GUILDFORD BOROUGH

Guildford Borough Council
Communications Strategy
2017-2019

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1. Introduction

We are committed to delivering great value services for Guildford Borough residents. The effectiveness of how we deliver our vision is determined to a significant extent by the quality of our communications and engagement. This strategy outlines the approach we will take to ensure our communications and engagement activity is the best possible and helps to achieve our vision.

Effective communications and engagement will ensure that our vision, priorities and outcomes are clearly understood by local people, our workforce, our partners, local businesses and other stakeholders.

All aspects of our communications and engagement can have an impact on the Council's work and reputation. We have a collective responsibility to plan, prioritise and consider the potential impact, as well as communicate in the best way possible. We provide key services and local leadership on plans and issues that affect our community, so we must work together and with partners to provide integrated, planned and effective communications and engagement.

This strategy will be supported by individual communications plans for specific campaigns, key projects and initiatives. It is a 'living' document and will be updated to reflect changing priorities or requirements.

2. Our communications and engagement aims

Effective communications is the responsibility of all councillors and officers across the Council and this strategy needs their support and adherence.

The corporate Communications and PR team sets the strategic framework for delivering the communications and engagement functions, which is essential to the delivery of the Council's ambitions.

The framework is based on four key principles that will shape our communications delivery.

1. A commitment to place the Council's customers at the heart of all activities.
2. The various disciplines of communications are treated as a whole rather than individual elements.
3. Communications is an integrated and strategic, corporate function.
4. Communications must be of demonstrable value to the Council and the communities it serves.

We will communicate clearly, openly, accurately, regularly and at appropriate times with residents, business and our partners, and throughout the Council. We aim to promote mutual understanding and ensure a high quality service for people across our borough.

3. Our Corporate Plan 2015-2020

Our corporate vision

For Guildford to be a town and rural borough that is

- the most desirable place to live, work and visit in South East England

- a centre for education, healthcare, innovative cutting edge businesses, high-quality retail and wellbeing

- a county town set in a vibrant rural environment which balances the needs of urban and rural communities alike

- known for our outstanding urban planning and design, and with infrastructure that will properly cope with our needs.

Fundamental themes that support our vision

- **Our Borough** - ensuring that proportional and managed growth for future generations meets our community and economic needs.

- **Our Economy** - improving prosperity for all by enabling a dynamic, productive and sustainable economy that provides jobs and homes for local people.

- **Our Infrastructure** - working with partners to deliver the massive improvements needed in the next 20 years, including changes to tackle congestion issues.

- **Our Environment** - improving sustainability and protecting our countryside, balancing this with the needs of the rural and wider economy.

- **Our Society** - believing that every person matters and concentrating on the needs of the less advantaged.

- **Your Council -** ensuring a sustainable financial future to deliver improved and innovative services.

4. Council narrative and key themes

As well as the vision and fundamental themes in the Corporate Plan, it is also useful to have a simpler, overarching set of themes and messages.

These help tell a clearer story and form a narrative about the Council's aims and priorities. Evidence and activities will support the themes and outline the key elements for residents, businesses and visitors. These must also be linked to and support the fundamental themes in the Corporate Plan.

Overarching themes

1. **Guildford moving forward**

2. **Celebrating Guildford**

3. **Made in Guildford**

4. **Every person matters**

These overarching themes are supported by further detailed themes that link directly to the fundamental themes in the Corporate Plan (as shown).

Guildford moving forward

- Planning for prosperity now and for future generations by providing the homes and jobs people need (Borough, Economy, Infrastructure, Environment, Society)

- Enhancing the features that make Guildford attractive to residents, visitors and businesses (Borough, Economy, Environment)

- Tackling congestion, delays and the unreliability of journeys to improve residents' daily lives (Infrastructure)

- Meeting the challenges we face through innovative approaches to service delivery (Your Council)

Celebrating Guildford

- Being a first class centre of culture and heritage (Economy, Environment, Society)

- Celebrating all that's great about Guildford (Borough, Economy, Environment, Society)

Made in Guildford

- Supporting the local economy, local and global innovation and technology (Borough, Economy, Your Council)

- A place to learn and thrive (Borough, Economy, Environment, Society)

Every person matters

- Improving the lives of residents across the borough (Borough, Infrastructure, Economy, Environment, Society)

These themes will be incorporated as appropriate into specific and overall campaign and communication plans and activities.

External environment

This strategy must also take account of external pressures and challenges. The external environment is ever changing. It will affect our tactical approach and we will plan accordingly.

The current external environment:

- removal of government funding and need to generate new revenues and income
- balancing green belt protection and delivery of new homes and infrastructure, particularly increased affordable housing
- Brexit – changing situation for government, the economy, individuals
- continued fiscal austerity
- pressures on service capacity and capability
- centralisation of public services
- need to engage the public in tough decisions
- cyber threats – and other security issues
- need to protect Council brand and reputation
- extension of Right to Buy to housing associations
- forced sale of Council housing stock
- hardening public attitudes to austerity
- greater public awareness of service reductions
- proliferation of media channels and access for excluded groups.

Emerging opportunities:

- delivering the new Local Plan
- bringing forward schemes with partners to deliver local infrastructure improvements
- the opportunity of devolution to deliver both growth and whole system reform
- a clear focus on delivering outcomes rather than services alone
- the potential and power of digital and data to transform services and engage residents, businesses and communities
- forming new partnerships
- proven track record in transformation
- ability to deliver outcome-based approach
- the strength of our local and the South East economy
- how to measure impact and success

5. Corporate communications & engagement strategy

We are committed to making all our communications and engagement activities:

- two-way – both informing and listening
- relevant and appropriate for target audiences
- accessible and cost-effective
- easily understood by everyone in our community
- consistent and timely
- honest, open and accountable.

A successful strategy and framework must establish and maintain clear, relevant communication to:

- increase awareness and understanding about the Council's vision

- maintain a culture of two-way communication with our target audiences to ensure that feedback is consistently fed into service planning and delivery

- keep residents, businesses, visitors, stakeholders, staff, councillors, the Mayor and partners well informed and promote understanding

- address negative or potentially damaging information about services and protect the Council's reputation

- support our staff in their roles as ambassadors for the organisation and elected councillors and the Mayor in their role as community leaders

- reach all sections of the community

- keep abreast of technological developments and embrace them where feasible

- promote respect and trust between the Council and its communities

- raise the profile of Guildford Borough

- maintain a strong and consistent identity for the Council

- promote Council services to maximise access to them

- develop and promote opportunities for residents, community groups and other stakeholders to engage with the Council

- maintain and improve customer satisfaction levels with the Council

- involve residents, community groups and other stakeholders in research, policy development and decision-making.

6. Communications objectives

Working with partners and others across the Council as necessary, the key objectives of the corporate Communications and PR Team are to:

- inform and promote understanding of residents, businesses, visitors, partners and stakeholders about the Council's aims and key priorities, the services it provides and how they can get involved in shaping decisions

- maintain a strong and recognisable Council brand and identity

- promote and uphold the Council's reputation

- ensure that our workforce is involved and engaged through good internal communications, so that they can represent and champion the Council in the community

- plan, develop, and advise on the strategy and implementation of coordinated communications and engagement activities across the Council and associated protocols and standards.

7. How do we communicate and engage?

There are currently many ways to communicate with people, and for them to communicate with us, including face to face, our Customer Service Centre, our website, traditional and social media, consultations and events. All audiences have high expectations for a rapid response and time-critical information.

The communications landscape is ever changing, with a clear channel shift towards online and digital methods and tools, particularly with the decline in the print media.

To continue to innovate we will focus on the following.

Improving our digital communications

- working with the Web Team to help make our website a convenient, quick and easy way to engage with us and use our services

- using appropriate new ways to engage through digital and social media

- developing digital channels and digital marketing as alternatives to print or PR when appropriate.

Tailoring communications and engagement to maximise impact

- using data to tailor activity to reach groups of people more effectively

- evaluating our approach to continue to increase effectiveness

- joining up activity to reach key groups of people in the most effective way and provide value for money.

Maintaining a strategic approach

- focusing on the priorities in our Corporate Plan.

Ensuring Guildford has an influential voice

- presenting the borough's views on our priorities locally, regionally and nationally.

Providing opportunities for people to engage on issues and services

- increasing opportunities for people to get involved by developing existing and new channels.

Providing the best communications and engagement by working as one team

- building on effective, coordinated communications and engagement that is consistently high quality and provides value for money

- working with partners and others across the Council to co-ordinate communications and engagement for the benefit of residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

Who communicates?

Communication is the responsibility of every officer and councillor of the Council.

The corporate Communications and PR team is responsible for developing and delivering the associated plans that underpin this strategy.

The team manages the Council's communications function and provides procedures, guidance and advice, to ensure that information is exchanged in an accurate, effective and consistent way. This includes for ongoing and daily activities, longer-term projects of all sizes, marketing, promotion and emergency crisis communications.

As well as proactive communication and managing media relations, the corporate team also advises on and deals with reactive enquiries from journalists on behalf of the Council.

Journalists can expect us to:

- foster a cooperative, courteous and mutually beneficial relationship

- regard them as partners in providing people with timely, accurate information

- make every effort to assist them with their requests and enquiries.

The Council expects to be reported fairly and accurately and given a reasonable opportunity to reply to media enquiries.

8. Audience-led campaigns – a strategic approach

Our residents do not live their lives within organisational boundaries. In the course of a morning they can be a parent, a carer, a commuter, an entrepreneur and much more besides. They are unlikely to think of themselves as Council 'service users' or 'customers'.

An audience-led campaign approach, that supports our corporate themes, will help identify and agree priorities to enable more focus on strategic and associated activities.

Clear prioritisation and forward planning is also critical for effectively managing ad-hoc or unplanned requests. These requests can lead to a confused or diluted narrative and take time and resources away from key priorities.

- Building campaigns around audiences rather than services ensures a sharper focus on customers and stakeholder groups, and increases the relevance of the information they receive.

- A robust campaign is a series of communications activities with a common objective or theme, designed to influence the target audience's perceptions, or effect a behaviour change. This applies to both internal and external campaigns.

All internal and external campaigns should:

- be championed by senior management

- support Council priorities and improve reputation

- show measurable outcomes, and demonstrate value for money

- engage with the audience rather than just informing

- incorporate research, analysis and evaluation

- use an appropriate variety of channels.

The key deliverables of audience-led campaigns:

- implement the strategies that have been designed to influence particular groups

- employ the Council's key communications channels and functions to support campaign activity

- led by an over-arching strategy that drives effective communications through
  - clear objectives and proactive tactics
  - identified target audience groups
  - consistent messaging
  - a full range of communications tools
  - supported by sustained monitoring and evaluation.

Key campaign messages should:

- focus on what we want the target audience to know, think or do

- be tailored and avoid contradiction or unrealistic promises

- use statistics and case studies

- gain third party endorsements

- and make target audiences sit up and take notice.

As well as getting support and advice from the corporate team, everyone across the Council should apply the following basic test to all internal and external communications proposals. It is more effective and efficient to consider these points and plan ahead, rather than jump straight to tactics.

- Why do we want to do this?

- How does it fit in with our priorities?

- What are we trying to achieve – is it relevant?

- Who are we communicating with?

- What is the possible impact of this – positive or negative?

- What is the most cost effective way to achieve this and by when?

- And work with the corporate team to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Prioritisation Framework

In order to establish the level of resource that needs to be allocated to each campaign, a prioritisation level should be attached to it.

Priorities can change throughout the life of a campaign depending on activity, deadlines and timescales. Below are the summary requirements for each category.

Priority 1

- A high level corporate priority that is of strategic importance to the Council.
- Requires consistent long-term attitude or behavioural change among target audiences.
- Is a politically important issue.
- Has clear delivery objectives that link directly to priority targets.
- Requires significant communications activities.
- Has a clearly defined and specific target audience.
- Is a high priority to residents as identified in survey or satisfaction ratings.

Priority 2

- Is of strategic importance to the Council.
- Requires attitude or behavioural change among target audiences (both short and long term).
- Has clear delivery objectives that link to strategic objectives.
- Requires a smaller mix of communications activities.
- Has a broader audience.
- Is a medium priority to residents as identified in survey or satisfaction ratings.

Priority 3

- Requires short-term recognition from target audiences.
- Has a very broad audience.
- Is a short-term burst of communications activities.
- Communicates one-off pieces of activity.
- Has no clear need for attitude or behaviour change among residents.

Other

- Anything not linking to corporate objectives will receive communications support in the form of appropriate media relations or social media only.

The tables below demonstrate a strategic approach to messaging.

To achieve maximum impact, we set out what we want people to hear, see and believe about the borough and the Council (out takes). The key messages to achieve these, which when delivered regularly and consistently will collaboratively build to create the out takes described. Using specific examples or proof points to evidence and give life to the messages.

Key corporate messages – simple example for Priority 1

Out take	Messages	Proof points
' I have noticed improvements in local transport'	We are working with partners to tackle congestion and improve the borough's road network	Government funding announced for A3 junction improvements
	We are working with Network Rail on new railway stations and improved rail connections	Work starts on new Walnut Bridge for pedestrians and cyclists in the town
	Integrated transport is part of our new Town Centre Regeneration Strategy	

Key corporate messages – simple example for Priority 2

Out take	Messages	Proof points
' We can easily recycle in Guildford'	We have a range of recycling to meet all needs We are consistently improving our services and collection Recycling saves money and the environment	*We are 13th in the country for recycling* *Increase in take up of garden waste collection scheme*

Key corporate messages – simple example for Priority 3

Out take	Messages	Proof points
'Guildford is a centre for innovation with good job prospects'	Get involved, be inspired and join in the free fun at Innovate Guildford 2017 Find out more about work and opportunities from global-leading local companies Celebrating science and arts across the borough	*Increase in exhibitors and visitors to Innovate Guildford science and arts festival* *Positive feedback and majority of audience were new in 2017*

9. New opportunities, priorities and next steps

The corporate Communications and PR team owns and manages the Communications Strategy and associated plans, and any service plans should be subsidiary to this.

To help implement this across the Council, any communications or marketing roles in services should have a dotted line to the corporate team and attend the regular corporate communications group meetings.

To increase mutual understanding, and assist with effective communications and forward planning, they should also meet someone in the corporate team on a regular basis. This enables proactive discussion and agreement of upcoming strategic and tactical events, activities and opportunities.

Below are the priorities, opportunities and actions for next steps to ensure continuous improvement in our communication and engagement.

Opportunities, priorities and next steps

- Identify and prioritise campaigns for the next 12 to 18 months with senior officers and the Executive, ensuring each has a plan, an owner, a champion, and clear and measurable objectives.

- Use agreed campaign and priority framework to reduce ad-hoc, unplanned and last minute requests.

- Use social media to increase opportunities for instant feedback and involvement.

- Update and promote our social media standards making sure they are owned by the corporate team and understood by all.

- Use new technology as appropriate to get news quickly and effectively to audiences, maximising the mobile-enabled aspects of our website.

- Agree the core campaigns and factor out anything that doesn't fit within them.

- Commission research to find out how residents get their news and information, and use this to influence where we place our focus.

- Update the communications media protocol and ensure councillors have clarity and understanding, and enforce it.

- Audit branded materials to ensure consistency, and ensure communications sign-off for all new Council collateral.