Communications and Engagement Strategy 2024

Context

In this document we set out our approach to communications and engagement both internally and externally. In today's world, we need to ensure we focus our attention on the most appropriate and meaningful areas as an organisation and take on the daily challenge of good communications and reputation management collectively. We need to have mechanisms/tools in place to enable effective engagement with our communities.

The **Local Government Association** recommends that strategic communications in local authorities should deliver:

- Leadership - clarity of purpose and commitment
- A distinctive brand
- A clear vision
- Authenticity to the local area
- A strategic approach to communications
- A corporately agreed, fully evaluated annual communications plan
- Communications activity based on research with robust evaluation
- Communications that are owned by everyone

Our strategy is based on these principles of good strategic communications, developing communications focused on our priorities and establishing a framework for pro-active communications work over the coming period.

The objectives of this strategy are to:
- Help our residents and stakeholders feel informed about council services and policies and how to engage with them.
- To set out our key messages and campaigns aligned to the Corporate Strategy and identify who we need to communicate with the most.
- Ensure communications are co-ordinated, consistent, targeted and driven by insight so that communications are delivered at the right time, in the right way to the right people.
- To maintain and improve our strong local, regional, and national reputation making sure people have a good understanding of our priorities and operations.
- To actively encourage feedback and facilitate conversations which help shape and improve the delivery of our services.
- Ensure all employees and Members are effectively supported with frequent, clear and consistent communications and updates.

Our approach to communications and engagement aims to support strong, active, and inclusive communities who can influence and shape the borough in which they live and work. The approach aims to create a more transparent and accountable Council where people are effectively informed, engaged, involved, and empowered by the Council. They actively help define and design local priorities and policies, deliver and evaluate services and inform council decision-making in areas that impact on their lives.

Melton Borough Council wants to ensure that people feel well informed about local issues. Also having the opportunity to get involved, influence local decision making and to tell the Council what they think about its policies, procedures, service delivery and work with partner organisations.

The role of engagement for the Council is to help understand different views within the community. Working alongside the Equality Scheme 2020-2024, our approach will help us to ensure that the needs of groups or areas that are harder to reach or do not traditionally engage with us are not overlooked. Additionally, we should use the most appropriate engagement techniques, so we get meaningful responses. This will help the Council to make better decisions and meet the needs of our communities more effectively.

The purpose of our approach to communications and engagement is to build on the good practices that already exist within the Council, setting out how we plan to engage with our community moving forward.

Engagement is a powerful tool that can provide invaluable information and help to build confidence within the community but only if it is conducted in a meaningful manner; engagement must always have a purpose and we must be able to demonstrate the impact the responses have had on our decision-making.

Recently there have been several unexpected events that have challenged the borough ranging from our emergence from the COVID-19 pandemic, the developing cost of living crisis and the war in Ukraine.

We know from talking to residents that the cost-of-living crisis is having a significant impact on everyone, especially the poorest in the community and the Council finances. We have worked to promote what we and our partners are doing to provide support and advice to those who need it most. We will continue to publicise this support so that no one in our community must choose between feeding their families or heating their home.

The hard work of the council, the support for local people in the community and the dedication to delivering the services has been heartening to see and the spirit of our community developed during COVID-19 and has continued through our support for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and our commitment to the wider Afghanistan and Syrian resettlement programmes.

We need to continually develop and build new ways of communicating and engaging with our audiences and stakeholders, to develop strong, enduring and mutually beneficial relationships. We will continue to work hard to ensure that the right support mechanisms are in place for every refugee who needs our help.

Over the last decade we have seen a digital revolution. People are more connected than ever before and the way they search for and receive information and news has changed significantly as a result. This approach sets a clear ambition to drive forward a new method to deliver digital communication. As a result of a number of these events and the transformation of our digital channels, we have seen communication and engagement take up through these channels increase dramatically.

We have made the choice to develop our approach to communications and engagement with the belief that one cohesive and inclusive strategy reflects greater transparency for the public and also directs our focus more clearly. It also shows our commitment to greater inclusion across our communities.

The purpose of this is ultimately to outline how we plan to engage with our communities, local people, and other vital stakeholders in the future. Internally, we have ensured focus on evolving best-practice engagement approaches, but we now need to set out what the community can expect from the Council.

This approach was informed by a variety of sources including the 2022 Residents Survey where we received more than 1,200 responses from the community. These responses have helped to form our approach and to ensure that our priorities are our community's priorities and that Melton Borough Council acts in a way that responds to the real issues that matter most within our community. The theme of engagement is also prevalent throughout our Vision 2036 and 4-year delivery plan.

Aligned to our communications, stakeholder engagement is about knowing who your stakeholders are, understanding them and knowing how best to involve them. Effective engagement requires consideration towards the different interests and values stakeholders have and addressing them throughout. Engaging the right people in the right way can make a notable difference to its success. Engagement with both **external** and **internal** stakeholders is key, but each group will require a tailored approach to make the engagement effective and valuable.

We need to better understand what is happening around the borough to make more effective choices and encourage our community to be invested in what we do. We should be keen to spread best practice working and promote our activities both around the borough, to ensure the engagement opportunity is fully realised, and through external communication channels, to showcase what we are doing and what we have to be proud of.

Corporate Priorities

The Council's Vision 2036 is made up of the following 8 statements:

- To have a new, single, custom-built leisure centre and swimming pool fit for the next generation, supported by wider recreation and physical activity facilities across the borough.
- To have greater access to healthcare services, increasing the availability of primary care, and to meet the needs of a growing population.
- To have more sustainable homes, that meet the needs of our communities, supported by the right infrastructure, including the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road (MMDR) and adequate school places.
- To have high quality homes, across all tenures, supported by accountable and enabling landlord services.
- A bustling, vibrant and regenerated town centre, recognised as a regional destination, and supported by a thriving tourism sector.
- Cherished and celebrated our villages and rural heritage, delivering on the Rural Capital of Food and maximising investment in our waterways, canals, walkways and green infrastructure.
- To harness new technologies, diversifying our business base, and securing more high skilled, higher paying jobs, creating a brighter future for young people.
- To be recognised as clean, green, and attractive; well on our way to becoming a net zero borough.

Alongside the Vision 2036, there will be a 4-year Delivery Plan which would be underpinned by the strategic vision statements and the new corporate priorities. The Delivery Plan would be linked to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The framework for this is set out below and retains the existing themes of Helping People, Shaping Places and Great Council and is made up of 6 Priorities and focus areas which sit under these.

The new framework for the 4-year Delivery Plan is:

Theme 1: Healthy Communities and Neighbourhoods

Focus Areas
- High Quality and Accessible Public Services
- Making the Borough Cleaner, Safer and Greener
- Connected with our Communities
- Healthy and Active Communities

Theme 2: High Quality Council Homes and Landlord Services

Focus Areas
- Housing Quality and Development
- Tenancy Support and Engagement

Theme 3: Tourism & Town Centre Regeneration and Vitality

Focus Areas
- Improving the Town Centre
- Attracting more visitors to the Borough
- Economic Development

Theme 4: Sustainable growth and infrastructure

Focus Areas
- Maximising the value of our assets
- Securing the right infrastructure to enable sustainable growth
- Ensuring Planning Policy and Development support sustainable growth
- Delivering a net zero borough

**Theme 5: Right conditions to support delivery**

Focus Areas
- Ensuring Good Governance and Performance Management
- Effective Organisation and Great Place to Work
- Delivering Financial Sustainability and Value for Money

Theme 6: Engaging and Connected Council

Focus Areas
- Promoting local democracy
- Engaging and communicating effectively with residents

Our 'communications offer' at a glance:

what we do and how we do it
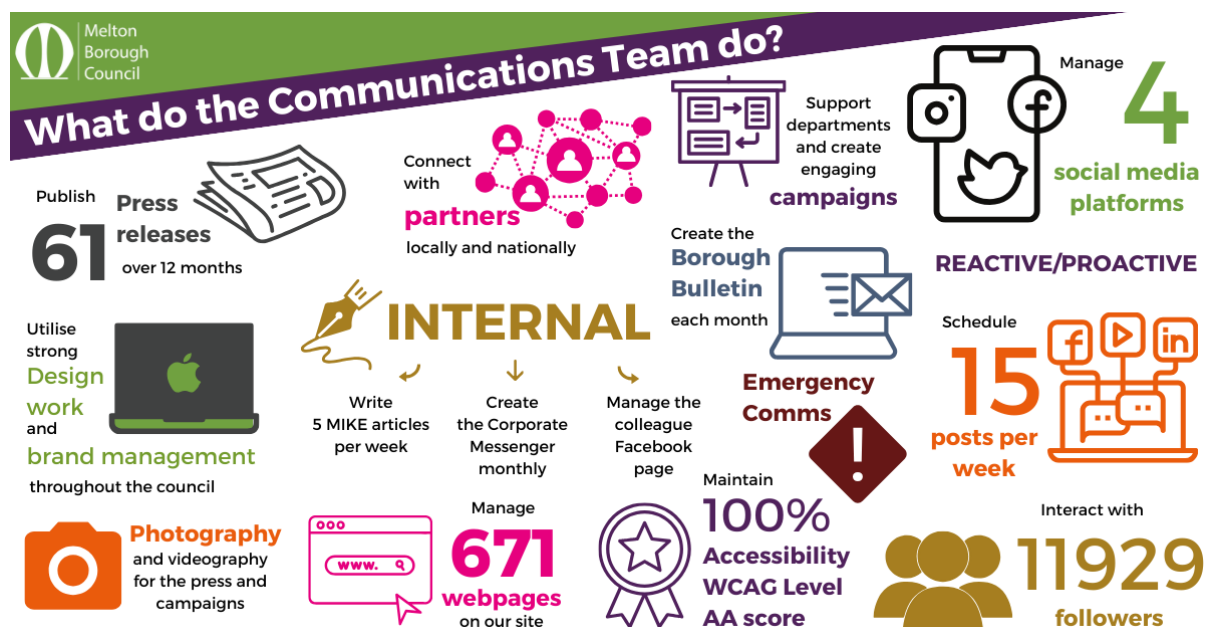
How do we gain customer insight?
- State of Melton
- Performance Data
- Community Engagement
- Customer Feedback, including website feedback and social media comments
- Complaints
- Consultation

How we monitor performance
We do have a range of performance indicators which provide the service with analytics to understand how effectively our current communications are performing in terms of the reach and impact of our communication across communities through:
- % increase in followers on Facebook and Twitter compared to previous quarter
- Average reach of posts for the quarter
- Website Accessibility score (%)
- % satisfaction with website

What are the principles we follow when communicating?

All communications issued by the Council, will follow the principles set out below carefully to ensure that content and activity meets the high standards we expect and follows our corporate branding guidance. We will ensure that:

- our messages will be timely and proactive.
- our actions will provide value for money.
- two-way communication takes place with our audiences, where we will listen to feedback, acting quickly and diligently.
- we will be transparent and honest when communicating with our customers.

- we will use positive language and celebrate the achievements of the Council.
- our approach will be based on being trusted and operating with integrity.
- we will operate a digital first approach to communities but will be inclusive to cover all our customers' needs.
- our communications will be accessible for all customers.
- when needed, we work collaboratively with partners to provide cohesive joint messaging and highlight partnership working.

What media we will use to get these messages out?

We need to clear about the media we will use to reach our audiences. This will need to be effective and the most appropriate to achieve the outcome intended. We will choose the media that will help us to deliver the desired outcome as effectively and efficiently as possible. The media which we can use are listed below:

- Media releases
- Social media content/campaigns
- Emails/e-newsletters (Direct electronic communication)
- Animation/Infographics
- Campaigns on priority themes
- Video content
- Radio/TV content
- Community and online forums
- Reception Screens
- Website
- Banners and printed resources, where suitable
- Internal magazine
- Intranet

How will we engage with our stakeholders and communities?

There are various approaches by which councils have chosen to involve their local communities, ranging from: citizens' panels and juries, neighbourhood committees and forums and community champions. Creating a more devolved approach, where individuals within the local community have more of a say, has resulted in a greater focus on connecting the development of public services with the real needs of the people who use them.

Without doubt, there are challenges for councils in involving people effectively. Barriers to successfully involving communities can include the established cultures of organisations in the public sector and the willingness and ability of service users and the public to get involved. In developing this strategy, we recognise that we will need to overcome these challenges and fully achieve our vision for the borough and its residents.

Our strategy will reflect the wide diverse communities that make up the Borough of Melton and the range of services that we provide directly or in partnership with other organisations.

The following sections cover how we engage with the residents and communities across a range of our services. More information can be found by clicking the link to the website.

Our approach and some practical tips to support you are set out in the Council's Engagement Toolkit.

To do this we work flexibly across the borough with different tools and methods.

Consultation Platform – CitizenSpace

We have recently procured a consultation platform which allows us to engage more effectively with our residents. The bespoke platform provides us with the functionality to develop and publish engaging consultation and surveys for our residents and stakeholders.

Following a consultation, we will be able to publish meaningful results and indicate actions that will be taken, allowing the respondents, and interested parties to understand the impact of engagement with the council and display the who consultation journey in one place.

Empowering Communities

Key to engagement is contacting our communities and ensuring that we listen and actively engage with residents. We work on engaging our community groups including hard to reach communities to consult, inform, advise and include them in developing the future direction and priorities across the Council.

Community Engagement

Our Community Engagement teams help deliver community grants which provide funding to deliver projects and services within the borough which demonstrate community benefit. We are also committed to supporting the refugees from Ukraine and other areas affected as best we can to be able to support the refugee effort.

We bring groups together including for example, Melton in Bloom who by working together with all the local community groups, schools, businesses and with the support of local statutory bodies, they will be adding value to all lives, whilst taking environmental responsibilities very seriously. The work encourages the support of local conservation, biodiversity and the protection of wildlife habitats throughout the area.

We also work with residents to develop our strategies and plans and ensure they reflect our communities' priorities. Through consultations we are able to reach out to a large group of people, however. we understand that success is not only measured in terms of number of people who engaged in a survey but how meaningful the responses can be. Therefore, we encourage a multi-level approach to consultations, where online surveys can be launched alongside events and communications which encourage open dialogue with the council. We have a wealth of contacts and previous consultations have seen us engaging with our consultation database, groups of interested people, wider public and over 130 local groups and organisations.

Engaging with young people

Young people are also a key target audience for engagement. We attempt to engage with them through a variety of approaches and work with a range of groups to showcase the things the council do for the borough to young people and encourage their participation.

Statement of Community Involvement

A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a document that councils are required to produce which sets out how the community can be involved in the preparation of planning policy documents and how they can have their say on planning applications. A SCI states who the Council will consult and engage with, when and how, for each of the planning functions it performs.

The Melton SCI provides clarity on the extent of community involvement that will take place, as the Council fulfils its range of its planning functions. It sets out the key standards we will

aim to achieve when involving the community throughout the preparation of planning policy documents. It also describes how we will involve the community when we consider planning applications, and how we will engage with communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans.

Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Framework.

Our approach is set out in Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Policy. Collaboration with our tenants and leaseholders will help us to shape our future direction and will be dynamic and transparent; allowing our tenants and leaseholders to influence decision-making and ensures that there is an emphasis on a joint approach. We will be responsive to tenants and leaseholders, by listening to feedback and improving services.

The framework will ensure that the voices of our tenants and leaseholders are heard and that they are given the opportunity to engage with officers and councillors, on matters pertaining to their homes and neighbourhoods.

We have a Tenant and Leaseholder Choice platform, which gives our tenants and leaseholders the option to participate as much or as little as they wish.

A small group of representative tenants and leaseholders who have expressed an interest in active engagement will be known as the "Your Choice Group". These residents will be engaged in a programme of thematic assurance through service improvement assurance groups.

Parish Councils

Parish Councils are independent of other levels of local government, such as Borough and County Councils. However, they maintain a close working relationship with both.

We actively engage with our Parish Councils as they undertake many duties such as street lighting, managing cemeteries, allotments, village halls, war memorials and markets. Parish Councillors have an active interest and concern for their local community so it's important to keep them engaged. They represent local people and work in partnership with them and others when necessary. They help facilitate the provision of local services and facilities and take decisions that form the policy of the Parish Council.

Growth and Regeneration

We actively engage with our key businesses and stakeholders through the Place Board Partnership with key stakeholders to pick up Growth and Regeneration issues across the borough.

We also work with the Melton Business Improvement District (BID) to develop the town centre. The Melton BID is committed to enhancing the vitality and vibrancy of Melton's town centre, raising its profile as a tourist and shopping destination and reducing business costs through business schemes. Working with key partners, the BID delivers a range of projects, including targeted marketing campaigns and events, business support initiatives and the promotion of Melton's heritage and visitor experience.

Priorities - campaigns to communicate/engage on

Our activity is essential to support and promote the work of the Council. To do that we focus the work that we do and create campaigns around the priorities/aspirations set out to deliver on our Vision 2036.