

## 1. Introduction

Northampton residents and businesses are at the heart of everything we do. The ambitious plans outlined in our Corporate Plan are aimed at building a stronger economy, creating resilient communities and delivering exceptional services everyone can be proud of.

Communication has a vital role to play in this, ensuring that people are aware of the excellent services we provide and how to access them. It is also important to remember that communication is a two-way process and that we need to listen to residents as much as we talk to them.

At times we will want to encourage residents to change their behaviour, perhaps to increase recycling or boost town centre fortunes for instance, and good communication is a crucial tool in achieving this. Also, within such challenging financial conditions, effective engagement can help protect the council's reputation and improve public confidence.

Therefore the ultimate aim of this strategy is to ensure all staff, residents, partners and everyone who deals with Northampton Borough Council have a clear understanding and a positive perception of our vision, aims, values, services and achievements, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and engagement.

## 2. Our corporate priorities

We have a new Corporate Plan to take us through to March 2020, when Northamptonshire is expected to be part of significant changes in the local government landscape. An anticipated move to unitary governance is the subject of several separate communications strategies which are continually being adapted to ensure they achieve the desired results.

In the meantime, our corporate vision is simple:

- We are **ambitious** about Northampton's economic fortunes with particular focus on the town centre and enterprise zone
- Our aim is to ensure Northampton is a **prosperous** place where people can achieve their ambitions
- A great many of our residents are **proud** of Northampton and we want to give them ever more reasons to love the town

With this vision in mind, our mission is to be enterprising and innovative in our approach, working with customers, communities and partners to deliver a great Northampton in which to live, work study and invest.

Our priorities are to create:

- A stronger economy
- Resilient communities
- Exceptional services to be proud of

Key messages arising from each priority are covered in the "What will we communicate section" below.

### **3. Purpose and commitment**

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure communication about the council's priorities is carried out in an effective and consistent way.

We are committed to:

- Ensuring our communication is valuable and accessible to all
- Representing the full diversity of our communities and ensuring equality of access to all our services
- Providing accurate information in a clear and simple style
- Using a wide range of methods in a holistic, joined-up manner, to maximise reach
- Engaging in two-way conversations to capture the views of our audiences
- Being open and transparent in our approach

#### **3.1 Key objectives and outcomes**

- Deliver a first class media management service
- Streamline and strengthen our digital channels and content
- Develop key print publications
- Execute proactive campaigns that support corporate priorities
- Support and engage staff in their roles as ambassadors for the Council

#### **3.2 At the end of this strategy the Council's communications will:**

- Improve relationships and positive output from local media agencies
- Empower audience members to manage their own information and service needs
- Be better led by audience enquiries and feedback
- Increase footfall to events and attractions and improve engagement with campaigns
- Be more accessible and engaging
- Have solid, built-in evaluation and monitoring techniques

### **4. What will we communicate?**

As outlined previously, a primary function of this strategy is to ensure our audiences are well informed about council services. In order to achieve this, we need to deliver regular, clear and consistent messages based on the council's key priorities.

The three priority areas outlined above are broken down into subsections and a pick-and-mix selection of key messages for each of these can be found in appendix 1. Our headline key messages are as follows:

**A stronger economy** – We are creating a thriving, vibrant town which is clean, safe and attracts regular investment

**Resilient Communities** – We engage, protect and empower our diverse communities with partnership working, regular events and activities and increased housing support

**Exceptional services to be proud of** – we are committed to providing exceptional services which always put our customer first, help increase our income and promotes our open and honest approach

## **5. Who communicates with whom?**

Everyone associated with Northampton Borough Council has a responsibility to protect its reputation, so an understanding of the impact their actions have is vital.

Quite simply, everyone has the potential to communicate with everyone, so it is important that all staff and councillors understand the basic principles by which we work.

As a communications team, our primary audiences are as follows:

- Staff and potential new staff and trades unions
- Residents
- Businesses and potential investors
- Members, partner councils, town and parish councils
- Northamptonshire's Health Sector
- Northamptonshire Police and PCC and other emergency services
- Educational establishments
- Voluntary and community sector
- MPs, Central Government
- Media

In many instances, staff and members from across the rest of the organisation will engage with each other or external stakeholders. In these instances, they should adhere as closely as possible to the commitments in section 3 above.

## **6. How do we communicate?**

There is a wide variety of methods for communication and we try and utilise as many of them as possible, to ensure we reach the maximum number of people. This document deals primarily with external communications, but we also use a wide variety of internal communications channels to engage with staff.

### **Media**

Media can be an effective way to disseminate information but the results can be variable. Advertising is the only guaranteed way to ensure the Council's primary messages remain intact. It is worth noting that Northamptonshire has dedicated Local Democracy Reporting Service staff scrutinising Council activity so the more proactive the Council can be in terms of communicating about its activity, the better. For this reason, it is important that the Communications Team receives timely updates from all service areas where appropriate.

### **Press conferences**

These are used extremely sparingly in order to maintain impact. They are usually necessary when there is a particularly big announcement which requires or is likely to attract a high level of media involvement.

### **Media interviews**

Cabinet members usually undertake media interviews though, in some circumstances and with their agreement, staff might offer interviews where that is the more expedient or effective option. It is important that key messages are understood and adhered to.

### **Press releases**

These are used frequently in order to ensure key messages remain in the public domain. Content is always focused on Council or partnership activity with the intention of informing members of the public about initiatives, events and developments in the borough.

### **Social Media**

Primarily Facebook and Twitter, though the council also utilises Instagram to promote Love Northampton activity. This activity could be used to support more extensive activity via web, press release, direct mail and so on, or to provide bite-sized chunks of detail to ensure key messages become established.

### **Website**

The Council's revamped website was launched in November 2018 and its news section is used as a repository for council updates which are then promoted via a variety of methods, primarily social media.

### **Direct mail and advertising**

Due to cost these are used sparingly for particularly hard-to-reach groups, though Council Tax demands offer an ideal opportunity to communicate with every household within the borough. Advertising is sometimes considered in local publications to promote events in the locality.

### **Parish meetings and community groups**

Parish meetings or attendance at community groups offers the opportunity to engage directly with specific communities, where residents can ask questions and receive updates. It is often also a good opportunity to distribute printed materials without the additional cost of postage.

### **Members**

Council members are clearly ambassadors for the Council and its work, and have the ability to access and inform sections of their communities which might otherwise be hard to reach. They are provided with as much information as possible in order that they can speak with authority when asked about Council activity.

### **Staff**

Well-informed and engaged staff can provide an effective ambassadorial front-line role when dealing with residents.

### **Voluntary and community organisations**

Each authority engages with local volunteers and they are encouraged to distribute and spread the word about Council activity.

### **Internal channels**

The Council uses a wide variety of internal communications channels from face-to-face staff briefings to a staff e-newsletter. For a full outline see the refreshed Internal Communications Strategy agreed by Corporate Management Board in October 2018.

## **6.1 Engagement and consultation**

The council engages and consults with the public regarding many aspects of its work. This is usually carried out by individual service areas but where appropriate the Communications Team helps publicise.

A variety of methods are adopted for both engagement and consultation:

### **Forums**

Departments work with a wide variety of organisations including residents', community, and parish clerks' forums, park management committees, and voluntary sector partners, including regular meetings. These offer the opportunity to engage directly with the community and encourage participation in consultations.

### **Survey Monkey**

This is the Council's primary tool for carrying out consultations, coupled with publicity through an appropriate assortment of channels.

### **Email**

In some circumstances, consultation responses are requested via direct email, publicised in the same way as the Council's Survey Monkey work.

### **External consultants**

The council also makes judicious use of consultants where the situation dictates that this is the most appropriate mechanism.

## **7. Did it work?**

As part of the communications process, it is important to consider how success will be measured.

There are a number of excellent indicators, some of which are outlined below:

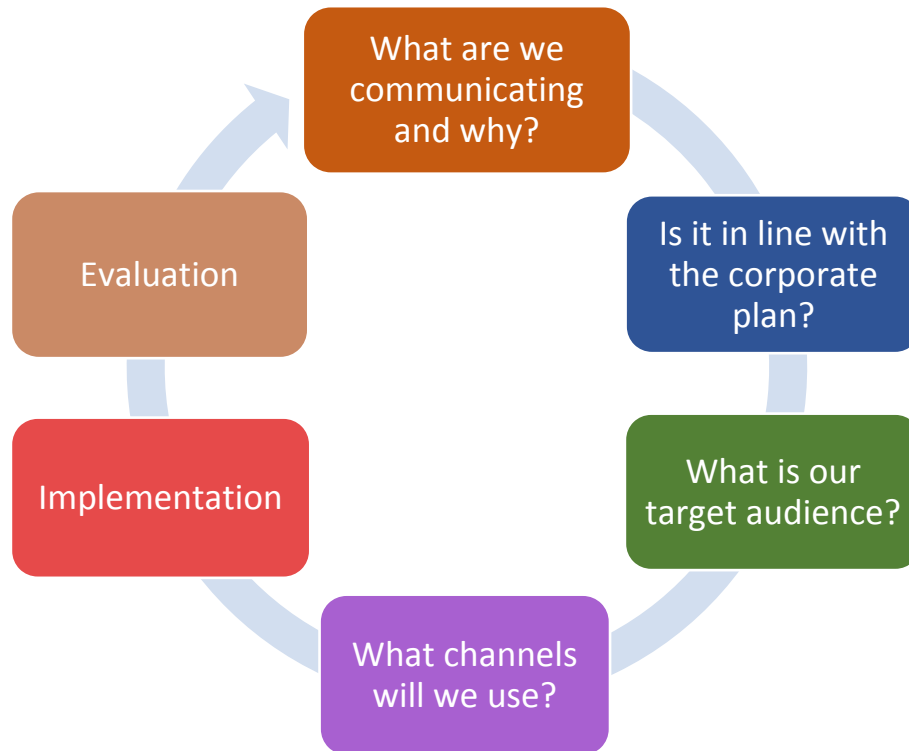
- Public consultation results
- Resident surveys
- Community group engagement
- Customer feedback
- Feedback from stakeholder partners
- Google analytics regarding messaging
- Social media metrics (both in terms of views and interactions)
- Web page views
- External monitoring by organisations like SOCITM, the society for public sector IT practitioners
- Media coverage

Staff surveys can offer a good indication of whether internal communications have been successful, though in most instances just speaking with colleagues is the best way to gauge progress.

## **8. Communications cycle**

Each time we identify a new message, no matter the audience, we will follow the same process. Not only will this ensure our communications are as effective as possible in each instance, it will also

provide incremental improvements.



## Appendix 1 – Key messages by priority area

This appendix offers a suite of potential key messages which can be used, mixed and matched depending on the external communications going out.

### A stronger economy

<b>A clean, green and tidy town</b>	<b>Creating a thriving, vibrant town</b>	<b>Shaping place and driving growth</b>
We work with partners to make Northampton a clean and attractive place for residents and visitors alike	We arrange and support a wide range of events and activities throughout the year to celebrate the town, its businesses, communities and heritage	We already have several key strategies in place and are working on more to ensure growth is planned, strategic and effective
We carefully manage our environmental services and enforcement contracts to ensure they operate in an effective and reasonable way to raise standards and change anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping and littering	We are working to improve Northampton's Market Square to create a focal point for more town centre activity, building on a wide and diverse range of events held there	We will continue to seek additional investment to enable project and infrastructure delivery
Improved air quality, particularly in areas with high pollution readings, is a priority	Working with partners, we endeavour to ensure Northampton is safe and welcoming	Our strategies will help us attract additional development and investment across the borough
	We establish and support ways of highlighting Northampton's long and rich history and its current cultural offer	
	Work with developers to ensure schemes make a positive contribution to the vitality of Northampton and its communities	

### Resilient Communities

<b>Keeping the town and people safe</b>	<b>Empowering local people</b>	<b>More homes, better homes</b>
Our successful campaigns around encouraging safer nights out and reducing knife crime will continue to be developed	We engage with partners and communities, through a variety of forums and our neighbourhood wardens and park rangers, on days of action which bring residents and	We are working with developers and other delivery partners to accelerate delivery of much-needed housing

	businesses together to work on neighbourhood priorities	
We are taking an active part in delivering solutions to risks, including the introduction of a taxi-marshalling scheme and the establishment of safe routes home	We work with schools to deliver community safety and environmental messages in order to instil acceptable behaviours early	Our enforcement work in the private rental sector is nationally recognised and we continue to build on that good reputation
We use the powers available to us through the activity of our neighbourhood wardens, park rangers and enforcement contract to tackle environmental issues including noise nuisance and anti-social behaviour	Our work to support community events like Diwali, Chinese New Year and the Northampton Carnival helps bring residents together to celebrate diversity	We work with a wide range of partner organisations to reduce homelessness and remove the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton
We continue to work with community safety partners to tackle serious and organised crime, including county lines drugs gangs		Having demonstrated its effectiveness, we are now looking to increase capacity of Northampton's Nightshelter to accommodate women
The work we do helps protect the most vulnerable in our society		We are looking to create a stock of homes which can act as temporary accommodation, thereby decreasing our reliance on bed and breakfast
Thousands of residents come together each year for our firework display which helps cut back on the number of domestic events which often end in injury and damage to property		

### Exceptional services to be proud of

<b>Spending your money wisely</b>	<b>Putting the customer first</b>	<b>Improving governance</b>
We have established good lines of communication with our staff which is helping maintain good levels of job satisfaction, retention and a desire to deliver value for money	We will continue to provide excellent customer service as assessed by the Cabinet Office against its exacting standards	We are open and honest in our approach and ensure information is available to customers wherever possible
We have established close working links with other local authorities across the county in order to explore the	We work closely with a wide range of relevant partners to provide a holistic service to customers at the first point of	Our governance processes have been continually improved during the past few years and we are constantly



potential for joint working and achieve economies of scale	contact	looking for ways to enhance our approach
We are considering potential investments which could help increase income and reduce reliance on decreasing government grants	We have improved the council website to help customers access our services more readily and we continue to monitor access to ensure that content is relevant and up to date	
We seek to wisely spend the funds that we collect through taxation		