



Communications Strategy

2017-2019

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Summary

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Strategy Owner (Name/Position)	Communications Team
Strategy Author (Name/Position)	Caroline Taylor and Natalie Banks – Senior Communications Officers
Applies to	All Council services, elected members and staff

Review of Strategy

Review Date	Annual refresh in April 2018 to ensure alignment with Corporate Plan 2018-20
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The Communications' Team welcomes suggestions on how we can improve our approach to communications.

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Section 1: Background and context

South Ribble Council has a strong track record in delivering excellent frontline services, and careful financial management has meant the Council has not, so far, had to make difficult decisions which have had a major impact on services.

The Borough is well placed for economic growth and regeneration and is punching above its weight in delivering benefits for residents and businesses – being home to global brands and world industry leaders including BAE Systems, PACCAR, Dr Oetker and Waitrose.

The £430m Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire City Deal is acting as a catalyst to bring forward three decades of growth over 10 years - creating 20,000 jobs, 17,000 new homes and delivering multi-million pound infrastructure improvements for its communities. Over its lifetime it will grow the local economy by £1 billion.

South Ribble sits at the very heart of the county - benefiting from access to four major motorway routes and is well served by all transport networks. The Borough is proud to boast award-winning parks and open spaces – earning itself a reputation as the garden of Lancashire.

With low levels of unemployment, good schools, one of the best performing colleges in the country and a rich local history, residents are afforded a good quality of life and the Council has recently been named best place in the country to live in relation to a number of factors, including jobs, affordable housing, transport, culture, open space and happiness.

The challenge, now, is for the Council to capitalise on its strong foundations to address the issues that have impacted on its reputation over the past 18 months, understand more clearly residents' views about the Council and its services and develop an approach to open, honest and pro-active communications that engages residents, members, employees and partners.

The Council has a history of communicating with residents and members and the Council is committed to improving communications externally and internally.

However, the Council does not currently have a communications strategy outlining the principles and objectives which should underpin and support external and internal communications.

This interim communications strategy aims to build on best practice, outline the Council's approach to strategic communications and ensure that residents, members, staff, stakeholders and partners can (and want to) play an active role in promoting South Ribble, as well as communicating openly and honestly about the challenges faced by the Borough.

Section 2: Council priorities and values

The Council has four priorities set out below which are aligned to wider partnership priorities for the Borough.

- ❖ Strong and healthy communities
- ❖ Clean, green and safe
- ❖ Strong South Ribble in the heart of a prosperous Lancashire
- ❖ Efficient, effective and exceptional council

As an organisation, we are committed to always having a positive attitude; acting with integrity, striving for excellence; being a learning organisation and working as a team. These are our values which are at the heart of everything we do, and which drive the behaviours of elected members, managers and all our staff.

These priorities and values underpin the Council's approach to communications and the pro-active work of the Communications Team.

The Communications team is responsible for promoting these priorities and values in a clear, concise and effective way to all stakeholders in a bid to maintain and build the reputation of the Council across all communication platforms.

The principal of this Communications Strategy is to set out a framework with clear action points which can ensure that, going forward, the Council has a robust, strategic approach to communications aligned to its corporate priorities.

Section 3: The Communications Team

The Council's Communications Team is responsible for the development and management of key communications tools including media relations (pro-active and reactive), employee communications (through the intranet and other means), Councillor communications (through Councillor Connect and other means), the Council's website and the main social media accounts.

The team is committed to delivering an efficient, effective and high quality communications service to the Council and strives to work collaboratively with others, sharing resources where appropriate and possible and continually exploring new opportunities to improve its effectiveness. Going forward, the team will look to develop ways to become financially self-sufficient by identifying potential revenue streams.

Currently, the Communications Team reports directly to the Chief Executive, with the Leader of the Council being the portfolio holder.

The team consists of three members of staff (equating to two full time equivalents) as follows:

- ❖ 2 part-time Senior Communications Officers (operating as a job share)
- ❖ 1 full time Communications Officer

These officers are active members of the Lancashire Communications Group, a forum to share best practice and resources, as well as members of the Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire City Deal Communications Group. The Senior Communications Officers are part of the Council's Core Managers' Group.

Both Communication roles are politically restricted, and so while officers can offer support to all councillors in terms of media relations, the Communications Team does not suggest content for political media releases, newsletters or e-communications.

Typically, the officers work directly with the Leader and members of the Cabinet to proactively communicate key decisions, provide statements in response to media enquiries and tell the Council's story. They also offer support to other committees as and when required.

Task and finish groups are formed on an ad hoc basis to support individual projects or to review and improve communications activity across the Council. One such group has played a pivotal role in shaping this communications strategy.

The team will continue to play a key role in delivering internal and external communications at an operational level while focusing on its responsibility to develop a strategic communications plan based on planned, targeted communications activities that support the corporate priorities outlined above.

Planned training and support for officers across the Council, led and supported by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and Core Managers' group will ensure that communications is owned by everyone (as outlined in the principles and objectives in this strategy) and that resources are focused in the right place, using the most appropriate and effective communications tools for the desired audiences.

Section 4: South Ribble communications principles

A number of principles set out below underpin this strategy and will inform the Council's approach to internal and external communications. These principles are aligned to the Council's priorities and values outlined above.

- ❖ The Council will be a listening organisation – taking the views of residents, businesses, employees, partners and stakeholders into account when developing plans and tackling challenges
- ❖ The Council, its staff and elected members will be open, honest and confident about the Council's work
- ❖ The Council will invest in and make best use of technology and innovations in technology to communicate more effectively and drive down costs
- ❖ The Council will celebrate success and help to further develop a sense of pride across South Ribble
- ❖ The Council, its staff and elected members will speak and listen as one council and one team while encouraging people to communicate about their work and the services they deliver through social media and other communications tools

Section 5: South Ribble communications objectives

The objectives of the strategy are to ensure:

- 5.1: A consistent style and approach to two-way communications that is authentic, lively and customer friendly
- 5.2: Corporate priorities are well-communicated and understood by residents, businesses, staff, partners and stakeholders
- 5.3: Communications are targeted to relevant audiences (and take account of the different needs of the Borough's diverse communities) and driven by research to ensure the right communications are delivered at the right time, in the right way, to the right people
- 5.4: Listening, acting on and giving feedback to residents, employees, employers and partners is a key priority
- 5.5: Cost-effective and innovative campaigns are planned and developed throughout the year

Section 6: Communications tools

The recent residents' survey has identified how local people prefer to communicate with and be communicated by the Council and this data will help inform the development of an action plan that will focus on the most efficient and effective ways of communicating with residents and stakeholders.

However, managers involved in the development of this strategy were strongly of the view that a focus on digital communications is key to the success of effective communications.

Current external communications tools

- ❖ South Ribble 'Forward' publication which is distributed to all residents in the Borough twice a year
- ❖ Media relations – reactive media service, dealing with around 15 calls a week from local, regional and trade press and proactive service, issuing between 5 and 10 press releases a week.
- ❖ The Council's website
- ❖ The Council's investment website and investment newsletter as well as Visit Leyland web page
- ❖ Social media channels, including the South Ribble Facebook page which tens of thousands of followers engage with every week and the South Ribble Twitter feed with 10,000 followers
- ❖ Posters, leaflets, newsletters, paid for advertising in local publications – currently carried out on ad-hoc basis
- ❖ Council officers who regularly interact with residents, businesses and partners and often live locally

Current internal communications tools

- ❖ Staff intranet (Connect) available to all employees and recently redesigned with more interactivity, easier navigation and more features
- ❖ Councillor intranet (Councillor Connect) available to all elected members and recently redesigned with more interactivity, easier navigation and more features

- ❖ Staff noticeboards – used most effectively where employees don't have access to the intranet
- ❖ Staff/team briefings
- ❖ Email messages to specific groups of staff

Section 7: Audiences

South Ribble's key audiences for communication include the following groups. The way we communicate and engage with all these groups is crucial to maintaining a good reputation to support the local economy, ultimately leading to more prosperity for local people and communities. The communications tools we will use will vary depending on the audiences and the purpose of the messages we are seeking to communicate.

Residents

The most recent census records South Ribble having 109,651 residents, occupying 48,740 homes. We want residents to be involved in developing priorities and in shaping services that meet their needs. We also want to ensure that we keep them informed about services, and how they can be accessed, including any changes, key successes and challenges facing the Council and the area generally.

Council employees, including trade unions

The Council employs around 300 full-time equivalent staff, many of whom are also residents. Staff can be ambassadors for the Council and its services if they are kept informed in a timely way, and the Council wants to make best use of this significant resource by ensuring that staff are motivated and supported, focused on council priorities and are effectively engaged in all communications and improvement activity.

Councillors

Councillors have a significant role to play in effective communications. They are ambassadors for the Council, dealing with residents, businesses, partners and other stakeholders on a regular basis and having opportunities to promote the Council and its work regionally and nationally through their political networks.

People working in and visiting South Ribble

We want the people who visit our Borough to have a positive experience and to tell others about life in South Ribble. The South Ribble 'brand' and how we promote this can be positively developed through visitors' experiences.

Existing businesses in South Ribble, potential businesses who may relocate or invest in South Ribble, business and economic development and regeneration partnerships and organisations and developers

The Borough has a diverse mix of businesses and we are working with partners on the City Deal to encourage more businesses to locate to the Borough and developers to invest in the Borough. Developing the South Ribble brand will also lead to an increase in visitors which will in turn stimulate the local economy. We will use our communications tools to support and encourage businesses and potential developers and investors to be advocates for the area.

Stakeholders and partners, including voluntary and community groups, parish councils, Lancashire County Council, neighbouring district and borough councils and local, regional, national and trade media

Services are provided in the Borough by a wide range of service providers, including other public sector agencies and voluntary, community and faith groups. The Council wants all its stakeholders, including partners and the local media to be advocates for the Council and we will use our communication tools to support them to do this.

Central government

The Council's reputation with central government and its department is crucial to its success.

Section 8: Developing and delivering an action plan

This strategy outlines the overall objectives and principles supporting good communications. More detailed action plans have been developed to ensure the delivery of specific actions and activity ([Appendices 1-3](#)).

These plans set out the actions we will take in the short-term (within one month), the medium-term (within 3-months) and the longer-term (6-12 months) and have been developed by the Council's Communications Team in consultation with a group of managers and staff.

Section 9: Monitoring and evaluation

The results of the employee survey and planned residents survey will be used to baseline activity and measure progress over the coming months.

The table below sets out the key measures that will be used to evaluate the impact of this strategy and the actions that underpin it.

Measure	2016-17 Baseline	Target
The percentage of staff who feel they are kept informed about what is going on in the Council	21.34%	80%
The percentage of staff who think the Council communicates openly about change and involves people in the big decisions	9.63%	80%
The percentage of residents who feel the Council keeps them informed about the services it provides	67%	80%

Section 10: Further information and key contacts

Further information about this strategy can be obtained from the Communications Team or any of the Directorate Communications Champions as follows:

Services	Contact
Communications Team	Name: Caroline Taylor E: ctaylor@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772 (62)5201
	Name: Natalie Banks E: nbanks@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772 (62)5333
	Name: Dale Haslam E: DHaslam@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772 (62)5312
Corporate Governance and Business Transformation	Name: Darren Cranshaw E: dcranshaw@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772 (62)5512
Neighbourhoods, Environmental Health and Assets	Name: Trudy Quinn E: tquinn@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772 (62)5678
Development, Enterprise and Communities	Name: Keith Molloy E: kmolloy@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772 (62)5200
Finance Services	Name: James McNulty E: jmcnulty@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772 (62)5289
Assurance Services	Name: Kerry Maguire E: kmaguire@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772 (62)5299
Human Resources	Name: Bernie Markham E: bmarkham@southribble.gov.uk T: 01772(62)5262

Appendix 1: Short-term actions (to be completed by end of March 2017)

Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
ST1	Continue to work proactively with the local media to promote Council news and activities and to respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.	5.2	Communications Team
ST2	Use results of employee survey and residents' survey to develop robust action plans which ensure communications are delivered in the right way, using the right tools to reach the right audiences based on their views.	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5	Communications Team
ST3	Feed back to SMT with monthly progress reports. Will strengthen relationships between SMT and the Communications Team and help plan effective media campaigns, generate proactive communications and diary key dates.	5.2, 5.5	Communications Team / SMT
ST4	Adopt a staff-first approach to news to ensure officers read about Council events, issues and activities on Connect first (rather than via local media or social media) and increasingly use the intranet as the go-to place for all Council information.	5.2, 5.4	Communications Team

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
ST5	Prioritise internal communications activities over the next six months. Develop regular “you said, we did” feedback on staff Connect, posters on noticeboards and in staff/team briefings.	5.4	Communications Team
ST6	Ensure successful relaunch of staff intranet to include user feedback and greater interactivity. Monitor usage and take up in first few weeks to build on successful features and address elements that aren't working.	5.4	Communications Team / IT
ST7	Check that the new Connect launches as the first screen on every staff computer to ensure it is an effective communications tool.	5.4	IT
ST8	Establish a staff focus group, with a good representation of staff from Neighbourhood Services, to evaluate the impact of improvements to internal communications on an on-going basis - providing feedback to influence future plans and drive forward an improved two-way dialogue with staff at the depot.	5.2, 5.4	Communications Team

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
ST9	Launch a regular series of senior managers' blogs led by the Interim Chief Executive, but including other senior managers, to promote 'one Council' and a strong management team approach. Programme this in weekly for next three months, then evaluate the impact and review.	5.2, 5.3, 5.4	Communications Team / SMT
ST10	Improve the way information is cascaded down from SMT. This would include an audit of all team briefings to establish how they are being undertaken across the council, and working closely with SMT to develop a consistent message to be used in those briefings which would be emailed directly to all managers. Also, look to integrate a new feature on Connect to celebrate the success stories presented at SMT.	5.2, 5.4	Communications Team / SMT
ST11	Develop an effective strategy to communicate the improvements the Council is making and document the progress. Internally, this would include setting-out timescales and identifying key dates for whole-service briefings and council-wide briefings to communicate improvements to all staff effectively.	5.4	Communications Team / SMT

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
ST12	Investigate investment in email newsletter distribution software, which enables organisations to issue attractive newsletters (based on simple templates) with links to more detailed information. This approach facilitates quick and effective evaluation through access to statistics on how many recipients have opened the newsletter and how many have clicked through to more information. This can subsequently be used to target future communications more effectively and enables newsletters to be customised to very specific audiences, e.g. small businesses as well as to a general audience.	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5	Communications Team / IT / Gateway
ST13	Carry out an audit of how, where and when press releases are currently used by local media and look at other ways of sharing information with journalists such as telephone briefings and social media. Look at streamlining the process so that simple information (e.g. routine events) can be issued without a series of sign-offs.	5.3, 5.5	Communications Team
ST14	Undertake a full review of the content, style and functionality of the Council website. Explore best practice elsewhere and enter into discussions with Firmstep about different templates we could adopt. If the suggested options don't meet our needs, look to approach other providers to see what more they could offer. An emphasis needs to be on making the website mobile-friendly to improve digital engagement, especially when promoted through social media.	5.1	Communications Team / IT

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
ST15	Establish a working group to look at the potential of any new website and ensure any changes are effective and meet the needs of all service areas.	5.4	Communications Team / IT
ST16	Adopt a digital-first approach for communications, developing the Council's presence and voice on social media and using e-communications to facilitate open and two way dialogue using the likes of feedback buttons, polls on the Council website and live chats on Facebook. Also look to live Tweeting from meetings and webcasting.	5.1, 5.3	Communications Team / IT
ST17	Allow all staff unrestricted access to all social media channels to encourage officers to engage with posts and develop new and original content for the pages, including videos, to promote their work at the Council. This would be supported by training to ensure social media is used consistently, effectively and positively. There will be a social media policy created to lay out ground rules, offer tips and guidance for good practice. Passwords will be kept by the Communications Team for safety.	5.1	Communications Team / IT

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
ST18	Develop a team of Communication Champions from all different service areas who can actively and positively promote the good work of the council through social media. Extra help would be offered to staff who don't feel confident using the different channels through a series of 'Tweet Shops' – drop-in sessions aimed at all abilities.	5.1	Communications Team
ST19	Arrange and facilitate member training sessions to promote the positive use of social media to support their good work on behalf of the Council. This would be facilitated by an external, industry expert and would be aimed at all abilities. Produce a social media policy for Members offering guidance, support and guidelines for appropriate conduct.	5.1	Communications Team
ST20	Facilitate the use of Wi-Fi across the Civic Centre and depot for all officers and members of the public.	5.4	IT
ST21	Oversee the successful launch of the new Councillor Connect which is due to go live on March 1. Form a member focus group to assess feedback, action any changes required and undertake a full audit of its usage over the first three months.	5.2, 5.4	Communications Team / IT

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
ST22	Invest in improved technology for the Communications Team to allow them to create original content, including videos, Facebook Live feeds and better monitor social media channels out-of-hours and off-site.	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4	Communications Team / IT / Finance
ST23	Explore the idea of creating a focus group/workshop with Members to think about their role as communicators. Share ideas about how they can best engage with residents in their role as community champions.	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6	Members / Communications Team

Appendix 2: Medium-term actions (to be completed by end of May 2017)

Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
MT1	Develop an in-house digital communications campaign which highlights corporate priorities and the progress the Council is making in delivering them – promoting key messages in strong visuals, videos and infographics. As part of delivering a strong, consistent approach, develop a series of key messages to be used in all communications based on the council's corporate priorities.	5.2	Communications Team
MT2	Work with key Cabinet members, service managers, senior officers and external partners, including the City Deal Communications Team and Marketing Lancashire, to identify a programme of campaigns for the coming year (e.g. budget, corporate priorities and major events) and develop a forward plan with specific time frames, costs and comprehensive plans.	5.1, 5.5	Communications Team / Cabinet / SMT / Core Managers' Group
MT3	Research best practice on allowing all staff ready access to the intranet – particularly those working from the depot and those who do not have a council-issued mobile device. Short-term, this could include allowing communal access to a computer in the reception at Moss Side.	5.4	Communications Team

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
MT4	Dependent on any specific findings in the residents' survey, end the production of 'Forward' and switch funding to more effective forms of communication. Limited resources available in the Communications Team means keeping Forward will severely impact the deliverability of this strategy.	5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5	Communications Team
MT5	Create an effective image library for use by all staff to promote the Council. Also, populate the new Flickr account to open access to our full library of Council-commissioned pictures online for use by third parties to promote the borough.	5.1	Communications Team
MT6	Ensure all external campaigns have an internal element so staff feel engaged and are invited to help make the campaigns a real success. Focus on making sure they know, understand and share key messages.	5.2, 5.5	Communications Team
MT7	Explore the functionality of MySite to roll-out a uniform email signature for all officers. This could include a monthly message to promote a key Council campaign or event. Look at the other resources the host could provide – including templates etc.	5.1	Communications Team / IT

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
MT8	Ensure external web pages, including Wikipedia, are up-to-date and positively promote South Ribble.	5.2, 5.3	Communications Team
MT9	Audit the use of staff notice boards within Council buildings and assess if and where they are still required. Ensure those needed are up-to-date and well maintained. Also, audit the 'posters' within the council buildings to ensure the key messages, including Corporate Priorities, are accurate and up-to-date.	5.2, 5.3	Communications Team
MT10	Look to integrate the Council's investment website within any new Council website to promote constituent branding and key messages.	5.1, 5.2, 5.3	Communications Team
MT11	Proactively communicate changes made at the Council as a direct result of the residents' survey in a "you said, we did" fashion. Moving forward, devise a mechanism for collating feedback and ensure we respond to all engagement through e-communications.	5.4	Communications Team

Appendix 3: Long-term actions (to be completed by the end of March 2018)

Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
LT1	Audit all spend on public relations, marketing and communications tools, including leaflet/poster production and similar, spend on graphic design and paid for advertising (excluding public notices). Centralise spend for coming year and allocate according to corporate priorities as part of the campaign planning process.	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.5	Communications Team
LT2	Look at the feasibility and cost of developing a South Ribble app and the opportunities it could provide in terms of communicating more effectively with all stakeholders, but particularly with young people.	5.1, 5.3	Communications Team / IT
LT3	Revise and relaunch style and branding guidelines and develop programme of workshops, training and support for employees to make sure branding is consistent and the language used in all communications is jargon-free, accessible and customer friendly.	5.1	Communications Team

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Reference	Action	Link to Communications Objectives	Responsibility
LT4	Following the employee and residents' survey, look to commission a survey of the business community in South Ribble to gauge how they would best like to receive communications from the Council. Also, look at their best practice and identify improvements that could further bolster the communications offering.	5.4	Communications Team / Economic Development
LT5	Hold a series of forums with young people (under 16-year olds) to identify the best ways to engage with and communicate with young people, and then develop a programme of actions to improve how we engage with young people	5.3, 5.4	Communications Team / Safeguarding