

Subject:	Communications Strategy 2023-25	Status:	For Publication		
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	18 th October 2023		
Report of:	Head of People and Policy	Lead Member:	Leader and Lead Member of Economic Development		
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency	<input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached:	No	
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached:	No	
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1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That Cabinet consider and approve the Council's Communications Strategy as set out in this report.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Communications has a vital role in delivering the Council Valley Plan 2021-25 – Our Place, Our Plan.
- The Council's Communications Strategy, and supporting Action Plan, will support and develop the Council's approach to communications.
- This strategy will support the Council's strategies by ensuring they are communicated to the relevant internal and external stakeholders in the most effective way.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council is required to communicate with staff and stakeholders in the most effective and efficient way. A clear and defined Communication Strategy will support the Council to identify stakeholders, communicate effectively and build stronger relationships.
- 3.2 To promote a digital-first approach throughout the Council, the strategy will focus on improving the Council's existing communications, as well as supporting new and innovative methods of communication.
- 3.3 Identifying an outlined framework for communications and engagements will support the delivery of the Valley Plan 2021-25, Our Place, Our Plan. The strategy will cover the Council's aims, core principles, outcomes and priorities for effective communications. The Communication Strategy should be read alongside the Council Communications Action Plan.
- 3.4 Following a procurement exercise VivaPR was appointed on a four year contract, reviewed on an annual basis to support the delivery the Council's communications service with effect from 22nd May 2022. The main deliverables of the contract are: promote the Council's image and protect the Council's reputation, manage the Council's media relations, manage the Council's Digital Marketing Apprentice, manage the Council's internal and external communications. The Head of People and Policy is the Account Manager for the contract.

4. DETAILS

- 4.1 The Council believes that good communication leads to better services, creates a stronger reputation and builds positive relationships with internal and external stakeholders including staff, councillors, residents, businesses, partners, community and voluntary groups.

- 4.2 The strategy aims to provide direction to the Council’s communication activity, focusing on all stakeholders to deliver planned, co-ordinated and clear, communication in the most effective and efficient way.
- 4.3 The Communication Strategy combines both internal and external stakeholders to embed a simplistic, but effective, approach to communication across the Council. Aims within the strategy focus on embracing new technologies and modern communication approaches, whilst ensuring the needs of stakeholders remain at the forefront of communications.
- 4.4 The strategy has been rationalised to define a clear and consistent communication approach. The Council has identified five core themes to support and deliver the strategy; Engagement, Communication, Stakeholders, Feedback and Transparency. The identified core themes will feed into the delivery of the outcomes and priorities of the strategy.
- 4.5 The Communications Strategy was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25th September 2023. The following recommendations were made for consideration prior to Cabinet approval:
1. To make it clear in the report that the Council was working closely with an external provider and to ensure that reference was made to how the decision was made to use an external company.
 2. To provide information about what provision we asked for when the service was contracted out.
 3. To share the additional column of information to the action plan to show the detail around the delivery of each action.

All the recommendations have been actioned within the covering report and Action Plan. The continued monitoring of the Action Plan will be managed through weekly meetings with the Account Manager, monthly briefing to CMT and included in the Quarterly Performance Management Report.

5. RISK

There are no specific risk issues to be considered arising from this report.

6. FINANCE

There are no specific finance issues to be considered arising from this report.

7. LEGAL

There are no specific legal issues to be considered arising from this report.

8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific policy and equalities implications to be considered arising from this report.

9. REASON FOR DECISION

A clear and defined Communication Strategy will support the Council in communicating to both internal and external stakeholders. Improving the Council’s communication and engagement will support the delivery of the Valley Plan 2021-25 – Our Plan, Our Plan.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Communications Strategy	Appendix 1
Communication Action Plan	Appendix 2

Communications Strategy 2023-2025

Rossendale Borough Council (the Council) believes that good communications leads to better services, a stronger reputation and positive relationships with our stakeholders including staff, councillors, residents, businesses, partners, community and voluntary groups.

The strategy sets out how the Council will communicate with our stakeholders to support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan to ensure our vision, priorities and outcomes are clearly understood.

The Council's Vision is *'To have a thriving economy built around our changing town centres, creating a quality environment for all and improving the life changes for all those living and working in the borough'*.

The aims of the Strategy is to give direction to the Council's communications activity and focuses on both internal and external communications, to support the delivery of planned, co-ordinated, clear, effective and efficient communications, using the most appropriate methods.

Internal and external communications affect all aspects of our day-to-day business and is the responsibility of everyone who works at the Council to consistently reflecting the Council's values – Pride, Passion and People and adhering to the Council's branding guidelines and customer service standards. The following core themes will support and deliver Council approach to communications:

<p>Transparency Clear, consistent and honest ensuring communication is free from jargon and easy to understand Information and documents will be factual, accessible and transparent.</p>	<p>Communication Communicate in a manner that work best for our stakeholders Communicate clearly, providing relevant information regularly with stakeholders</p>	<p>Engagement Engage, listen and respond. Select different communication channels and offer a variety of options to allow stakeholders to provide their input to the Council's decision making process</p>
<p>Stakeholders Recognising the need to tailor communications to include all our stakeholders within the borough. Reflecting the diverse needs and preferences of our audiences. Collaborate with our stakeholders to work effectively to achieve a positive outcome.</p>		<p>Feedback Respond to enquiries in a timely manner and update information and documents as required. Ensuring that all communication and engagement are effectively targeted and insight led.</p>

Communications key outcomes and priorities

Over recent years there has been a significant shift from traditional communication towards a greater use of digital and social media platforms with both internal and external communications. Whilst digital communication is a quick and cost effective way of communicating with stakeholders, not everyone has access or the skills to use digital and social media platforms or prefers to use traditional methods. The Council must ensure that communication methods are user friendly and accessible to everyone.

The delivery of the Strategy has four core key outcomes:

- Develop collaborative working relationships with all of our stakeholders
- Enhance a range of accessible communication tools to effectively engage stakeholders
- Be recognised as a respected and trusted Council providing effective and efficient services
- Meet the Council's digital first approach to customer contact.

We will deliver these through the following key priorities:

- Developing a communications function that effectively communicates with external stakeholders to increase understanding of the Council's services and support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan
- Improving the use of internal communications to promote staff wellbeing, engagement and effective delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place. Our Plan
- Building and maintaining the Council's identity and reputation with stakeholders
- Embedding two-way communications by engaging and consulting with stakeholders to support the Council's decision making process.
- Developing robust communication plans to support the delivery of key campaigns and projects.

This strategy should be used in conjunction with the **Communications Annual Action Plan**.



Communication Strategy 2023-25

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The Council's Vision

'To have a thriving economy built around our changing town centres, creating a quality environment for all and improving the life changes for all those living and working in the borough'.

The strategy sets out how the Council will communicate with our stakeholders to support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan to ensure our vision, priorities and outcomes are clearly understood.

The aims of the Strategy is to give direction to the Council's communications activity and focuses on both internal and external communications, to support the delivery of planned, co-ordinated, clear, effective and efficient communications, using the most appropriate methods.

Core Principles

Internal and external communications affect all aspects of our day-to day business and is the responsibility of everyone who works at the Council to consistently reflecting the Council's values – Pride, Passion and People and adhering to the Council's branding guidelines and customer service standards.

The following core themes will support and deliver Council approach to communications:



MAKING THE CONNECTION

ENGAGEMENT

Engage, listen and respond. Select different communication channels and offer a variety of options to allow stakeholders to provide their input to the Council's decision making process

COMMUNICATION

Communicate in a manner that work best for our stakeholders Communicate clearly, providing relevant information regularly with stakeholders

STAKEHOLDERS

Recognising the need to tailor communications to include all our stakeholders within the borough. Reflecting the diverse needs and preferences of our audiences. Collaborate with our stakeholders to work effectively to achieve a positive outcome.

FEEDBACK

Respond to enquiries in a timely manner and update information and documents as required. Ensuring that all communication and engagement are effectively targeted and insight led.

TRANSPARENCY

Clear, consistent and honest ensuring communication is free from jargon and easy to understand Information and documents will be factual, accessible and transparent.

Communication Outcomes and Priorities

KEEPING
CONNECTED

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Outcomes to deliver this Strategy

Develop collaborative working relationships with all of our stakeholders

Enhance a range of accessible communication tools to effectively engage stakeholders

Be recognised as a respected and trusted Council providing effective and efficient services

Meet the Council's digital first approach to customer contact

Strategic Priorities to deliver Strategy

- Developing a communications function that effectively communicates with stakeholders to increase understanding of the Council's services and support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan
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This strategy should be used in conjunction with the Communications Annual Action Plan.

Communications Strategy – Annual Action Plan 2023/2024

Key Priorities	Actions	Accountable officer	Completion date
Developing a communications function that effectively communicates with external stakeholders to increase understanding of the Council's services and support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan	Provide a responsive and pro-active press office responding to enquiries in a timely and appropriate manner	Communications Team	Ongoing
	Develop and implement an external communications strategy and annual action plan	Communications Team	Q3,ongoing
	Develop and monitor a protocol for officers and members for managing contact with the media	Communications Team	Completed, ongoing
	Ensure officers and members are trained and equipped to respond to media enquiries and announcements via the media including press, radio and TV	Communications Team	Ongoing
	Provide timely information and advice to CMT, officers, staff, Members, business & community partners and residents.	Communications Team	Ongoing
Improving the use of internal communications to promote staff wellbeing, engagement and effective delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place. Our Plan	Develop and implement an internal communications strategy and annual action plan	Communications Team	Q3, ongoing
	Develop staff campaigns calendar for local and national campaigns including health awareness, white ribbon campaign, #Our Day	Communications Team Managers/Officers	Ongoing
	Provide support to staff engagement evens including all staff engagements, health & wellbeing events	Communications Team	Ongoing
	Provide communications training and protocols for staff and Members	Communications Team	Ongoing
	Generate good news coverage and develop strategies to mitigate the impact of negative news coverage	Communications Team Managers/Officers	Ongoing
	Develop and submit at least one award submission per year	Communications Team Managers/Officers	Ongoing
	Provide support for Elections communications	Communications Team	Completed

	Support officers to promote the Council's activities and initiatives including prepare, manage and issue related press releases	Communications Team Managers/Officers	Ongoing
	Manage positive working relationships with local, regional and national media	Communications Team	Ongoing
Embedding two-way communications by engaging and consulting with stakeholders to support the Council's decision making process.	Provide professional advice and work with officers to support for major consultations and engagements	Communications Team Managers/Officers	Q3
	Monitor and manage the Council's social media accounts	Communications Team	Ongoing
	Conduct the annual Residents Survey	Communications Team Head of People and Policy	Ongoing
	Refresh the Council's Citizen Panel	Communications Team	Q3
	Develop a database to support resident and stakeholder consultation including facilitation of focus groups	Communications Team	Q3
Developing robust communication plans to support the delivery of key campaigns and projects.	Support the development of communications plans for corporate projects	Communications Team	Ongoing
	Assist officers in delivering media blogs and posts	Communications Team Managers/Officers	Ongoing