Communications strategy

moray
c o u n c i l

Approach

Communication plays a vital role in everything we do. As we work collectively to deliver the priorities across our Corporate Plan and our Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, meaningful communications will prove a key enabler for engagement, involvement and positive outcomes.

This is strategically embedded through our FAIR values within the Corporate Plan: Responsive – to be open and transparent; to promote community participation and involvement; and to listen to and involve our communities.

Another important focus is internal communications, using and championing employee voice and influence to further embed this positive workforce culture. Communications activity will align with employee engagement and culture workstreams to ensure colleagues are recognised and valued, continue to foster a culture of connectivity, and boost engagement, pride and morale.

A professional and progressive approach to our communications output ensures our audience reach is maximised, the people we are communicating with are better informed and engaged, have a clear understanding of what the council does and why, which has a direct benefit both for the audiences and for the council in terms of reputation management.

This strategy establishes a framework for our communication activities across the council, ensuring we get accurate and relatable messaging to our audiences at the right time, while ensuring we are proactive in encouraging feedback that can help shape future service planning, delivery and improvement. This happens through communicating with stakeholders using the channels they're familiar with and make use of. This includes a spectrum of channels including paid, earned, shared and owned media.

To be effective in continuing to cement communications as a strategic and core business function, colleagues across the council should champion its importance and value, and meaningfully embed communications as early as service planning, and before delivery.

Purpose and principles

High-quality, effective and engaging communications will develop a customer-focussed approach to:

- Improve access to and information about the Council's services – including hard-to-reach groups, to create a better understanding between the council and its stakeholders.

- Ensure effective two-way communication with all stakeholders, to maximise interest, engagement and involvement in council activities and decision-making.

- Protect and enhance the council's reputation and ensure high-quality communications are an integral part of the work of all colleagues.

- Prevent confusion and help ensure the council is seen as a single organisation with a strong sense of identity.

- Recognise, value and champion the contributions of colleagues and communities.
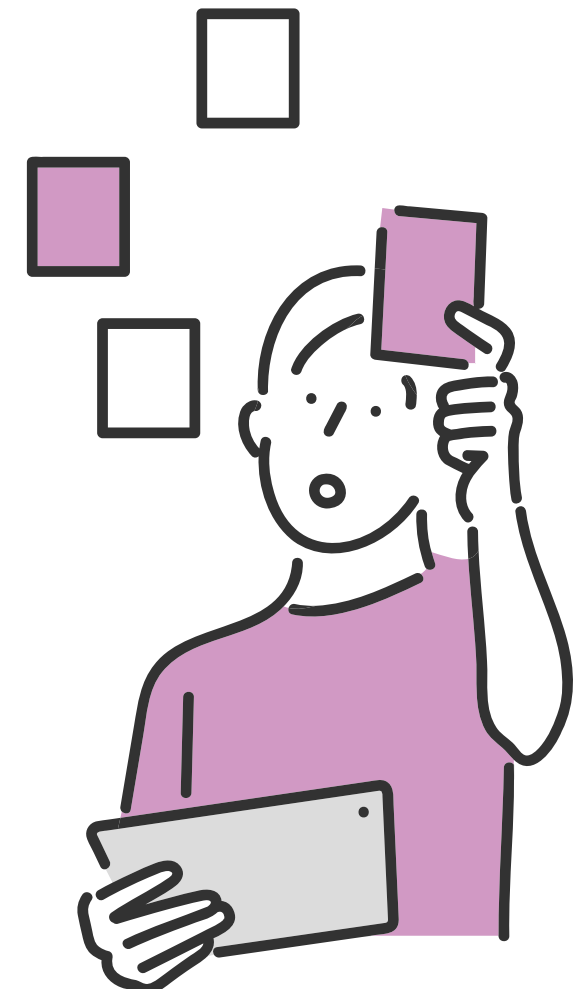
To do this we will:

- Develop a proactive, planned, resourced and managed approach to communication activities across the Council.

- Identify and champion communication as a priority activity for the Council and equip colleagues with the tools to ensure it is reflected in service and project plans.

- Deliver an integrated communications service which provides a focus and sense of direction for all Council communication activity in-line with our core values and strategic objectives.

- Adapt to the changing communications landscape, needs and demands of new and existing stakeholder groups.

- Monitor emerging trends and take responsive action to ensure our communication principles and purposes are met.

- Proactively review the communications strategy and associated documents to ensure the service provides the best support to colleagues and elected members, and the identified outcomes for stakeholders.

- Ensure the Council 'brand' is consistently linked to Council services and projects to help build trust, support and reputation.

Our communications principles are:

Inclusive: Everyone should be able to access council communications through and a channel and a format that suits their needs. We use plain English and jargon-free content.

Honest and accountable: Public relations relies on building trust with stakeholders, we do this through being truthful in all our communications and explaining the reasoning behind actions taken by the council. Communications will be clearly recognisable as coming through the council, through trusted channels and appropriate branding.

Representative and relatable: Our communications activity will represent the council and its staff by maximising employee voice and visibility to demonstrate a people-focussed organisation, and be representative of our communities. This enhances our reputation and fosters a culture of awareness and engagement.

Inspiring: We're ambitious for Moray and for the communities we support. Our communications will champion Moray's successes and opportunities, as well as the efforts and aspirations of our communities and colleagues.

Purposeful: Our communications will support and enable council services to deliver measurable outcomes for our stakeholders, which meet the objectives of our corporate plan. To maintain engagement, our communications will be purposeful and not superfluous.

Strategic priorities

To achieve purposefulness, our communications will reflect the Council's strategic priorities as set out in its corporate plan.

We will encourage and support services to consider these priorities in their communications planning and delivery, through the provision of professional guidance and tools such as communications planning templates.

- Tackle Poverty and Inequality

- Build Stronger Greener Vibrant Economy

- Build thriving, resilient, empowered communities

Audiences

Our audiences are many and varied, with internal and external stakeholders. Communication and engagement with these groups is mutually beneficial, and audience segmentation and targeted approaches will help to effectively facilitate this.

Further segmentation of the audiences set out below will allow for insight-led, targeted communications. We will support services to segment audiences to achieve optimum targeting, while achieving consistency in messaging to deliver the objective.

- Residents (e.g. housing tenants, parents with school-aged children, etc.)

- Colleagues (e.g. by location, job type, etc.)

- Partner organisations (e.g. NHS, Police Scotland, etc.)

- Community groups and councils

- Businesses

- Press and media organisations (e.g. print and broadcast media)

- Politicians and respective governments (e.g. local, regional and national)

- Visitors

Channels, tactics, and prioritisation

Amend first para to read: Moray Council's social media strategy <LINK> sets out the strategic direction of the authority's use of digital platforms to engage with audiences.

Recognising the benefits of real-time information dissemination through trusted channels, and the reduced risk of the spread of mis and disinformation, social media will remain a mainstay of our communications activity. We will continue to: prioritise engagement as a performance measure; create compelling, shareable content; build partnership relations through sharing relevant content; research and respond to emerging social trends; analyse and develop existing channels, and launch new ones to widen our reach.

However it should be recognised that not all areas or demographics within Moray have access to or are confident in the use of digital media, so our communications activity will continue to be multichannel across a spectrum of paid, earned, shared and owned media. Where appropriate we will consider a time and objective-specific campaign encompassing a range of channels for maximum reach or conversion.

The council's corporate communications audience and channel mapping tool <LINK> should be used by services, and is used by the corporate communications team, to determine the best method of communication to its varying audiences.

Press and media relations

Press and media relations continue to be an important aspect of our communications strategy as the council seeks to maximise positive coverage.

While it is generally accepted that there is an industry-wide shift away from the reliance on press and media, in favour of direct communication with audiences, it should be recognised that opportunities remain and it will still regularly feature in campaign design, as well as the day-to-day running of the communications function.

The aims of this are to: maintain a multichannel approach to maximise audience reach; increase awareness and understanding of council decisions and actions; demonstrate transparency and accountability; showcase council achievements; and to protect the council's reputation by rebutting inaccurate or unfair criticism.

Communications will continue to support service managers, Heads of Service, CMT and elected members manage the media day-to-day, and also during high-profile or sensitive issues that are likely to attract considerable interest. This could include the handling of media interviews; briefings; press conferences; issuing of statements or speeches.

A media protocol and crisis communications strategy are both available to facilitate this, where relevant.

Planning, measurement and evaluation

Crucial to the success of our communications is planning, measurement and evaluation.

Colleagues across all services will be encouraged to embed communications in their service planning, and supported to identify measureable objectives, craft key messages and recommend channels to best achieve the outputs and outcomes.

Regular forecasting will facilitate a planned and structured approach to communications delivery, setting out activity for corporate-wide and service-level projects from information fed through from service managers and lead officers. Use of a dynamic planning tool available to senior management and other internal stakeholders will allow them access to real-time oversight of planned activity, to facilitate cohesive communications.

The established OASIS framework (Objectives, Audience Insight, Strategy, Implementing and Scoring) will be used to create consistency in our approach to delivering campaigns.

Reporting mechanisms will set out the deliverables achieved by channel or campaign, wherever possible to attribute activity to outcomes achieved for the organisation, reflecting the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) globally-adopted Barcelona Principles, which present an industry-wide consensus on measurement and evaluation. These principles include a focus on goal-setting; outcomes and impacts; driving learning and insights; and can be qualitative and quantitative.

Metrics and content analysis will be detailed, to report on activity, inform future planning and facilitate insight-led approaches.

Communications Team

The Communications team is embedded within the Organisational Development section, reporting relationships are the Organisational Development Manager, and the Head of HR, ICT and OD.

The Communications Team comprises:

- Senior Communications Officer

- Communications and Media Officer

- Communications and Engagement Officer – Learning Estate

- Web Comms and Levelling Up Communications Officer

- Graphic Designer

In the event of a high-impact or sustained crisis or emergency incident, communications support may be requested from local or regional resilience partners. Similarly, we may be requested to support partner organisations through a mutual aid agreement.

Supporting documentation

To facilitate the delivery of effective communications we have a number of supporting documents, for internal use:

- Brand/ Style/ Inclusive Comms guidance
- Channel mapping
- Comms plan template
- Comms request template
- Crisis communications strategy
- Cyber resilience comms strategy
- Drone use for media
- Guide to producing accessible digital documents and content

- Influencer guidance
- Media protocol
- Permission forms
- Social Media house rules
- Social Media Policy
- Social Media Strategy
- Social Media request form
- Video guide