

Communication Strategy

2019 - 2024



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2019 - 2024

Communications plays an important role at Eastleigh Borough Council. Communicating well is the responsibility of everyone at Eastleigh Borough Council and not just that of the communications team.

We are committed to using a multi-channel approach to communications covering media and public relations, internal communications, marketing, publications, social/digital media. We want to ensure that we use the most appropriate method of reaching the wide variety of customers we serve; including residents, businesses, partners, and all levels of government.

We are committed to ensuring that communications are effective and efficient. This means that where possible, we will utilise digital communications and online channels, whilst ensuring that no group(s) of people are discriminated and excluded by this method.

Research shows that communication with residents is a key driver to overall satisfaction with council performance. It is also at the heart of good customer service.

The Communications Strategy will follow the best practice principles as set out by the Government Communication Service. The Publicity Code is now grouped into seven principles that publicity by local authorities

should follow. It should: • be lawful • be cost-effective • be objective • be even-handed • be appropriate • have regard to equality and diversity • be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

Maintaining the reputation of the Council has many layers and can be considered the role of all employees and stakeholders, Communications would have a leading role in protecting our reputation and helping to build trust and satisfaction.

Communications can help by communicating and promoting:

- What can be expected of the Council (customer expectation)
- The quality of the services the Council offers
- The quality and convenience of access to those services and
- The extent to which the Council is perceived to provide value for money

It has also been recognised that these perceptions are some of the most important drivers of public satisfaction with the Council.

The LGA Reputation II pinpoints five rules of reputation:

proving we provide value for money

ensuring communication engages residents and staff

Building trust and confidence in what we do

Working to improve services

Changing lives for the better

Our communications will be used to highlight and enforce the above wherever possible.

Stakeholders

- Residents of Eastleigh Borough
- People and organisations who use the Council's services / attend Council events
- Residents' and community associations
- Eastleigh Borough Council staff
- Eastleigh Borough businesses
- Schools and colleges in the Borough
- Visitors to Eastleigh Borough
- Councillors
- Partner organisations / neighbouring authorities
- Regional and national media
- Voluntary groups

Aims

To ensure that stakeholders, particularly Borough residents are **well informed** about Council services

To **raise the profile** of the many services that the Council offer and specifically its corporate priorities of **Greener Borough, Health & Wellbeing, Housing & Development and Economy**.

To help **build trust**

Ensure communications are **simple**, easy to understand and in **plain English**

To ensure communications are **consistent and co-ordinated** across channels

To build and maintain a strong, **professional and consistent identity** for the Council

To build opportunity for **two-way** communications

To unite Council staff behind the authority's mission of Supporting Communities, Improving lives and ensuring that our values are understood and championed.

Objectives

Grow subscriptions to our digital 'Weekly Borough News' email newsletter

Grow engagement and likes/follows to our social media channels

Increase resident satisfaction measure of feeling 'well informed' year on year

Maintaining a quarterly publication to all households offset by advertising

Running a minimum of five campaigns per year which align to corporate priorities which are measureable

Ensuring regular news releases (10 per month) to external media, both local/ regional and nationally within target sector

We will do this through

Campaign work

(A series of planned activities designed to achieve a goal) that is aligned to our corporate priorities. 2018/19 campaigns include: Food Waste Recycling, Garden Waste recycling, This Girl Can, Step up for you, Energy Switch. In order to ensure campaigns are measurable we will use the OASIS framework when campaign planning: Objectives, Audience Insight, Strategy/ideas, Implementation, Scoring/ Evaluation. Where appropriate, we'll also incorporate behaviour change principles into our campaign work – using the EAST framework (easy, attractive, social, timely.)

Corporate branding / Style guide

We will ensure our branding style guidelines are adhered to across all publicity and channels – it's important that this is consistent so that people can easily identify us and the work we do. The branding applies to all printed and digital materials, including but not limited to: advertising, emails, letters, websites, leaflets, posters, uniforms, vehicle livery, signs, video. This will also include any sub brands – such as Itchen Valley Country Park or The Point and The Berry Theatre which will be governed by their own style guides. This is accompanied by guidance around tone of voice including simplifying language and being 'human'.

Social Media

The Council has social media guidelines which guides our approach to communicating via social media channels. The corporate channels for the Council include: Facebook and Twitter - (@EastleighBC), You Tube and LinkedIn. It also includes the social media channels for our Theatres (The Point and The Berry Theatre) and our Country Parks (IVCP / Lakeside) including Facebook and Instagram. Our sports and health team also have social media channels. All Facebook accounts are managed by Facebook business manager to ensure there is corporate governance and so they can be used effectively as part of wider campaign work.

Social media presents much more cost effective opportunities for targeted and specific promotion of services – it also allows us to have two-way conversations with users.

Digital newsletters

Growing subscribers to 'Your Weekly Borough News' will be one of our priorities in the lifetime of this strategy. The email newsletter is sent weekly and subscribers are steadily growing.

Our objective will over time be to grow users by 10% each year.

Website

Our new website was redesigned and launched in January 2018 to ensure that users found content easier and to prepare for customers being able to do

more for themselves online (if they are able and would like to) at any time of day. It's built around the type of audience (resident or business) and the most frequent transactions / information people seek from the Council. It is also search engine lead so people are encouraged to search for the content too as well as via navigation.

Website performance: The Eastleigh Borough Council website was browsed more than 892 thousand times in the last financial year, up 28% from the previous year and up 59% from the year before that. Visits on mobile devices made up 40% of total traffic.

Digital first

During the lifetime of this strategy, more work will take place within our IT team to enable customers to do more online. The intention is not to remove face to face or telephone contact, but to respond to a population who are willing and able to use online channels – the advantage being that this can happen outside of office hours too.

87% of households have access to the Internet and 79% of UK adults personally use a smartphone (OFCOM 2019)

In 2018/19 more our customer service centre was offered more than 155,000 calls and through enabling customers to do more online we would expect this to reduce in the lifetime of this strategy.

Media relations

The media remain one of the Council's important external stakeholder groups. It is, though, changing and evolving rapidly.

The traditional model of local newspapers and regional television news broadcasters is being usurped by new media and an ever-expanding range of channels, although the digital versions of major regional brands continue to be key influencers.

People are now as likely, if not more likely, to get their local news from Twitter or Facebook as they are from a local newspaper. The Council must adapt to the realities of these changes and tailor its media messages and the way it shares information accordingly.

We will maintain and develop good relationships with our regional media, and seek to build relationships and coverage across trade and local government media as appropriate. This will look to include more feature stories such as human interest stories and wider information features to reflect the services we provide and the difference we make to people's lives.

Internal communications

Council staff should be our best ambassadors. If Council staff do not understand the organisation's objectives, mission, priorities and values, then no-one else will. To be well-informed, Council staff need timely, accurate information. They are out in the community meeting and talking to residents and businesses. This year we launched #teamebc which unites our staff under one banner, serves as our recruitment brand and pulls together all the positive work across the Council that helps achieve our corporate priorities and how the work contributes to our overarching mission of 'Supporting Communities, Improving Lives'.

We will maintain weekly email bulletins and organise relevant 'drop in' sessions around major projects or changes to allow for two-way feedback. We will continue to develop the Staff Hub as the source of key information for our internal audience. We will explore ways of more effectively reaching frontline staff without access to computers – especially those who work out of the Hedge End Depot. We will commit to annual/twice yearly staff conferences where staff have the opportunity to learn about the wider council aspirations and how their roles contribute.

Internal communications will seek to embed our values, in a human and easy to understand way, and will seek to use a diverse range of tools including video to convey information in a more engaging way.

Traditional media / print

Whilst many of our objectives are around building a digital/online audience, we continue to plan for integrated campaigns and incorporating traditional print when appropriate and suitable for the target audience. Our intention is to always maintain access for our residents who don't have or want access to computers. Our choice of channels will always be evaluated and based on performance and informed by date.

The Borough News remains one of our key channels for keeping residents informed and whilst harder to measure, various calls to action or competitions within the quarterly paper tells us that this is still a

popular way to find out information, and is still well read. Offsetting the cost with advertising has also helped us ensure that this remains cost effective.

Councillors

Councillors are the public face of Eastleigh Borough Council and are important ambassadors for the Council. This is most obvious in the roles of Mayor and Deputy Mayor who will undertake a large number of activities across the Borough. It is important that Councillors are given the right and timely information, communications advice and support (if requested) to allow them to communicate effectively with residents and other stakeholder groups.

To ensure that Councillors are kept up to date on Council news, as well as organisational developments, we will continue to publish the fortnightly Councillor's Update e-newsletter, which was recently revamped, and provide a news feed on the Members' Hub – an internal portal for Councillors.

The Communications Team will help Cabinet members maintain good relationships with local and regional media, Cabinet members would usually be the spokespeople for any relevant media release/statement.

At the end of this strategy the Council's communications will

- Ensure campaigns have clear objectives and measurable outcomes and support the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities

- Be more audience focused with an increased use of digital channels (which comes with growing the audience)

- Will incorporate more engaging content such as video and other visual content

- Support and empower customers to be able to transact with the Council through their tailored customer account

- Empower staff to tell the story of their work and how it all contributes to the Council's overarching priorities and mission

- Continue to focus on building excellent media relations – looking at a broader range of publications and online news channels

- Include internal communications which are more engaging with staff and suited to a modern, mobile (sometimes from remote sites) workforce

- Ensure the Council is easy to understand and talk / interact with

- Ensure that communications is consistent and recognisable as coming from the Council

- Ensure we increasingly communicate how the services we provide make a positive difference to people's lives and benefit the wider community.
