

Subject:	Communications Strategy 2025-2029	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny	Date:	31 st March 2025
Report of:	Head of People and Policy	Lead Member:	Environment and Corporate Services
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
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1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny committee to consider and provide comments on the Council's refreshed Communications Strategy 2025-2029
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny committee to consider and provide comments on the Communications Strategy annual Action Plan update 2024-2025.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The current Council's Communication Strategy 2023-2025 has been refreshed to support the refreshed Valley Plan 2025-2029 – Our Place, Our Plan.
- Effective communications is key to support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan.
- The Communications Strategy provides a framework including the Council's aims, core principles, outcomes and priorities for effective communications
- A Communications Strategy Annual Action Plan will support the delivery of the Communications Strategy 2025-2029 to support the Council's approach to communications, ensuring both internal and external stakeholders are communicated with effectively.
- The Annual Action Plan 2024-2025 outlines the work completed to support the current Communications Strategy 2023-2025.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council is required to communicate with stakeholders in the most effective and efficient way. A clear and defined strategy will support the Council to identify stakeholders, communicate effectively, build stronger relationships, and protect the Council's reputation.
- 3.2 A tender exercise was completed to appoint an external contractor to support the Council's communications provision. VivaPR were appointed and a contract commenced 20th May 2022 on a four-year contract renewable on an annual basis, supported by internal officers.

- 3.3 In line with the Council's policy review cycle, the current Communications Strategy 2023-2025 is due to be reviewed.

4. DETAILS

- 4.1 Good communication leads to better services, creates a stronger reputation, and builds positive relationships with internal and external stakeholders including; staff, Members, residents, businesses, partners, and community groups.
- 4.2 The Communications Strategy 2025-2029 aims to provide clear focus to the Council's promotional activity, ensuring communications are planned, co-ordinated, and clear.
- 4.3 The Communications Strategy combines both internal and external stakeholders to embed simplistic, but effective communications across the Council.
- 4.4 Aims within the strategy focus on embracing new technologies and modern communication approaches, whilst ensuring the needs of stakeholders remains at the forefront.
- 4.5 The strategy has been refreshed to define clear and consistent communications. The Council will continue to focus on the five core principles of communication; Engagement, Communication, Stakeholders, Feedback, and Transparency.
- 4.6 The identified principles will be supported by four key priorities:
- Developing a communications function that effectively communicates with external stakeholders to increase understanding of the Council's services and support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan.
 - Improving the use of internal communications to promote staff wellbeing, engagement and effective delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place. Our Plan.
 - Building and maintaining the Council's identity and reputation with our stakeholders.
 - Embedding two-way communications by engaging and consulting with our stakeholders to support the Council's decision making process.
- 4.7 The delivery of the Strategy will be supported by an annual Action Plan. The Action Plan 2024-2025 in Appendix 2 outlines the work undertaken throughout the year to support the current Communications Strategy 2023-2025.

- 4.8 During the last of the VivaPR contract an options appraisal will be completed to consider the most suitable option to deliver the Communications Strategy for the Council.

5. RISK

Risks are included within the body of the report.

6. FINANCE

There are no specific finance issues arising from the report.

7. LEGAL

There are no specific legal issues arising from the report.

8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

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There are no specific policy or equality issues arising from this report.

9. REASON FOR DECISION

A clear and defined Communications Strategy will support the Council is communicating to its stakeholders. Improving the Council's communications and engagement will support the delivery of the Valley Plan 2025-2029 – Our Place, Our Plan.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Communications Strategy 2025-2029	Appendix 1
Communications Strategy – Action Plan 2024-25 update	Appendix 2

Communication Strategy 2025-2029

Rosendale Borough Council (the Council) believes that good communication leads to better services, creates a stronger reputation and builds positive relationships with our stakeholders including officers, Members, residents, businesses, partners, community and voluntary groups.

Our Vision

To have a thriving economy built around our changing town centres, creating a quality environment for all and improving the life chances for all those living and working in the borough.

The Strategy sets out how the Council will communicate with our stakeholders to support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan to ensure our vision, priorities and outcomes are clearly understood.

The aim of this Strategy is to provide direction to the Council's communication activity, focusing on both internal and external stakeholders to deliver planned, co-ordinated and clear, communication in the most effective and efficient way.

**Making
the
Connection**

Core Principles

Internal and external communications affect all aspects of our day-to day business and is the responsibility of everyone who works at the Council. The Council's communication should consistently reflect the Council's values – Pride, Passion and People and adhere to the Council's branding guidelines and customer service standards. The following core themes will support and deliver the Council's approach to communications:

Stakeholders

Recognise the need to tailor communications to include all stakeholders across the borough, reflecting their diverse needs and preferences. Collaborate with our stakeholders to work together effectively and achieve a positive outcome.

Engagement

Engage, listen and respond. Select different communication channels and offer a variety of options to allow stakeholders to provide their input to the Council's decision making process.

Communication

Communicate in a manner that works best for our stakeholders. Communicate clearly, providing relevant information regularly.

Feedback

Respond to enquiries promptly, ensuring information and documents are updated as needed. Ensure that all communications and engagements are effectively targeted and insight led.

Transparency

Provide clear, consistent and honest information ensuring communication is free from jargon and easy to understand. Information and documents will be factual, accessible and transparent.

Communication Outcomes and Priorities

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Over recent years there has been a significant shift from traditional communication methods towards a greater use of digital and social media platforms to communicate with both internal and external stakeholders. Whilst digital communication is a quick and cost effective way of communicating with our stakeholders, not everyone has access or the skills to use digital and social media platforms, or prefers to use traditional methods. The Council will ensure that communication methods are user friendly and accessible to everyone.

Outcomes to deliver this Strategy

- 1 Develop collaborative working relationships with all of our stakeholders.
- 2 Enhance a range of accessible communication tools to effectively engage stakeholders.
- 3 Be recognised as a respected and trusted Council providing effective and efficient services.
- 4 Meet the Council’s digital first approach to customer contact.

Priorities to deliver this Strategy

- Developing a communications function that effectively communicates with our stakeholders to increase understanding of the Council’s services and supports the delivery of the Council’s Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan.
- Improving the use of internal communications to promote staff wellbeing, engagement and effective delivery of the Council’s Valley Plan – Our Place. Our Plan.
- Building and maintaining the Council’s identity and reputation with our stakeholders.
- Embedding two-way communications by engaging and consulting with our stakeholders to support the Council’s decision making process.

This strategy should be used in conjunction with the Communications Annual Action Plan.

Communications Strategy – Annual Action Plan 2024/2025

Priorities	Actions	Update
Developing a communications function that effectively communicates with external stakeholders to increase understanding of the Council's services and support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan	Provide professional communications advice and support to internal stakeholders; CMT, staff and Members to communicate effectively with stakeholders	<p>The Communications team attend monthly meetings with CEO, CMT, Leader of the Council, and officers delivering corporate campaigns and projects.</p> <p>Weekly CMT updates are provided, Communications team attends monthly SLT and information is shared to all officers via Daily Message.</p> <p>A monthly Community Bulletin is shared with voluntary and community groups.</p> <p>A quarterly Residents Newsletter has been established (first edition September 2024).</p> <p>Strategic advice provided to CEO, Leader, CMT, Cabinet on specific high-profile cases, for example, Waste Transfer Station.</p>
	Provide a responsive and pro-active press office responding to enquiries in a timely and appropriate manner	<p>To date 64 press releases written and distributed throughout 2024-25 (20 in Q1, 14 in Q2, 20 in Q3 and 10 (as of 14.03.25) in Q4). Examples include:</p> <p>Rossendale's first business expo resounding success</p> <p>Rossendale awarded two coveted Green Flag awards</p> <p>Physical Activity and Sport Strategy launched to create 'active' Rossendale</p> <p>Rossendale Works empowers resident to secure meaningful employment</p> <p>RBC increases fixed penalty notice fines to combat environmental crimes</p> <p>RBC exceeding national planning performance targets</p> <p>Rawtenstall Masterplan and £20m Long Term Plan for Towns given go ahead</p>

	Develop and monitor a protocol for officers and Members for managing contact with the media	<p>A protocol was developed to manage contact with media and shared with officers and Members in November 2024.</p> <p>The protocol is also covered in staff training and annual new Member training in May each year.</p>
	Provide communications training to staff and Members	<p>Annual training for new Members (open to all Members) each May.</p> <p>Two sessions for officer communications training was delivered in September 2024 and included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to write a communications plan, • know your audience, • effective writing • targets and measurement <p>Lunchtime Learning session on branding guidelines and accessibility guidance was delivered October 2024.</p>
Improving the use of internal communications to promote staff wellbeing, engagement and effective delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place. Our Plan	Review internal communication channels to develop more accessible and inclusive internal communications	<p>Monthly CEO Huddle was established May 2024 to provide corporate updates to all officer.</p> <p>A quarterly Your Voice officer working meeting was re-established November 2024. Representatives from each service area attend the meeting to share and listen to views of teams and feedback on the Council's policies and processes.</p> <p>A corporate monthly team meeting agenda has been developed to include all corporate updates, ensuring all officers receive the same information. Team meetings are held in the 1st week of the month.</p> <p>Lunchtime Learn session were initiated March 2024 and are held on the third week of the month. The sessions help officers learn new skills and build relationships. Examples of the sessions include fraud awareness, dealing with difficult conversations relating to suicide, Freedom of Information and AI.</p>

	Refresh the staff engagement framework to support staff satisfaction, wellbeing and motivation	<p>An annual Christmas all staff engagement session was held in December to celebrate successes throughout the year, look forward to the next year's ambitions, and to thank staff for all hard work throughout the year.</p> <p>An annual Health and Wellbeing Day was held in September 2024 to support employee mental health and promote a positive work-life balance. The day also provides officers with an opportunity for staff to connect with colleagues and try new activities.</p>
	Develop two way communications tools to support a collaborative working culture	<p>The Intranet platform was disabled in January 2025 and the information was transferred to the shared area drive. Work is being completed to review options to re-establish a new intranet platform. The intranet is used to ensure staff have access to internal information including; policies, forms, processes, etc.</p> <p>Staff suggestion boxes were re-instated December 2024. Physical boxes are available at Futures Park and Henrietta Street. A suggestions inbox has been created for officers to send suggestions digitally.</p>
	Conduct an annual staff satisfaction survey	An annual staff satisfaction survey carried out during July 2024. The survey received 121 (out of 170) responses increasing by 37% when compared to 2023. The survey showed overall high satisfaction, with 97% of respondents enjoying working for the Council.
Building and maintaining the Council's identity and reputation with our stakeholders	Support staff to promote the Council's activities and mitigate any challenge or negativity	The Communications Team has provided ad hoc crisis support, advice and worked with officers to develop communications plans, to mitigate impact of negative coverage for issues including Rawtenstall gyratory works, Bacup market and regeneration work, and the Waste Transfer Station.
	Refresh the Council's Branding	The Council's corporate branding was reviewed and is in the process of being rolled out gradually. Branding and Accessibility Guidance was developed September 2024 and shared to ensure all officers apply the Council's brand appropriately.
	Develop and submit at least one award submission per year	Although unsuccessful at shortlist stage, the Communications Team has supported officers in the development of four LGA award entries:

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rossendale Forest - community involvement • Residents Survey - small campaign of the year • Rossendale Works - Public & Private Partnership • Civic Pride Groups - Community involvement <p>The Net Zero Terraced Street has been successfully shortlisted in the Local and Public sector net transformation category for the Green Energy Awards.</p>
	Provide support for Elections communications	<p>The Communications Team worked closely with Elections Team providing media relations support with local, regional, and national media for the Local Elections in May 2024 and General Election in July 2024.</p> <p>The Communications Team also supported throughout canvas with social media posts and press releases reminding of voter registration dates, voter ID, etc.</p>
Embedding two-way communications by engaging and consulting with our stakeholders to support the Council's decision making process	Manage positive working relationships with local, regional and national media	<p>Regular contact has been maintained with local press and media to ensure a good working relationships and responses to requests in a timely manner, including local democracy reporters, Free Press, Lancs Live reporter and Radio Lancs.</p> <p>The Communications Team also work with external communication teams on joint projects, such as, Lancashire County Council and regeneration partners.</p>
	Monitor and manage the Council's social media accounts	<p>A weekly schedule of social posts with minimum of three posts a day covering Councils four priorities is completed.</p> <p>A quarterly audit of all social platforms, tracking and monitoring follower numbers and engagement to ensure effective engagement is completed.</p> <p>Follower increase in last 12 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook – 15.8% to 8,900 • Instagram – 17.5% to 1,894 • Twitter/X - 1.4% decrease to 7,808 • LinkedIn – 73.7% to 1,456

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blue Sky – new platform - 108 followers <p>Performance management data is provided for the quarterly Performance Management Report.</p>
	Conduct the annual Residents Survey	<p>The Communications Team has facilitated the annual Resident Survey in September 2024. The survey included additional questions to support the review of the Council's Valley Plan.</p> <p>Through more effective marketing of target groups and improved visibility the response rate increased by 391% when compared to 2023.</p>
	Develop the Council's Rossendale Panel database to support resident and stakeholder consultation including facilitation of focus groups	<p>The Rossendale Panel (formally known as the Citizen's Panel) has been developed using data collected via the 2023 and 2024 Residents Survey.</p> <p>The Rossendale Panel receive the Council's quarterly newsletter and are contacted to participate in any Council consultations or focus groups.</p> <p>The Rossendale Panel has increased to 1,507 subscribers.</p> <p>The Rossendale Panel were invited to a Resident Focus Group as part of the Valley Plan review. 10 residents participated.</p>

Key Priorities	Actions
Developing a communications function that effectively communicates with external stakeholders to increase understanding of the Council's services and support the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional communications advice and support to internal stakeholders; CMT, staff and Members to communicate effectively with stakeholders • Provide a responsive and pro-active press office responding to enquiries in a timely and appropriate manner • Develop and monitor a protocol for officers and Members for managing contact with the media • Provide communications training to staff and Members
Improving the use of internal communications to promote staff wellbeing, engagement and effective delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place. Our Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review internal communication channels to develop more accessible and inclusive internal communications. • Refresh the staff engagement framework to support staff satisfaction, wellbeing and motivation. • Develop two way communications tools to support a collaborative working culture • Conduct an annual staff satisfaction survey
Building and maintaining the Council's identity and reputation with our stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support staff to promote the Council's activities and mitigate any challenge or negativity • Refresh the Council's Branding • Develop and submit at least one award submission per year • Provide support for Elections communications
Embedding two-way communications by engaging and consulting with our stakeholders to support the Council's decision making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage positive working relationships with local, regional and national media • Monitor and manage the Council's social media accounts • Conduct the annual Residents Survey • Develop the Council's Citizen Panel database to support resident and stakeholder consultation including facilitation of focus groups