of the communication planning once fully resourced team. Also discussed by the Community Engagement Working group as events such as National Democracy Week should be led by elected Members. |
| Engage with hard to reach groups | Operations Manager for Performance, Governance and Health & Safety with Communications support | To support the Equality Forum to grow and to be opened up to outside groups at an appropriate time. |
| Develop corporate use of LinkedIn | Communications with HR support | Develop connections across the platform |
| Develop social media governance framework and forward plan | Communications | Launch social media governance group. Seek views from this group as well as IT and other councils. |
| Support Climate Change agenda | Communications Team, Corporate Manager for Property Services, Leisure and Climate Change, | Launch website Database of local groups and initiatives New partnership between Communications Team and Climate and Sustainability Specialist |

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| | Climate and Sustainability Specialist, Cabinet Member for Climate Change | |
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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

In addition the Communications team will develop a social media governance group and devise a social media governance framework and forward plan. This document will support for the effective and appropriate use of social media across service areas and corporately.

Constraints

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

Evaluation and monitoring

- 6.5 Media enquiries are monitored in Comms Flow. This system was built in house by staff who are no longer with the organisation and may need to be replaced at some point. The Council may need to explore the purchase of a new media system which can log media enquiries as well as disseminate all press releases to multi channels. Eg Vuelio, Crowd Control, PR Gloo.
- 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 Mid Devon 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 office.

7.0 Emergency planning

- 7.1 The Communications 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 members of the Communications 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 Communications Team, but who have the capability to edit the website. These members of staff are also detailed in the DEPS directory.
- 7.4 In addition, the Council's IT team have capability to update the website during an emergency or 'out of hours' event.

Accessibility

- 7.5 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/>
- 7.6 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.
- 7.7 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.
- 7.8 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. This is not new and part of the Equalities Act 2010.
- 7.9 Due to increasing complexities with the accessibility requirements and the need for the Council to ensure it meets all the requirements the Communications team, in collaboration with the web developer is looking to create a formal sign off system for the publication of documents such as Council branded leaflets to be used by all services. This will also ensure consistent branding.

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 while the current accessibility work is being undertaken, now is an appropriate time to refresh certain documents such as committee report and letter templates.

9.0 Website

- 9.1 The existing corporate website is updated by a team of web contributors, overseen by the Communications Team and Web Developer.
- 9.2 It is hoped in the future the Council's own MDDC website will move to Umbraco 8, however, this will involve a rewrite of much of the current content as well as providing training for the web contributors and Communications team.
- 9.3 Once the initial accessibility work is complete ahead of the next audit there should be a new and continuous focus on ensuring website content is relevant and timely. This work should emphasise the need to remove content that is not necessary. This work will support website upgrades and customer service specific improvement projects.

10.0 Media training

10.1 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.

11.0 Appendices

- Appendix one: Social Media and Media Relations policy