

Beyond Communications: A Strategy for communication, engagement and consultation



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Beyond Communications: A Strategy for communication, engagement and consultation



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Section 1. Background, Aim and Vision

Background

This document provides a long term strategic overview of the Council's approach to communications and will be used to help guide the Council in meeting various targets throughout the lifespan of the strategy.

Communication plays an important role in everything we do at East Staffordshire Borough Council. The ONS estimates the population of East Staffordshire in 2018 was 118,574 and this is forecast to increase to 121,975 by 2028. Therefore, effective communication is vital to bring the Council and the community together. It is the responsibility of everyone at the Council including members and officers.

There is a strong history of strategic communication within the authority. Over recent years, various strategies ranging from a traditional communication strategy to digital strategies have enabled the Council's communications to evolve. In particular, the Marketing and Communications Strategy, adopted in 2012, provided a platform to adopt digital communication methods whilst now commonplace, were not widely adopted across the public sector at the start of the last decade.

Communications Strategy (2008 - 2012)

- A traditional communications strategy that provided a clear and focused approach to communication.

Marketing and Communications Strategy (2012 - 2020)

- A change in approach to communication and marketing from traditional methods to digital that allowed the Council to modernise and expand its methods of communication.

Digital Strategy (2018 - 2020)

- Introduced a digital consideration in all aspects of the council delivering a new approach to social media communications, democratic engagement and a refreshed website and intranet all of which enhanced our digital communications.

Digital Strategy (2020 - 2023)

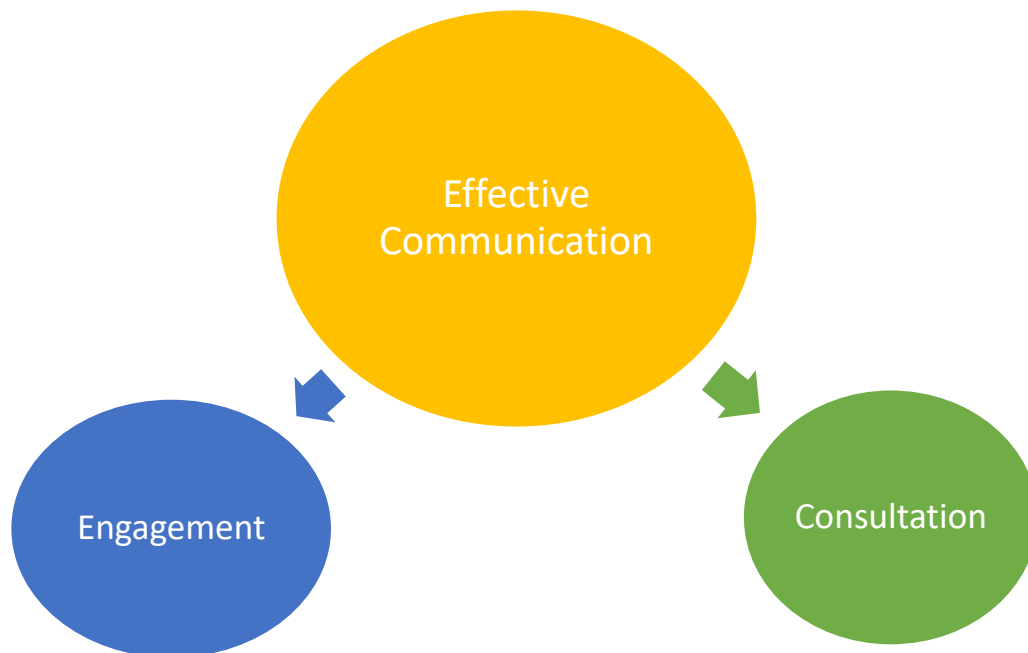
- This strategy will support the further development of our digital communications including the launch of a corporate e-newsletter, mobile app and integrated communications in service delivery.

The strategy sets a framework for council communications both internally and externally, and gives direction to all media, online, internal, marketing, publications and public relations communications activity undertaken on behalf of the authority.

The strategy will guide the Council on how to build trust and enhance engagement with its stakeholders, consider how communicate with members and officers and how we engage and consult with our residents.

The Council commitment is to use a multi-channel approach to reach the wide variety of stakeholders we serve, including members, officers, residents, partners, businesses, community partners and visitors to the borough.

The strategy will demonstrate how effective communication is linked intrinsically to stronger engagement and consultation.



Aim and Vision

The aim of the strategy is to ensure all members, officers, residents and partners have a clear understanding and a positive perception of our vision, aims, values, services and achievements. This should lead to higher levels of satisfaction and engagement.

The strategy encourages members and officers across the organisation to take ownership of communicating and engaging in their service areas.

The Council's communications should:

- Tell the story of East Staffordshire and the priorities of the Council
- Improve corporate and professional reputation

- Support the leadership and objectives of the Council
- Engage with members, officers, residents and partners
- Build trust
- Attract investment
- Strengthen public support and understanding
- Follow legislation with regards to communicating with residents
- Involve the right person at the right time

This should be delivered through

- An annual communications plan
- Campaigns that are linked to corporate targets and priorities
- Multi-faceted marketing and communications
- Evaluation of communication performance
- Ensuring organisation wide ownership of communications

Section 2. Influences on this strategy

Supporting the Delivery of the Corporate Plan

This strategy supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan. At a general level, the Council's approach to communication assists in delivering a number of corporate objectives and supports the Council's priorities of:

- Value for Money Council
- Community Regeneration
- Environment and Health & Wellbeing

Internal Influences

The Council's Marcomms Strategy, adopted and delivered between 2012 - 2015, detailed how the Council would improve its digital presence including how the Council would use social media, ensuring the website was responsive to mobile and tablet devices and reducing traditional methods of communicating with the public in favour of digital methods where appropriate.

The Council's Digital Strategy, adopted in October 2020, will influence how the Council communicates through its digital platforms and digital customer services.

The Social Media Policy outlines how the Council will use social media to communicate with residents and its businesses.

External Influences

The law governing council external communications (including news releases, conferences and websites) is set out in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988 and the Code of Practice on Publicity. This includes the requirements on Councils during the pre-election period (previously referred to as "Purdah").

The Civil Contingencies Act 2005 raises the profiles of emergency management and business continuity planning. Councils have an important role in planning for and dealing with the consequences of local emergencies. They must also make sure there is 'business continuity' to deliver their critical services in an emergency. Communication plays a vital role. Getting messages to employees and local people will be crucial before, during and after an incident.

The Government Communication Service (GCS) is a professional body that supports government communication. The GCS provides professional guidance on a variety of subjects ranging from strategic communication to digital communication and marketing.

Section 3. Delivering our communications objectives

East Staffordshire Communication Campaign Model

The strategy will introduce the East Staffordshire communications campaign model which will be used a basis for communicating key objectives, campaigns and initiatives.

The communications model shown below provides a structure that ensures the Council's corporate communications are consistent, clear and reflective.



By adopting a communication model the Council is able to plan its communication which enables devolved ownership of key messages, objectives and evaluation.

In order to deliver our communication objectives and effectively utilise the East Staffordshire communications campaign model, the Council will undertake a number of actions through the following themes:

- Understanding our audience and sense of place
- Communicating effectively
- Measuring success

The key outcomes for each of these themes are summarised in the table below and expanded upon further in the subsequent sections of this strategy.

Understanding audience and sense of place	Communicating effectively	Measuring success
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Place Branding (AP1)• Engagement and consultation (AP2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual Communications Plan (CE1)• Digital Communications (CE2)• Website refresh (CE3)• Internal communications (CE4)• Communications toolkit (CE5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitoring and evaluation of communication (ME1)

Understanding our audience and sense of place

It is important the Council not only understands the audience it is communicating with but is able to establish a clear identity and branding for the place and organisation it is communicating about. Understanding how our audience feel about the Council and how it wants to receive information is key to ensuring we can communicate and engage effectively.

Place branding (AP1)

Developing place branding and a clear identify provides the Council with an opportunity to raise the profile, confidence, growth and vibrancy of East Staffordshire.

A clear place branding or story will enable members, officers, residents and partners to understand the role of the Council in delivering frontline services, providing a sustainable future for the area and improving people's lives in the borough.

A place brand should be an understanding and expression of place, supported by a set of verbal and visual assets – narrative, messages, design, photography, film, digital – to enable a full range of consistent and coherent communications activities to support the Council's wider corporate objectives.

A place brand is a significant element of any communication strategy therefore the strategy will be reviewed once the place branding exercise has been completed.

Engagement and Consultation (AP2)

Expectations from our residents continue to rise and tools such as social media provide residents with a platform to communicate publically with the Council. It's vital the Council continues to engage and consult with its members, officers, residents and partners to ensure they are understood and involved.

Recent consultations the Council has undertaken include those on the town deal, Uttoxeter masterplan and budget consultation. In addition, the Council undertakes regular consultation with members, residents and other stakeholders through Planning and other services across the Council.

Members and officers from across the organisation have a role to play in engaging with residents. From Councillors to Cabinet Members to frontline officers, each has a role to play in starting a conversation with our residents.

As part of this strategy the Council will conduct a borough wide electronic residents survey utilising the Local Government Association's guidance on understanding the views of residents. The Council will conduct a resident survey to gain a better

understanding of what local people think about the authority, the services we provide, how they access information, and how they prefer to receive it.

Conducting a residents survey will provide the Council will invaluable insight into how residents consume information. This increased insight will help inform our methods of communication moving forward.

This resident survey will be supported by ad hoc consultations and surveys on an ongoing basis.

Communicating effectively

Effective communication is at the heart of any communication strategy. It is important the Council is transparent and inclusive in its communication. In order for communication to be effective it must be relevant to the target audience and delivered through a method which is appropriate to the objectives and audience.

Annual Communications Plan (CE1)

Building on the regular communications that punctuate at regular intervals during the year, an annual strategic communications plan will be developed to draw all communication together to ensure the Council is communicating key objectives, targets and initiatives.

An annual key strategic communications plan will ensure the Council can identify and prioritise key communication activities for each financial year.

The annual communications plan should be closely linked to the Corporate Plan to ensure the Council is effectively communicating its key objectives and priorities. The strategic communications plan is to be approved by the Leader of the Council.

The initiatives identified in the communications plan will be delivered using the communications campaign model utilising multi-faceted methods of communication as shown below.



Digital Communications (CE2)

Building on the success of the Council's Marketing Communications and Digital Strategies the Council will continue to evolve its digital communications. This will include communications across multiple digital platforms, including but not limited to, our websites, social media, e-newsletter and SMS, which will closely align with programme work included in the digital strategy.

This will include:

- A monthly residents e-newsletter promoting council services, consultations, latest news, attractions and tourism opportunities.
- Marketing and communication of cultural services including dedicated e-newsletters and social media accounts for Burton Market Hall, Brewhouse and tourism
- A focused business e-newsletter to promote relevant business news including funding opportunities, changes in legislation, case studies and opportunities for sponsorship.
- Social media content including Deputy Leader videos, infographics and partner content where appropriate.
- Leader's Blog

Website content refresh (CE3)

The Council's website is a key communication tool and with 195,845 page views in September 21 it is vital the website's content is continually reviewed to ensure it is relevant, up-to-date and accessible.

Website content management is devolved across the organisation with each department responsible for their content therefore it is important each team can review and manage their content appropriately.

A website content refresh programme will run throughout the lifecycle of the strategy and will give teams across the organisation additional tools to analyse and manage the quality of the content in their areas.

Internal Communications (CE4)

Internal communications play a key role in ensuring members and officers are informed about Council news, plans and priorities, and the challenges ahead.

Effective internal communications allows members and officers to understand how their actions contribute to the overall achievement of Council priorities and how their behaviour affects the way the organisation is perceived internally and externally.

Effective communications also allows the Council to promote other initiatives such as workplace health and performance. These initiatives will continue to be communicated through weekly briefings, for example the monthly Community & Civil Enforcement newsletter included in the members briefing.

As part of this strategy the Council will review internal communication to members, including the exploration of a member intranet.

This will be achieved by:

- A weekly briefing to members and officers
- Review of member briefing mechanisms, including exploring a member intranet
- Staff Intranet
- Internal noticeboards with posters and information on topics ranging from workplace health to Council performance
- An internal communications group with officers representing different areas of the Council.

Review of Communications Toolkit (CE5)

To support the delivery of the Communications Strategy the Council will update its communications toolkit. The communications toolkit will outline the Council's media

protocol, branding guidelines and templates for communication campaign activity and evaluation.

Measuring success

Monitoring and evaluation of communications (ME1)

It is important the Council monitor and evaluate all campaign activities effectively to determine if campaigns have delivered campaign objectives, providing clear evidence of impact and value for money.

A number of key statistics and measurements are already captured across our cultural services such as statistics on e-newsletter and social media interactions.

Utilising the Government Communication Service Evaluation Framework, the Council will develop an evaluation framework that can be used as part of its communication campaign methodology. This will provide a consistent method to measure the success of the Council's communications and influence future activity.

Monitoring and evaluation of communications through this model will not only capture statistics but it will seek to evaluate how effective communication has been in achieving desired outcomes.

In addition, this strategy will link directly into the Digital Strategy and will look to obtain feedback on service delivery.

Section 4. Programme Plan

This section outlines in more detail how the outcomes described within the themes in Section 3 will delivered.

- Understanding our audience and sense of place
 - Outcome 1: Place branding (AP1)
 - Outcome 2: Engagement and Consultation (AP2)
- Communicating effectively
 - Outcome 1: Annual Communications Plan (CE1)
 - Outcome 2: Digital Communications (CE2)
 - Outcome 3: Website content refresh (CE3)
 - Outcome 4: Internal Communications (CE4)
 - Outcome 5: Review of Communications Toolkit (CE5)
- Measuring success
 - Outcome 1: Monitoring and evaluation of communications (ME1)

This action plans describes a number of projects and initiatives that have been identified at the outset of the strategy. Naturally, the programme plan will evolve over the lifecycle of the strategy.

ESBC Communications Strategy	Expected Start:	Expected End:	Component Lead:	Link to Comms Outcome
1. Place branding	2022/23	2022/23	Enterprise Team	AP1
<p>Brief Description:</p> <p>Developing a clear place branding and identity provides the Council with an opportunity to raise the profile, confidence, growth and vibrancy of East Staffordshire.</p> <p>Clear place branding or story will enable members, officers, residents, partners and stakeholders to understand the role of the Council in delivering frontline services, providing a sustainable future for the area and improving people's lives in the borough.</p> <p>A place brand is a significant element of any communication strategy therefore the strategy will be reviewed once the place branding exercise has been completed.</p>				
Initial Milestones & Timescales:	Key Outcomes & Benefits:		Key Performance Measures:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of place branding (2022/23) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positioning of East Staffordshire in relation to better inward investment opportunities for the private sector, tourism opportunities and quality of life for residents and visitors. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of East Staffordshire Place Branding 	
Contribution to Corporate Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Regeneration Environment and Health & Wellbeing 			

ESBC Communications Strategy	Expected Start:	Expected End:	Component Lead:	Link to Comms Outcome
2. Residents Survey	Q1 2022/23	Q2 2022/23	Programmes and Transformation	AP2
<p>Brief Description:</p> <p>It is important the Council continues to understand the extent in which residents feel informed and engaged by the Council, and the services they receive. This impacts on their levels of satisfaction and ultimately a council's public reputation.</p> <p>The Council will conduct a resident survey to gain a better understanding of what local people think about the council, the services we provide, how they access information about the council, and how they prefer to receive this information. Results from this survey will help shape and inform our communications moving forward.</p> <p>Conducting a residents survey provides an opportunity to understand what our communities think and will provide valuable insight into how the organisation is perceived by our wider community.</p>				
Initial Milestones & Timescales:	Key Outcomes & Benefits:	Key Performance Measures:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct borough wide residents electronic survey (2022/23) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater understanding of resident's perception of the Council and how they prefer to be communicated with. • Provide a benchmark at the early stages of the strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a residents survey within the first year of the strategy. 		
Contribution to Corporate Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Regeneration • Environment and Health & Wellbeing 			

ESBC Communications Strategy		Expected Start:	Expected End:	Component Lead:	Link to Comms Outcome
3. Annual Strategic Communications Plan		2022/23	Ongoing	Programmes and Transformation	CE1
<p>Brief Description:</p> <p>An annual key strategic communications plan will ensure the Council can identify and prioritise key communication activities for each financial year. The annual communications plan should be closely linked to the Corporate Plan to ensure the Council is communicating its key objectives and priorities. The strategic communications plan is to be approved by the Leader of the Council.</p> <p>The annual strategic communications plan is to be complemented by an operational communication plan. This will ensure that operational activities from across the organisation are captured and communication activities from external organisations can be supported by the Council where appropriate.</p> <p>Developing these communications plans will ensure the Council can carefully manage and provide a strategic approach to its communication.</p>					
Initial Milestones & Timescales:		Key Outcomes & Benefits:		Key Performance Measures:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a strategic communications plan following the approval of the Council's Corporate Plan (March 22) Develop a rolling operational communications plan (April 22) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic communication Ensure all key activities from across the organisation are captured 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic communications plan developed and approved 	
Component Dependencies:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of Corporate Plan Input from managers into operational communications plan 			
Contribution to Corporate Objectives:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value for Money Council Community Regeneration Environment and Health & Wellbeing 			

ESBC Communications Strategy	Expected Start:	Expected End:	Component Lead:	Link to Comms Outcome
4. Digital Communications	2021	Ongoing	Programmes and Transformation	CE2
<p>Brief Description:</p> <p>Building on the success of the Council’s Marketing Communications and Digital Strategies the Council will continue to evolve its digital communications. This will include communications across multiple digital platforms including but not limited to website, social media, e-newsletter and SMS.</p> <p>Following the successful launch of the resident e-newsletter, the Council will develop a business e-newsletter. The business e-newsletter will use content focused solely on the commercial sector and will be used to promote funding opportunities, changes in legislation, case studies and opportunities for sponsorship.</p> <p>The Council will also utilise its digital channels to communicate and encourage tourism to East Staffordshire.</p> <p>Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the Council has communicated key information to its residents and partners across its social media channels. The number of likes on Council’s corporate Facebook has more than doubled from 2.2k pre-pandemic to 5.1k in October 21 and is a vital platform for sharing key information. Using the annual communications plan, the Council will continue to schedule engaging content including Deputy Leader videos, infographics and partner content where appropriate.</p>				
Initial Milestones & Timescales:	Key Outcomes & Benefits:		Key Performance Measures:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a business e-newsletter (Dec 21) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted Council communications from across the authority aimed at the commercial sector. Continue to reach a large number of stakeholders through digital communications 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business e-newsletter launched 	
Component Dependencies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital Strategy 			
Contribution to Corporate Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value for Money Council Community Regeneration Environment and Health & Wellbeing 			

ESBC Communications Strategy		Expected Start:	Expected End:	Component Lead:	Link to Comms Outcome
5. Website Content Refresh		2022/23	Ongoing	Programmes and Transformation	CE3
<p>Brief Description:</p> <p>The Council's website is a key communication tool and with 195,845 page views in September 21, it is vital that the website's content is continually reviewed to ensure it is relevant, up-to-date and accessible. Website content management is devolved across the organisation with each department responsible for their own content.</p> <p>The Council is due to update the website content management system in 2022/23 and will take the opportunity to launch a content refresh programme to run throughout the lifecycle of the strategy. The content refresh programme will ensure that all content is reviewed and then carefully monitored and managed through the Council's website quality assurance software.</p> <p>The Internal Communications Group will conduct a mystery shopping test at various stages of the strategy to test for accuracy, readability and accessibility.</p>					
Initial Milestones & Timescales:		Key Outcomes & Benefits:		Key Performance Measures:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch content refresh programme (Q1 2023) • Conduct first mystery shopping test (Q3 2023) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website content that is relevant, readable and accessible. • Website content is continually reviewed and assessed. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality score for website is rated as 85 or greater. 	
Component Dependencies:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Strategy 			
Contribution to Corporate Objectives:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value for Money Council • Community Regeneration • Environment and Health & Wellbeing 			

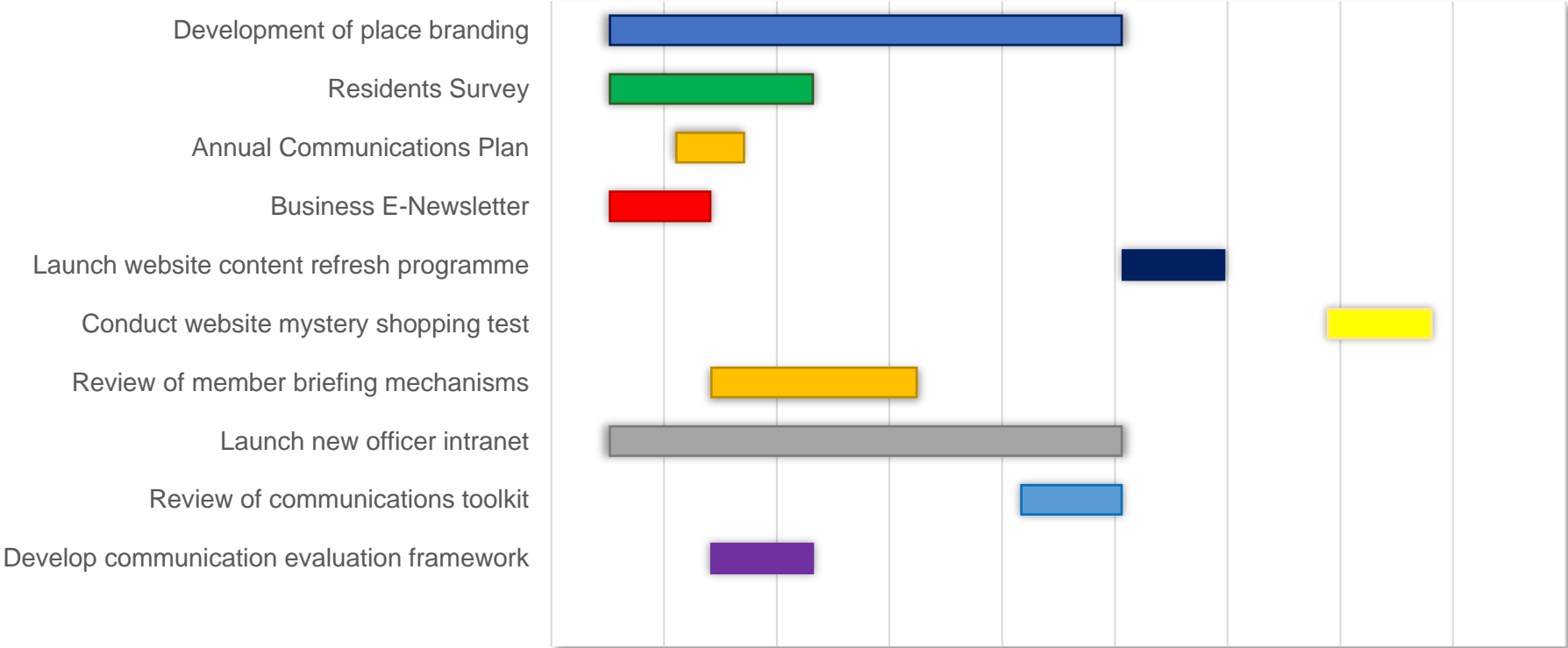
ESBC Communications Strategy	Expected Start:	Expected End:	Component Lead:	Link to Comms Outcome
6. Internal Communications	2021/22	Ongoing	Programmes and Transformation	CE4
<p>Brief Description:</p> <p>Internal communications play a key role in ensuring members and officers are informed about Council news, plans and priorities, and the challenges ahead.</p> <p>Effective internal communications allows members and officers to understand how their actions contribute to the overall achievement of priorities and how their behaviour affects the way the organisation is perceived internally and externally.</p> <p>As part of this strategy the Council will undertake a review of its member briefing mechanisms and will explore the feasibility of a member intranet.</p> <p>The Council will also launch a new intranet for officers and will utilise internal communication methods such as weekly briefings and noticeboards, to promote topics ranging from workplace health to Council performance.</p>				
Initial Milestones & Timescales:		Key Outcomes & Benefits:	Key Performance Measures:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal noticeboards for key information • Internal communication to promote Council performance (2021) • Launch a new officer intranet (2023) • Review of member briefing mechanisms, including exploring a member intranet (2022/23) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members and officers have a greater understanding of the Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New intranet developed and launched • Review of member briefing mechanisms undertaken 	
Component Dependencies:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Strategy • Workplace Health 		
Contribution to Corporate Objectives:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value for Money Council • Community Regeneration • Environment and Health & Wellbeing 		

ESBC Communications Strategy	Expected Start:	Expected End:	Component Lead:	Link to Comms Outcome
7. Review of Communications Toolkit	Q1 2022/23	Q4 2022/23	Programmes and Transformation	CE5
<p>Brief Description:</p> <p>To support the delivery of the Communications Strategy the Council will update its communications toolkit. The communications toolkit will outline the Council's media protocol, branding guidelines and templates for communication campaign activity and evaluation.</p>				
Initial Milestones & Timescales:	Key Outcomes & Benefits:	Key Performance Measures:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review corporate style guide, media protocol and campaign templates (Q4 2022/23) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a consistent approach to communications across the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate style guide and media protocol updated and campaign templates developed. 		
Component Dependencies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media policy Digital Strategy 			
Contribution to Corporate Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value for Money Council Community Regeneration Environment and Health & Wellbeing 			

ESBC Communications Strategy	Expected Start:	Expected End:	Component Lead:	Link to Comms Outcome
8. Monitoring and evaluation of communications	Q1 2022/23	Ongoing	Programmes and Transformation	ME1
<p>Brief Description:</p> <p>It is important the Council monitor and evaluate all campaign activities effectively to determine whether campaigns have achieved their objectives, providing clear evidence of impact and value for money.</p> <p>Utilising the Government Communication Service Evaluation Framework, the Council will develop an evaluation framework that can be used as part of its communication campaign methodology. This will provide a method to measure the success of the Council's work and influence future communication activity.</p>				
Initial Milestones & Timescales:	Key Outcomes & Benefits:	Key Performance Measures:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop evaluation framework for Council communications (Q1 2022/23) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate communication effectiveness Ongoing improvement of communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of evaluation framework that is adopted in campaign methodology. 		
Component Dependencies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of the communication evaluation framework. 			
Contribution to Corporate Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value for Money Council Community Regeneration Environment and Health & Wellbeing 			

Initial Programme Plan Gantt Chart

10/11/21 18/2/22 29/5/22 6/9/22 15/12/22 25/3/23 3/7/23 11/10/23 19/1/24 28/4/24



Section 5. Risk Management

The table below describes a number of strategic risks, how they are to be mitigated, the likelihood of them occurring and the impact on the organisation. The quantification of the risk likelihood, impact and risk level are taken from the Council's Risk Management Strategy.

Risk	Source of Risk	Treatment Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Level
Consultation fatigue	Frequent consultations may lead to consultation fatigue	Communication and awareness of consultations across the organisations. Possible consultations to be included within the annual communications plan.	2	2	5
Strategy 'buy in'	Key members of the organisation will not 'buy in' to the strategy meaning the intended outcomes will not be delivered.	Approval of the strategy by Cabinet will ensure senior councillors and officers are aware of the strategy. The Leader of the Council to sign off annual communications plan. Details of the strategy to be communicated in the Staff Briefing.	2	2	5
Alignment to corporate priorities	Changing corporate priorities do not align with the strategy.	Objectives in the strategy included in corporate planning and annual communications plan linked to the Corporate Plan.	2	2	5

Section 6. Further Information

If you want to know more about this strategy or want to know more about any of the ways that you can contribute to its success, please contact us.

Alternative formats of this publication are available on request. Please contact us to discuss an appropriate format.

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