



## Communications Strategy



# Introduction

Much has happened in the year, let alone since our last Communications Strategy was published, but what remains the same is the importance of communicating what we are doing so the public understands it. Indeed, with an era of fake news, changing ways in which people engage with authorities and the sheer volume of information being put into the public domain, it is perhaps now more important than ever before to communicate clearly, accurately and directly.

We have seen that during the Covid-19 pandemic, where our community leadership role has been delivered through reassuring and informative communications to unite our district at a time of immense difficulty. As studies frequently show, local government is a trusted source of information – as it should be.

Good communication establishes trust and a stronger relationship between ourselves and the public; allows more effective service delivery; and a better reputation, which in turns allows us to lever better outcomes for our community. What we do speaks not only for ourselves, but for Tendring as a whole, and we want to shout from the rooftops how proud we are of our district.

By being clear about our roles and responsibilities, our priorities, and being transparent about the way we work, allows us to be more effective and accountable.

This Strategy sets out how we will manage our communications activity, helping to ensure communication between the council and the people and organisations we come into contact with is always appropriate.

We want to keep everyone informed about the council's policies, activities and events, and remain focused on our Corporate Plan. But communication is a two-way street, and we want people to share ideas and opinions with us. We will endeavour to make communication informative, at the right time, and using the right methods.



**Councillor Neil Stock OBE**

**Leader of the Council**

# Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011) says that:

*“Publicity by local authorities should be: lawful; cost-effective; objective; even-handed; appropriate; have regard to equality and diversity, and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.”*

We will have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and all our communication will be free of political bias

As such, we are committed to making all our communications activities:

- **Two-way** - making it easy for people to get in touch with us in ways that suit them.
- **Relevant and appropriate** - 'speaking in the language of our audience', using plain English that people understand. Using the right channel to reach the audience, and putting the right content on each channel.
- **Easily available and easily understood** - in different formats.
- **Consistent** - consistency of messages, tone, style and presentation, with a clear narrative across the range of council core communications.
- **Honest** - telling it how it is, and not over promise.
- **Accountable** - making it clear who is responsible for decisions taken by the council.
- **Timely** - responding promptly to enquiries from third parties such as the media, partners and stakeholder groups. We will make sure that communications are up-to-date.
- **Identifiable** - making clear use of branding to show the communication has come from the council.
- **Efficient** - avoiding unnecessary duplication or contradictory/mixed messages.
- **Planned, but flexible** - ensuring that communication is considered as an integral and early part of service and project planning; while being agile to adapt as situations change and maximising opportunities as they arise.
- **Accessible** - in line with accessibility best practice.
- **Give a Return on Investment** - for services' spending.

Communications must also have regard to other regulations, such as the Code of Corporate Governance and Tendring District Council's Constitution.

# Who communicates and how we communicate

Each and every officer and member of the council has a responsibility for communication, and to do so effectively.

The Communications Team oversees the function by providing advice, guidance and procedures, which ensures information is exchanged in accordance with this strategy. The team also considers long-term and wider planning of communications, to achieve and manage the overall picture of communications across the whole council.

Staff are provided with Customer Service Guidelines, and we also display our Customer Services Standards in our reception and public areas.

As society moves increasingly into a digital age our website and social media are critical methods of exchanging information, while ensuring anyone not digitally enabled is not excluded. This is recognised through our Social Media Strategy, Policy and Guidelines for staff, and the close working relationship between the Communications Team, Customer Services Team and the IT Team.

In the ethos of every officer having a responsibility for communication, these tools are not solely owned by the communications team.

Internal communication – engaging with our staff and ensuring information flows down, up and across the council – is also critical so that our organisation acts effectively and as one.

We have a range of channels through which the council communicates, and people can communicate with us. These include: telephone; face-to-face meetings; our website; press releases; email; social media; consultation groups; Council, Cabinet and other Committee meetings and public questions; consultation events, road shows and displays; reports and policy documents; our corporate strategy; staff and member briefings, emails and newsletters; the intranet; mobile apps.



# Who are we communicating to?

Specific projects will need to reach specific audiences, which will be determined as part of the campaign planning process.

In general terms, though, Tendring District Council has the following audience groups:

- Members; ensuring councillors are also kept informed
- Tendring's public; residents and businesses within the district.
- Wider public; such as visitors to our area.
- Partners; we have a number of key partners, such as other public, third and private sector organisations who we do business with on a day-to-day or project basis.
- Staff; internal communications are critical to ensure all employees are pulling in the same direction and that they are kept informed about the work taking place across the organisation; vital if they are to be ambassadors for Tendring District Council and to form their communications interactions.



Local newspaper titles



Councillor interviewed by BBC Look East

# Vision for Communications

The work of the Communications Team will be more closely, and explicitly, strategically aligned to Tendring District Council's adopted Corporate Plan – while still ensuring that operational-level communications needs are supported and met.

At times of peak workload, when capacity is reached within the team, priority will be given to work which meets Corporate Plan objectives (while also considering factors such as urgency and emerging priorities). Year-to-year this will pick up specifically on the Priorities and Projects and Back to Business agenda.

To manage the annual workflow of the Communications Team, increased involvement in project planning will allow for an overall view of communications needs so that peaks and troughs can be flattened out throughout the year – providing for a more efficient way of working for the team and de-cluttering messaging for the public.

Communications should be seen as part of the solution in many cases, identifying opportunities for positive behaviour change and delivering projects which achieve this (such as on Climate Change or recycling), not simply as a system of informing the public on council activity.

Tendring District Council's Communications Team has expanded in recent years – both in size of the team, and the work it carries out.

While the past three years have been characterised by increased quantity of communications – such as in the expanded use of social media and video – the next three years will build upon this foundation and further improve the existing good quality of those communications.

Having introduced new ways of reaching larger audiences ourselves, now is an appropriate time to solidify those channels and increase the efficiency of our work.

Existing relationships will be strengthened to increase resilience and maximise opportunities for learning and development of new tactics and technologies. Relationships include internally at Tendring District Council, such as with the Customer Services, Website and IT Development teams, and with external partners (in line with the Community Leadership aspect of the Corporate Plan). Particularly, communications will deepen its support for the website and mobile apps utilised by the council.

Internal communications will also be solidified to ensure that messaging to and from staff is the best it can be.

Accessibility will be at the heart of all communications – whether that be making sure individual messages are as accessible as possible, or across a whole campaign. Accessibility is something every staff member is responsible for.

Community engagement is important for Tendring District Council, and while two-way communication should not replace dedicated engagement, it will be a vital pillar to ensure that this engagement is effective.

In all aspects of this, innovation will be encouraged as a key method of improving communication. The Communications Team will be empowered to test new systems, allowing sufficient review of products, channels and tactics before a final business case is presented.



*Live streaming a hybrid council meeting*



*Radio interview at the Jobs Fair*

# Communications and the Corporate Plan

Tendring District Council's adopted Corporate Plan (2020-2024) has five areas of focus each containing a number of more specific objectives.

Already the Communications Team supports a vast number of these objectives, directly or indirectly, but in line with the Vision above Communications will now look to deepen that work to uphold and deliver against, the Corporate Plan.

This can be done in a number of ways, such as (but not limited to):

- Transformation Project support, promoting channel shift to digital interactions (**Delivering high quality services**)
- Supporting education and informing the public on enforcement activity (**Delivering high quality services**)
- Promoting the council's Climate Action initiatives, particularly around community leadership (**Delivering high quality services**)
- Working with partners on communications, including leading where appropriate; such as garden communities, the Health and Wellbeing Alliance, the Local Delivery Pilot working (**Building Sustainable Communities, and Community Leadership through Partnerships**)
- Continuing to support and possibly lead events for Tendring4Growth (**Growing and Inclusive Economy**)
- Publicising the decisions and spending of the council (**Strong Finance and Governance**).

Each year this strategy should be aligned with the Back to Business agenda or Priorities and Projects piece which is drawn out of the Corporate Plan.



# How will communications be improved?

There are five key areas identified for improvement in line with the Communications vision:

- Video content: Great strides have been made in creating more video content, which always performs well with audiences. The vision is to grow this content type; by increasing capacity, improved processes (such as video editing software) and empowering frontline staff to do more. Increased use of the council's drone for aerial footage will also improve content.
- Project work: Ensuring that communications is built in from the start with large projects, the team will increase its engagement with the internal Project Board and the Community Projects Board to ensure its work is aligned with those projects; enabling ongoing delivery of communications throughout the lifecycle of the initiative. Additional capacity would further ameliorate this.
- Social media: Since the introduction of a corporate Facebook page in August 2018 this has grown to more than 5,100 followers, while back-end processes have been introduced to ensure security. Now is the time to re-visit the type of content we are producing and sharing on this page (and others within the TDC family), and empower and enable frontline staff to be part of content creation.
- Email and SMS communications: While we directly reach more people than ever before through our own social media channels, there are still many residents who miss out on this; while other channels such as traditional media decline. Email is a unifying feature of those not completely digitally excluded, and direct email communication would enhance the way we reach people; while also presenting commercial opportunities. Similarly, the vast majority of people have a mobile phone, and existing use of SMS facilities in some service areas should be reviewed to see if they are suitable for wider roll-out.
- Internal communications: With a key audience being our staff, it is important that communication between employees and services is frequent, two-way, and part of the organisation's cultural norm. Making best use of our Intranet, internal communications groups, and techniques such as staff newsletters and vlogs, will be a key focus as part of this strategy.

# How is success measured?

Measuring success in communications can be difficult, especially when considering areas such as behaviour change and reputation management – however, that does not lessen the importance of setting specific, measurable objectives.

Each communications campaign should have its own specific objectives, aligned to the desired outcomes of the campaign.

This strategy's success must be aligned with its vision and outcomes, and will be measured as below. The 2024 target date on some objectives is set to align with the Corporate Plan.

- By 2024 increase the number of videos created each year by 50% from 2020 figure (*baseline: 50*).  
*This includes empowering staff to create their own video content and vlogs for internal communication.*
- Ensure every initiative which goes through the council's projects boards has a communications plan.  
*As a minimum key project milestones identified for communications and opportunities for communications to add value.*
- Grow the number of Facebook followers on Tendring District Council's corporate account to 8,000 by 2024 (*baseline: 5,300*).  
*Although this may seem modest, there will always be an initial rush when new accounts are established while particular spikes are linked to one-off events such as the new waste service, district-wide elections and Covid-19. No target has been set for Twitter followers as the platform is currently in decline (nationally).*
- Increase the number of staff actively posting to the council's corporate Facebook page by 300% by 2024 (*baseline: 5*).  
*Currently only a handful of staff post to our corporate page, while some others have access. As part of the vision we want to increase the number of frontline staff using social media to communicate to our audiences.*
- Present a business case for email communications software, and reinforce the council's Branding Guidelines with regards to email content, by 2024.
- Work with the IT Team as part of its review of SMS communications software, scheduled for completion by January 2022.
- Review and improve the TDC's Communications Group and the Intranet, refreshing both by the end of 2021.

# Supporting Protocols

This Communications Strategy outlines the overarching approach we plan to take to reach our stakeholders. It is linked to, and supported by, the following guidance and protocols:

- Branding Guidelines
- Media Protocol
- Website Strategy and Development Plan
- Intranet Policy and Guidance
- Social Media Strategy
- Social Media Policy
- Social Media Guidelines
- Drone Policy
- Digital Transformation programme
- Customer Services Strategy and supporting protocols

In addition, this strategy is intended to support the Corporate Plan.

## Contacts

If there are any queries regarding the Communications Strategy please don't hesitate to contact the Communications Manager [communications@tendingdc.gov.uk](mailto:communications@tendingdc.gov.uk) / 01255 686338.