COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

2025-2028

Contents

1. **Introduction**

This strategy is for the period from April 2025 to March 2028. It covers our principles and approach to communications for both High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, which have been working together over the past 15 years as a Strategic Alliance. It also includes an annual action plan which will be updated annually during the course of this strategy period.

While each Council has its own identity and decision making powers, they are managed by a shared Alliance Leadership Team and Alliance Management Team. This extends to the Communications function (part of the Organisational Development and Transformation service), one of whose main activities is to produce monthly Communications Plans for each Council to guide their work. The plans are presented and discussed at Alliance Management Team, Executive, and Cabinet meetings and then implemented by the Communications Team.

Following publication of the Government's White Paper on English Devolution in December 2024, this strategy is expected to take us to the abolition of both High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, which are due to be replaced by unitary councils in each county from April 2028.

2. **Why communication matters**

2.1   The Local Government Association (LGA) and the national communications body for marketing and communications in the public sector, LGcommunications, advocate a strategy of building trust among our customers. LGA says:

"Our customers should know what is available, why we have taken the decisions we have and how they can access our services. They must be able to trust not just what we tell them but that we will engage with them and place them at the core of our thinking. Trust builds and maintains our reputation; brings customers, partners, stakeholders and staff on the journey we have mapped out and enables us to achieve our aims and objectives, be they at a broad place-based level or pertaining to specific behaviour influencing campaigns."

2.2   Firmly in mind, is keeping our residents and businesses informed, listening to their concerns and involving them when making decisions. Being informed, listened to, and having the opportunity to be involved when the Councils make decisions can have a significant impact on people's satisfaction with our Councils and the services they provide.

2.3   It is equally important that people know we are well-run organisations that provide value for money to our council tax payers and the customers that use our services.

2.4   We can help achieve that by creating a compelling narrative, telling our various audiences what we do, how we do things, and why we need to work more effectively in the future. In section 9 we explore this further in `Creating a narrative`.

2.5   Understanding our audiences is also key to ensuring our communications reaches the right people at the right time; about being proactive, transparent, open and honest; clear and concise; accessible; relevant and appropriate; and inclusive with all the audiences we communicate with. In section 10 `Understanding our audiences - stakeholder analysis` we explain how we can best understand our audiences and how identifying them can help in our communications planning.

2.6   What follows, therefore, is a strategy and approach we will use that enables us to be organisations that can develop and sustain a Borough and a District that:

-    deliver quality services at the right time,
-    seek opportunities for economic growth; and
-    are ones which seek to look after their most vulnerable residents.

It is a strategy and approach where good communication and well managed public relations is at the heart of everything we do.

2.7   Communications is a two-way process - it is about giving people the opportunity to express their views and opinions as well as providing information. As such it has a close relationship with consultation and engagement, which is referred to in section 13.

2.8   Research by polling company Ipsos MORI has consistently found that the more residents and businesses feel informed, the more they tend to be satisfied with public services and their local authority. The research also shows that overall satisfaction with local authorities is further heightened when an informed public feel they can influence local decision making.

2.9   This is why we give communications at High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council such a high profile and why all of our communications and public relations work needs to be informed and guided by this strategic approach.

3.   Aims of the strategy

3.1   We have two principal aims in creating this strategy:

i)   *"To use a range of communication techniques, with an increasing emphasis on social media, digital and video communication, to ensure our customers, employees, members, partners and communities are informed and can become aware about the services, facilities and projects we deliver and have the opportunity to give their views about the work we do."*

ii)   *"To encourage channel shift but also to recognise, and aim to reach where we can, those residents who are less able to access social media and digital communication, by continuing to use more traditional forms of communication."*

3.2   In order to achieve this we need to have proactive, timely and well organised communications activities that gain local, regional and, occasionally, national recognition. We also need to be clear and concise in how we communicate.

3.3   Most importantly, we need to learn from what has worked well, by actively seeking feedback from residents, businesses, partners and our employees, in order to shape and refresh the ways in which we communicate.

3.4   We must not stand still in our approach to communications. There is always more we can do.

4.   Our communications principles

4.1   These are guided by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations definition:

"Public Relations is about reputation - the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public Relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour."

4.2   We also like this definition from the International Public Relations Association:

"Public relations is a decision-making management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organisations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods."

4.3   In order to achieve the aims of the strategy, we are committed to ensuring all internal and external communication is guided by these principles and is:

- **Open and honest** - presenting a clear picture of what's happening, when and why, and dealing with people's concerns

- **Clear and consistent** - all communication should be easy to understand and use jargon-free language
- **Relevant and timely** - communicate what people need to know when they need to know it, with an increasing emphasis on digital communication through our website and social media channels (which can also be more cost effective)
- **Targeted** - we will use various communication channels to meet the diverse needs of our communities
- **Accessible and two-way** - using a range of communication channels and feedback mechanisms to maximise reach and encourage dialogue with all sectors of our community

5. What we will do as a team - and what we expect of others

5.1 As a team we will:

- Provide a responsive media relations service working effectively with the local, regional, national and trade media to promote our work, protect our reputation and provide information about our services and activities
- Advise officers and members on media issues as they affect our work
- Ensure our branding is used consistently across our publications, advertising, signs, information boards and digital communication
- Promote the use of jargon free English in all our communication
- Ensure the Councils' websites and our social media channels are kept up to date, which includes working with internal web editors and training them as required to ensure useful content is provided and standards are upheld, and the sites are accessible to our customers; as well as continuing to develop new website features
- Assist and promote channel shift to our websites and encourage customers to access information online
- Support officers, members and partners to promote the Borough and District as good places for people to live, work, visit and invest in
- Deliver timely information to stakeholders through the media, social media, our website and publications
- Be alert to emerging issues on a national, regional and local level

5.2 What we expect from others:

Everyone has responsibility for communications

Our employees must be at the heart of this strategy. They are all potential ambassadors to promote the work and ambitions of the Councils, with many living in the Borough and District and having family and friends who live or work here. Everything therefore we proactively publicise externally needs our colleagues to be aware of.

Our members are the eyes and ears of the community. Better informed councillors will help us connect more with those we serve and ensure misinformation is addressed.

Partners - more timely and transparent communication with our partners will promote greater trust and support for what we want to achieve.

Alliance Leadership Team

To communicate effectively, in a timely manner, using appropriate means and communications channels

To adhere to the principles of the Communications Strategy when delivering the Borough Plan, the Corporate Plan and the Councils' priorities

To take note of and contribute to the internal communications produced, ask questions if required and help shape how we communicate to one another inside the Councils

To communicate decisions and the thinking that supports them, clearly and in a timely manner, so essential information can be delivered to employees and stakeholders

Alliance Management Team

To advise the Communications Team on the key issues that require communications support, or concerns work and activities requiring promotion

To consider any communications implications or potential media stories within service areas and to liaise with the Communications Team as appropriate

Ensure branding and promotional materials adhere to our brand guidelines, are appropriate and understandable to our target audiences

To be aware of overall web content; working with web editors representing individual services

6.   How we will communicate the priorities and objectives of the Councils

6.1   As mentioned, the Councils' work is guided by the Borough Plan at High Peak (covering 2023-2027) and the Corporate Plan at Staffordshire Moorlands (covering 2023-2027).

The Borough Plan has five aims:

- Supporting our communities to create a healthier and safer High Peak
- Future proof housing
- Protect and create jobs by supporting economic growth, development and regeneration
- Protect and improve the environment including responding to the climate emergency
- A responsive, smart, financially resilient and forward-thinking Council

The Corporate Plan has four aims:

- Help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work
- Use resources effectively and provide value for money
- Help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages
- Protect and improve the environment

The Communications Team has a key role to play in helping to achieve the ambitions in our Borough Plan and Corporate Plan.

6.2   Individual communication plans will be required for projects (as part of our project management principles) and major pieces of work. These will help identify appropriate audiences and channels, and ensure we deliver our key messages and encourage engagement with stakeholders.

6.3   Overall we will relate our communications back to the Borough Plan and Corporate Plan and their aims, wherever we can. This can be on the Councils' websites, our social media channels and when we write media releases. Our monthly Communications Plans will capture the key Borough Plan and Corporate Plan projects, as well as other key communications work.

6.4   In the Staffordshire Moorlands we have an important role to play in helping to support the Council's work over the past two years to strengthen relationships with its 40 plus town and parish councils: creating a Parish Assembly, relating this to the Community Leadership Scheme, and introducing a new newsletter. We are also looking to strengthen relations with the High Peak's town and parish councils through the Parish Forum. The scope of this work now needs to be extended to ensure that the towns and parishes are equipped for future models that may be adopted through local government reorganisation, where the Government wants to see `stronger community engagement` and to `deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment'.

6.5   In particular in the High Peak we have a role to play in supporting and working with the Communications team at the East Midlands County Combined Authority (EMCCA) as part of the devolution already established in the East Midlands Region.

6.6   It goes without saying that Communications has many partner relationships; with neighbouring district and borough councils, the county councils, the NHS, police and fire services, Government, and other public agencies it comes into contact with. Collaborative and partnership working will take place as required, to the benefit of our Councils.

7. The Councils' current communications activities

7.1 We currently use a wide range of communications channels and tools including:

- Media relations - newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and online
- The Councils' websites www.highpeak.gov.uk and www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk
- The Councils' social media channels - Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and YouTube sites
- The Councils' intranet site
- Marketing and campaigns on specific issues, or to promote individual services
- Newsletters for the business sector in the Borough and the District, and for parishes and town councils in the Staffordshire Moorlands
- Printed literature including posters and leaflets
- Video and photography (including use of drones)
- Corporate publications including the Borough Plan, the Corporate Plan, Annual Reports at both Councils, and the council tax leaflets
- Case studies
- Stakeholder mapping
- Public meetings as required
- Presenting at external events and exhibitions
- Entering awards competitions
- Internal communications including the intranet used by employees and members, a monthly Team Talk for employees, team meetings led by heads of service, and All Staff Emails

7.2 With the pace of communications technology and changes in demographics, it is important that we continually monitor and seek to refresh the ways in which we communicate as an organisation and the channels we use, not least to ensure that our strategy is up to date and meets the needs of the communities we serve.

7.3 At present, people communicate with us face-to-face, by phone, email, post, social media, website feedback forms, third parties (members and partners, forums, consultations, and questions at meetings).

8. Overall strategic approach

8.1 *We will communicate the right messages*

In line with our communications principles, our communications will be relevant and inform people of what they need to know and most importantly when they need to know.

8.2   *We will communicate to the right people (i.e. target audiences)*

It is essential to identify the relevant audiences we communicate with in order to deliver the most relevant messages through the most appropriate channels. Section 10 goes into more detail on this.

Our main audiences include:

INTERNAL

- Executive and Cabinet members
- Elected members
- Employees at all levels and locations
- Trades unions
- Alliance Leisure, Alliance Environmental Services, and Alliance Norse (the Councils' controlled companies)
- Partners

EXTERNAL

- Customers and residents
- Business community and potential investors
- Visitors
- Suppliers
- MPs in High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands
- Neighbouring councils
- Community and voluntary organisations
- Government and Government agencies
- Media - online and offline, local, regional, national and trade

8.3   *We will communicate through the appropriate channel - recognising diversity and being inclusive*

Recognising diversity and being inclusive when communicating with our residents is vital. We take these into account by having a flexible approach and being aware of the needs of our different audiences.

We believe the most successful way to communicate with our diverse communities is by ensuring we use a variety of mediums to meet varying needs. The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity.

Accordingly, through delivery of this strategy and a targeted approach, we will aim to ensure that individuals receive communication which meets their specific needs in a non-discriminatory manner. For example, on request we can make printed publications available as large print.

8.4   *We will develop our use of digital communication tools*

The use of the internet to access information is pervasive. According to the Office of National Statistics, approximately 60% of the UK adult population access the internet every day or almost every day (a staggering 32 million adults).

What has particularly grown in recent years is the use of mobile phones and especially smart phones to access the internet, social media channels and apps to do a huge variety of tasks, from ordering food from a takeaway to monitoring fitness levels.

It has made a great deal of communication instantaneous and with it a growing demand for responses in real time. Sometimes we can respond in this way but mostly we will need to carefully explain when we will be in the best position to do so.

Such growth in the use of digital is not exclusively among young people, with many older people also embracing new technology to the full.

We will therefore look to innovate and explore new channels as they emerge, to give our various audiences the opportunity to be communicated with in the way that suits them best.

We will seek to grow the numbers of followers we have on Facebook, X, Instagram and YouTube.

We will increase our use of video and infographics and create posts that have greater impact.

We will encourage our members to share our social media content, and we will share posts from our partners where they are helpful for our followers to see.

It should also be remembered that digital communication, whether through social media channels or enquiries through our website, can provide rich information on our audiences, their queries and how to reach them. It can also be highly effective in reaching audiences quickly and cost effectively.

We use some of this information to plan our campaigns. There is scope to use more of the information we gather within our communications work.

9.   Creating a narrative

Organisations are increasingly recognising the need to have a strong narrative. For councils, a narrative is about the organisation and the services it provides, and as a publicly funded body, we have a duty to explain our work and be accountable for our actions.

9.1 The strategy will need to be focussed on 'telling the Councils' stories' effectively. The foundations the Councils' narrative need to be built on involve four considerations:

- What the Councils do

  o What services are provided
  o How and where they are provided
  o How they are accessed
  o How they benefit communities

- Why the Councils do these things

  o The statutory obligations
  o The Councils' ambitions
  o Role in working with partners
  o Role and contribution to local communities

- How the Councils do these things

  o The way in which the Councils fund and deliver services
  o How the Councils strive for improvement and excellence
  o How the Councils work towards and achieve our priorities

- Why the Councils need to do things more effectively in the future

  o The future challenges that the Councils face
  o The financial constraints that the Councils have to operate within

9.2 Once these considerations have been made, a concise narrative needs to be developed. It can be a few paragraphs to provide focus for communications. A number of 'straplines' or 'hashtags' may emerge from this work and these can accompany future messages or campaigns.

10. Understanding our audiences – stakeholder analysis

10.1 Informed stakeholders can play a big part in helping our Councils deliver their projects and to gain overall support.

10.2 In order to structure and focus the approach, there needs to be a clear understanding of the Councils' audiences. This needs formal stakeholder analysis to take place, where required.

10.3 This stakeholder analysis can be undertaken in three stages:
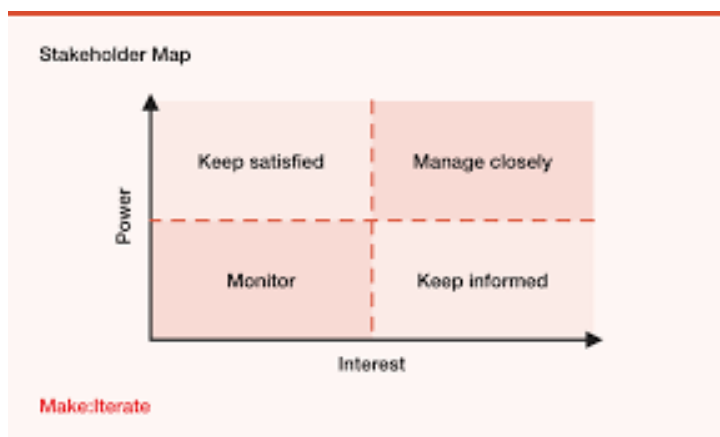
Stage One - Identification

This task involves the identification of organisations, individuals and groups of individuals that have an interest or are affected by the work of the Councils. The identification should include an understanding of the impact that the Councils' work and activities has on them.

Stage Two - Analysis and Prioritisation

This involves the analysis and assessment of the stakeholders. An understanding of them should be developed, based on:

• Their financial and emotional influence and whether this is positive or negative
• What is the legitimacy of their interest
• What power have they got and what motivates them
• What is their opinion of the Councils i.e. what is their current view / are they supportive

There are a number of ways of undertaking the assessment of stakeholders. The common approach is an assessment and prioritisation by their level of interest in, and influence on, the Councils' work and activities. Prioritisation of them could then be undertaken as summarised in the diagram below:

Stakeholder Map

Keep satisfied | Manage closely
Monitor | Keep informed

Power (vertical axis)
Interest (horizontal axis)

Make:Iterate

Another method of assessment could involve assessing the level of prominence or importance of the stakeholder by assessing the following three attributes:

• Power - the ability to influence others
• Legitimacy - their actions are proper or appropriate
• Urgency - the degree to which the stakeholder requires action

These attributes can then be mapped as follows:
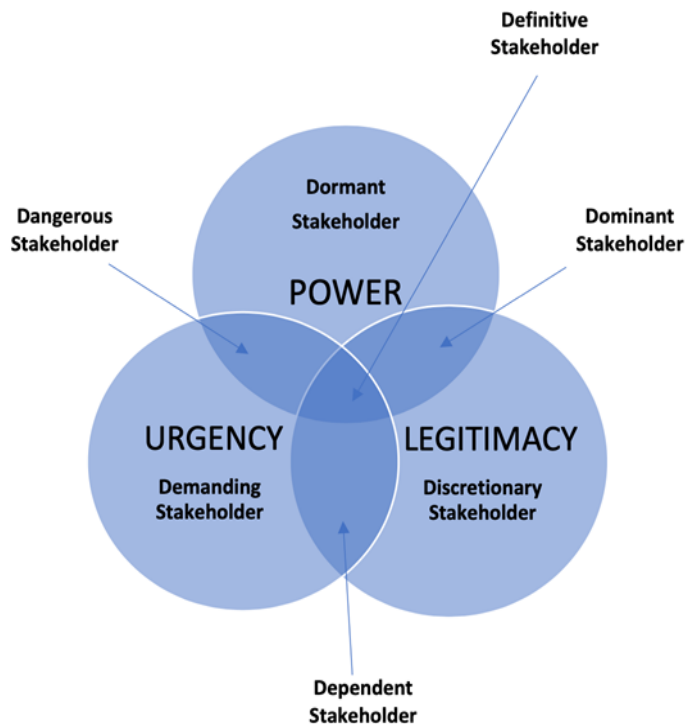
Stage Three - Development of Approach

Once the prioritisation has been completed, tactics can be developed for the level of engagement with them. This could be as follows:

Key Players / Definitive Stakeholders
• Focus effort on these
• Engage and consult regularly
• Involve in governance

Powerful Influencers / Dangerous, Dominant and Dependent Stakeholders
• Engage and consult periodically
• Attempt to increase their level of interest

Keen Observers
• Make use of them and involve
• Keep informed
• Potential ambassador

Casual Bystanders
• Inform with general communications
• Aim to raise interest

This form of analysis will enable the Councils to identify the critical audiences and enable communications to be prioritised.

11.   Our approach to media relations

11.1   Despite the decline in local newspaper readership, the established media continues to be important in reporting the Councils` work and especially in an era where trust is an issue. The Local Democracy Reporter Scheme, supported by the BBC and the local media, is enabling more council meetings to be covered.

11.2   Our local newspapers and magazines are primarily the Buxton Advertiser, Glossop Chronicle, Peak Advertiser, High Peak Review, Derbyshire Times, Derbyshire Life and Pure Peak (in High Peak); and The Staffordshire Sentinel, Leek Post and Times, Biddulph Chronicle, and Our Leek and Moorlands (in Staffordshire Moorlands).

11.3   Locally, in broadcast, radio is served by High Peak 1, BBC Radio Derby, BBC Radio Manchester (in High Peak); and BBC Radio Stoke, Moorlands Radio and Blue Sky Radio (in Staffordshire Moorlands). Whilst our regional TV news stations are BBC East Midlands Today, BBC North West Tonight, ITV Granada (in High Peak); and BBC Midlands Today and ITV Central (in Staffordshire Moorlands).

11.4   Traditional media still has an important role to play in helping us communicate to the hard to reach; borne from habit of reading, listening and watching, and accessibility.

11.5   We will react and respond to media enquiries, requests for interviews and comments in a timely manner.

11.6   We will also be proactive and identify stories that support the priorities within the Borough Plan and the Corporate Plan, by producing media releases for the media and inviting them to our photocalls and events, as these are proven techniques to deliver media coverage. Media releases continue to be appreciated by the media, and where we can we will make connections between stories and the aims of our Borough Plan and Corporate Plan. We will continue to welcome reporters to Council, Executive, Cabinet and Committee meetings and provide them with agenda and minutes as appropriate so they can freely go about their reporting.

11.7   All media releases will be copied to members, Alliance Leadership Team, other relevant officers, and posted on the websites for employees to see, as they are issued.

11.8   Where required we will rebut incorrect facts published in the media and we will handle any complaints the Councils may wish to make to the media.

11.9   As a story befits, we will also conduct press briefings and conferences to communicate with the media face-to-face.

11.10   Any media enquiry received by the Councils must be directed to the Communications Team to deal with, who will then involve the appropriate senior officer or member to provide a comment, or to arrange an interview.

11.11 We will create updated media protocols within this strategy period which will explain how we manage media enquiries and how we will field members of the Executive and Cabinet and appropriate officers for broadcast interviews or interview comment. We can providing media training to key Executive and Cabinet Members and key officers within this strategy period, as required.

11.12 Monitoring of media coverage will continue by using monitoring providers who supply, electronically, a digest of coverage each day. We will share this coverage in a limited way with those officers involved in a particular story, as agreed by our licence undertaking and copyright arrangements.

12. Our approach to social media and digital communication

12.1 As communication across digital outlets grows, we will devote more of our time to communicating through our digital channels, on social media and via our websites.

At the time of writing (5 March 2025) we have:

High Peak:

- 5,230 followers to our X site @highpeakbc
- 6,100 followers to our Facebook page @highpeak.gov.uk
- 138 subscribers to our YouTube site (46 videos) @highpeakboroughcouncil5855
- 426 followers on our Instagram account @High Peak BC

Staffordshire Moorlands:

- 2,782 followers to our X site @staffsmoorlands
- 6,500 followers to our Facebook page @staffsmoorlands.gov.uk
- 25 subscribers to our YouTube site (13 videos posted) @staffsmoorlandsdc
- 253 followers on our Instagram account @Staffordshire Moorlands DC

- During this strategy period we will develop our presence on Instagram and YouTube with the growing consumer taste for pictures and video content. Instagram, in particular, is becoming increasingly favoured as a channel by young people, often a hard to reach group.

- We will continue to monitor our social media sites during office hours and have made this known on both sites.

- We do carry out social listening (informally and using software from a supplier) to understand what is being said about the Councils across social media communities and on individual sites. This helps shape our responses and can also inform policy decisions.

- We will interact with posters on social media where it is justified such as correcting misinformation. This includes responding to direct messages on X and Facebook and signposting to other services as appropriate. We will not routinely respond to every post we see about the Councils and their work, on the basis that we do not have the capacity and sometimes engaging on social media, particularly with detractors keen on creating a long conversation, can be time consuming and potentially fruitless.

13.   Our approach to consultation and engagement

13.1   Whereas communications can often be a one-way process delivered by the communicator, consultation is very much an evolving dialogue where the exchange of views is encouraged.

13.2   Consultation is: *"A dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups based upon a genuine exchange of views with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action." (LGA).*

13.3   Engagement can take many forms, and partners can include organised groups, agencies, institutions, or individuals. Collaborators may be engaged in research, promotion or policy making. It is based on the democratic idea that everyone who is affected by an issue that impacts their community should have a say in the decision making around it. "It, moreover, holds the promise that public participation can influence decisions that affect the provision of services, future visions and sustainability".

13.4   The Councils consult for a number of reasons including:

- To meet statutory requirements
- To anticipate public relations reactions
- To stimulate greater civic awareness
- To supplement representative democracy with participative elements
- To educate the public about difficult decisions and to ensure elected members are accountable
- To oblige officials etc. to listen
- To provide opportunities for citizens to express ideas and views and influence decisions and actions that the Councils provide

13.5   Consultation provides the ability to express concerns, views and suggestions for improvement, community sustainability and strong local networks, and to create a greater understanding of local needs and issues.

13.6   The Councils are committed to consultation as a means by which to supplement their understanding of the local context, to determine priorities, and to assess the impact of service delivery.

13.7   Consultation is led by Democratic Services and it will continue to provide support and guidance to services at the Councils where they need to consult with residents and businesses.

13.8   A separate Consultation and Engagement Policy exists and can be read at [Consultation Policy](#).

13.9   Following publication of this policy, an Annual Consultation Plan has been produced to capture all consultation and engagement activity being planned by individual services over the next 12 months. This will help inform our communications work.

13.10   Some of our consultations are led externally. These include consultation to be undertaken from spring 2025 by Capital & Centric as our development partner for the Revitalising Buxton scheme, and the Government led consultation on local government reorganisation proposals between January 2026 and April 2026 that all affected councils will be asked to help promote.

14.   Our approach to employee communications

14.1   Our employees not only deliver on behalf of the Councils every working day but, as mentioned, are also ambassadors for High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands. As such they are a key part of the Councils' communications.

14.2   We use a number of tools and channels to communicate to our employees. These include:

- *The intranet*

    The intranet is the go to site to obtain employee work contact details and to understand who works in specific services, to obtain information on a wide variety of policies that affect employees' work, for information on services, and for copies of the employees' monthly newsletter. It also has members sections and useful links. Our priority is to keep information on the site as up to date as possible, with the help of our employees.

    A new intranet site is to be launched in 2025.

- *Team Talk*

    Team Talk is produced after each Alliance Management Team meeting (held monthly). It is written with employees in mind to cascade corporate and services news and announcements. It is currently produced as a PDF document which is posted on the intranet, with a link shared for employees to download and read a copy. It has its own section on the intranet home page from where previous editions can be found.

Keeping You Informed was an additional newsletter for employees which carried news from the Councils but with more of an emphasis on social news of interest to employees: life events etc. It was last published in March 2024.

- *Team Briefings*

  These are held monthly after Alliance Management Team meetings. Team Talk is used to brief staff across a wide range of topics including service announcements, the delivery of the Councils` aims and key projects, achievements, to cover election results and to report on the Councils` budget positions, as examples.

  The Chief Executive attends all service team meetings at least once a year, to allow all employees to have the opportunity to raise any issues or questions with him in person.

- Notice Boards

  The Notice Boards are located throughout Moorlands House in Leek and at the Town Hall in Buxton. The boards display information relevant to employees. The boards carry events posters, campaign material, notices from the trades unions and employee welfare initiatives. But with the onset of hybrid working and most staff working from home for part of the week, plus the development of the intranet, their importance has reduced, however they still remain a channel of communication.

- *All Staff Emails*

  These are emails sent to all employees, primarily by HR and IT. They include vacancy announcements, external offers to employees such as theatre ticket offers, and important IT announcements such as service disruption. We try to ensure employees are not bombarded by messages, hence they can only be issued by a few officers.

14.3   As the need arises, we also hold employee focus groups to gain greater understanding from our employees about particular areas or issues that may be of concern or could be developed, or improved. Such groups would need to be properly facilitated and be representative of our employees. A recent example has been the Our Culture programme of work.

15.   Our approach to member communications

15.1   The Members Portal is used to keep members informed about the Councils' business. From here members can access agendas, minutes and other Council and committee papers. Members are also supported through the Community Leadership Scheme.

15.2   Members receive a copy of all media releases issued by the Councils (relative to their Council), and are able to follow Councils' news and developments via the Councils' websites and social media channels.

15.3   As a future development, there are plan to introduce a regular members newsletter produced by Democratic Services. The Communications Team will be supporting the production of this.

16.   Our approach to corporate communications

16.1   Corporate communications includes managing the Councils` brands and identity and how they are used (through the issue of brand guidelines at each Council), their corporate publications, stakeholder engagement at a corporate level, the design and publishing of corporate publications both printed and web based; and corporate campaigns that are public facing, are internal, or are about corporate issues.

16.2   Corporate publications include the Borough Plan and the Corporate Plan, the Annual Reports, and the council tax leaflets.

16.3   A key corporate audience for the Councils is the business sector within the Borough and the District. The Councils have been proactive in developing relations with many of our local businesses over a number of years. A regular newsletter is produced for the Regeneration Service by the Communications Team.

16.4   Our corporate campaigns are a mixture of Councils' initiatives such as encouraging residents to recycle more; alongside the Councils helping to promote campaigns initiated by Government agencies and local partners such as on flood prevention, severe weather, and a variety of public health issues as appropriate to our Borough and District.

16.5   Corporate communications also includes our graphic design service where we produce artwork for print and digital use and can advise on outsourcing design work to ensure high standards are maintained and consistent branding is used. We liaise with external print companies and advise on specialist print and visual production, such as signage, exhibition displays etc.

16.6   We also commission and take photography, and maintain corporate photographic libraries, as well as the ability to subscribe to external libraries where we can use free and sometimes paid for images to illustrate our designs and publications.

**17.	Our approach to emergency communications**

17.1	The Communications Team has a key role to play in the event of an emergency and is ready to provide a communications service which includes being available to assist outside normal office hours on a voluntary basis and subject to the availability of team members. We are part of the Organisational Development and Transformation Service which is the main contact point on emergencies for both Councils.

17.2	In emergencies the team would be responsible for handling media relations requests, drafting statements, advising senior colleagues, providing website updates, undertaking social media activity, supporting on internal communications and liaising with the communications teams of our partners in Staffordshire and Derbyshire as part of their respective local resilience forums.

17.3	Our councils follow the tried and tested emergency plans produced by the local resilience forums and we respond and engage as part of these through communications groups and cells, having specific responsibility to advise and deliver communications.

**18.	Our approach to branding**

18.1	Local authorities need to build their brand for many of the same reasons as commercial organisations. The principal reasons that are relevant for the Councils are:
   o	Recognition - a strong brand builds recognition which builds over time with its consistent application;
   o	Trust - this builds once the brand starts to be recognised with it;
   o	Respect - this relies on the Councils supporting the brand with excellent service; and
   o	Professionalism.

18.2	Consistency is critical when it comes to branding. The material that is put out into the public domain should have one consistent look and feel. It is important that all publicity material adheres to the branding guidelines adopted by the Councils.

18.3	The guidelines for printed and digital materials include information on council logos, fonts, colours and typography and explain why the Councils need to always use consistent styles. The Councils have attempted to establish this in the past and have received some level of success as there is already a level of consistency.

18.4	Despite the progress it is appropriate to revisit and redevelop the branding. The branding should be designed to apply to all printed and digital materials, including but not limited to: advertising; emails, letters, websites, social media posts, leaflets, posters, uniforms, vehicle livery, signs, and videos.

18.5   Although the Councils are diverse organisations delivering a huge range of services, branding guidelines need to create an identity that is consistent and professional. The Councils' corporate identities tell people that they are organisations that care about the way they are presented and perceived.

18.6   A style guide needs to be relaunched to agree a set of standards for writing in documents. This style guide should establish and enforce common standards of how language should be used and presented. Having a style guide will help the Councils produce documents and materials in a consistent manner, giving products a more professional look and feel. The style guide will need to be applied to all published information including reports to councillors.

18.7   The guide will also reduce confusion and conflict about our standards and give the Councils a reference tool that will be easy to access and understand. The guide will accompany the Councils' individual branding guidelines and will be compiled by the Councils' Communications team. It will be reviewed regularly and, if necessary, refreshed to take into account changes in common usage and any new relevant terminology.

19.   Our approach to evaluation

19.1   Media - as a communications service we are able to evaluate our work, producing detailed media analysis including sentiment in media reports i.e. positive, neutral or negative, where required. We can also assess the amount of media coverage achieved, use of key messages in media coverage, and can arrange media satisfaction surveys.

19.2   Social media - we can make available, analysis of the Councils' performance across our social media channels including followers, follows, the popularity of individual posts and reach achieved.

19.3   Intranet and website - performance data on our intranet site, including the most popular pages visited, is used to develop the site and site content. For our website this includes visits to pages, time spent on pages, and sign ups where these have been established, as well as feedback from the public when they contact the Councils via our websites.

19.4   Campaigns - for each campaign we run we can incorporate measurements to determine the success of the activities undertaken, such as reach achieved through any paid advertising, media coverage secured, social media analysis, increase in income or attendance (as appropriate), the number of enquiries or calls received and overall behavioural change (e.g. take up of a service), as appropriate.

19.5   Internal communications - evaluation of our internal communications activities can look at engagement at employee briefings and the results from employee surveys.

19.6 In summary, evaluation in communications can measure any one of the following as required:

Media	Reputation
Amount of coverage Sentiment of coverage: positive / neutral / negative Media reach as % of target audience Prominence of media stories Media satisfaction survey Key messages included	Internal communications and external communications surveys Contact centre surveys Stakeholders contacted Stakeholder feedback / advocacy Survey evidence (awareness, attitude) Media evaluation
Social media	**Website**
Social media analytics (reach, followers, follows, shares etc) Social media sentiment	Page visits Dwell time on pages Sign ups Website feedback Partner feedback
Internal Communications	**Campaigns**
Engagement at team meetings and focus groups Employee surveys	Visits to webpages Feedback from public (e.g. surveys, social media, via customer contact centre) Calls to action (click throughs, sign-ups) Behavioural change (e.g. service take up) Recognition (e.g. through Awards entries) Number of enquiries / calls Increase in income or attendance

20.   Communications Action Plan 2025-2026

20.1   An Action Plan 2025-2026 sits alongside the Communications Strategy. The Action Plan captures key `one off` and new actions only, that the Communications Team will lead on / help deliver over the course of the next year. This is in addition to day-to-day work. Also listed are some potential actions to consider for the 2026-2027 and 2027-2028 Action Plans. The Action Plan for 2026-2027 will be created in Q4 of 2025-2026.

20.2   In addition, the team will continue to produce monthly Communications Plans for both Councils, which will show key communications work, projects, initiatives, and known PR issues including how these are being managed through communications activities.

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Communications Action Plan 2025-2026

Actions	Lead	Timescale
Section 11 - Media relations		
Media mapping - to map all traditional media and key social media groups operating in the Borough and District	Graduate Trainee / Principal Policy Officer (Communications)	Q1
Create a set of media protocols setting out how we deal with the media and handle media relations at the Councils	Communications Business Partner	Q2
Work with Alliance Environmental Services on Simpler Recycling	Communications Business Partner	Q1-Q4
Review contract with Zen City - provides traditional media and social media monitoring, and surveys for consultation and engagement	Head of OD and Transformation / Communications Team / Democratic Services	Q2
Media cultivation - meeting contacts when can, welcoming new contacts	Communications Business Partner / Principal Policy Officer (Communications)	Ongoing
Section 12 - Social media and digital communication		
Purchase new drone and photography equipment and create ongoing schedule of drone and photography shoots in conjunction with service needs	Graduate Trainee / working with Communications Team	Q1 then ongoing
Arrange training for Communications Team to shoot video on mobile phones and develop visual media techniques to broaden our content	Communications Team	Q2 / Q3
Remind employees and members of social media policy and procedures, and for members to share our posts whenever they can	Website Development and Social Media Officer	Q2
Work with Alliance Environmental Services on Simpler Recycling	Website Development and Social Media Officer	Q1-Q4
Section 13 - Consultation and engagement		
Annual Consultation Plan reviewed and next plan produced – and helps inform media relations support	Democratic Services	Q4

Section14 - Employee communications		
New intranet site - help launch, develop Communications Team content	Digital Transformation Business Partner / Communications Team	Q1
Improve the look of Team Talk employee newsletter (monthly) (perhaps using 365 product Sway)	Principal Policy Officer (Communications) / Communications Officer	Q2
Work with the Our Culture Reference Group to develop an internal communications strategy	Head of OD and Transformation / Principal Policy Officer (Communications)	Q1-Q4
Section 15 - Member communications		
Introduce new members newsletter	Democratic Services	Q1
Section 16 - Corporate communications		
Produce monthly Communications Plans for AMT, Executive and Cabinet	Principal Policy Officer (Communications)	Ongoing
Communications for key regeneration projects: Revitalising Buxton, Glossop Market Halls, Leek LUF, Cheadle Market	Communications Team / Regeneration	Ongoing
Devolution and local government reorganisation - Keep employees and members informed as process develops - Work with communications leads at Derbyshire districts, boroughs and the city council on preferred option - Work with Sub-Committee at Staffordshire Moorlands as it considers options - Promote Government consultation on proposals received	Principal Policy Officer (Communications) / Communications Business Partner / Chief Executive	Ongoing Q4
Introduce new Residents newsletter	Principal Policy Officer (Communications) / Communications Team	Q2
`In Touch` town and parish councils newsletter (quarterly) (SMDC)	Democratic Services	Q1-Q4
Business newsletter including a re-design (monthly)	Communications Business Partner	Q1-Q4
Tenants newsletter (twice-yearly) (HPBC)	Communications Officer / Housing Services	Q1-Q4
Support Growth Strategy work on a prospectus and place marketing, promoting the visitor economy	Communications Team / Regeneration	Ongoing

Create Communications Action Plan for 2026-2027	Principal Policy Officer (Communications) / Communications Team	Q4
Section 17 - Emergency communications		
Participate in emergency planning exercises	Communications Team	Ongoing
Section 18 - Branding		
Introduce a Style Guide including use of Plain English guidance	Graduate Trainee / Principal Policy Officer (Communications)	Q2 / Q3
Brand guidelines - complete revision and re-issue to all services and their employees	Graduate Trainee / Principal Policy Officer (Communications) / Communications Officer	Q2

Note: Q1 is April to June, Q2 is July to September, Q3 is October to December, and Q4 is January to March

Actions to consider later in the strategy:

- Next steps in devolution and local government reorganisation
- Arrange formal media training for key Executive and Cabinet members and the Alliance Leadership Team (as required), with a media training company
- Social media training for members
- Entering more awards