

<b>Report Title:</b>	Communications Strategy 2025 – 2029		
<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet	<b>Date:</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2026
<b>Report of:</b>	Communications and Engagement Manager	<b>Cabinet Portfolio:</b>	Environment and Corporate Services
<b>Cabinet Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Lythgoe	<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All wards
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment:</b>	Required:	No	Attached: N/A
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<b>Valley Plan Priorities</b>	<b>Thriving Local Economy:</b> This involves securing new inward investment, creating a sustainable economy, matching local skills with future job opportunities, and supporting town centres as unique destinations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>High Quality Environment:</b> This includes having a "clean and green" local environment, reducing the borough's carbon footprint, improving waste and recycling rates, and delivering new homes with a good mix of housing tenures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Healthy &amp; Proud Communities:</b> This priority focuses on improving the health and physical/mental wellbeing of residents, reducing health inequalities, ensuring access to better leisure facilities and health services, and fostering a sense of pride in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Effective &amp; Efficient Council:</b> The aim is to provide good quality and responsive services, embrace new technology, be a financially sustainable council with a commercial outlook, and ensure sound governance.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Rossendale Borough Council commenced a review of its Communications Strategy in April 2026 following the appointment of a new Communications and Engagement Manager. This report presents the refreshed Communications Strategy 2025-2029 and the accompanying Annual Action Plan 2026-2027 for consideration and approval. The review was undertaken to ensure the Council's communications approach remains modern, accessible and aligned with the Valley Plan, and to ensure the Council has the internal capacity and tools required to deliver an effective communications function.
- 1.2 The review examined the existing strategy in full, alongside the operational implications of bringing previously outsourced activity back in-house. This included assessing the Council's press office capacity, media monitoring requirements, digital content production, internal communications channels, and the systems needed to support proactive and responsive communication.
- 1.3 The refreshed strategy introduces a series of targeted improvements designed to strengthen the Council's communication function. These include a clearer emphasis on a digital-first but not digital-only approach, a stronger focus on two-way engagement, and a more human, conversational tone to build trust and reinforce the Council's identity.

## 2. RECOMMENDATION

**2.1 That Cabinet considers and approves the refreshed Communications Strategy 2025-2029 and annual Action Plan update 2026-2027.**

### **3. BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR THE DECISION**

3.1 Rossendale Borough Council is required to communicate with its stakeholders in a way that is effective, accessible, and aligned with the Council's values. Clear, consistent, and insight-led communication supports the Council to build trust, strengthen relationships, protect its reputation and ensure that residents, Members, staff, partners and community groups understand the Council's priorities and services.

3.2 Since 2022, elements of the Council's communications function have been delivered through an external PR agency. In 2026, the Council took the decision to end this contract and transition to a fully in-house model, the contract with VIVA PR ends in May 2026. With the appointment of a Communications and Engagement Manager in April 2026, the Council took the decision to review the existing Communications Strategy 2025-2029 to ensure it reflects the operational requirements of an in-house model, aligns with the Council's values and the Valley Plan, and supports a modern, accessible and human-centred approach to communication.

3.3 The review identified the need to strengthen the strategy in several areas, including:

- Embedding a digital-first but not digital-only approach to ensure communication remains accessible to all residents.
- Placing greater emphasis on two-way engagement, and enable a 'engage, listen and respond' approach.
- Adopting a more human, personable tone to build trust and reinforce a recognisable Council identity.
- Shifting the focus from a one-way broadcast communication to more conversational, collaborative communication.
- Clarifying the tools, processes and performance measures required to deliver an effective in-house communications function.

### **4. RISK**

4.1 The Council's communications function is delivered by a small team, which can create vulnerability if staffing levels fluctuate. This will be mitigated through clearer prioritisation, forward planning and streamlined processes.

4.2 A wide range of communication channels are used across different departments, which can lead to variation in tone, accessibility and messaging. The action plan references conducting an audit of existing channels and owners and then work to strengthen coordination and guidance.

4.3 The transition from an external PR agency to a fully in-house model requires the Council to ensure appropriate systems and tools are in place. This will be mitigated through the implementation of media monitoring and distribution services.

4.4 While digital communication is increasingly important, some stakeholders prefer or require non-digital channels. This will be mitigated through the strategy's commitment to a digital-first but not digital-only approach.

### **5. SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS (FINANCE)**

5.1 Financial implications are expected to be minimal and contained within existing budgets; however, any additional resource, system, or transition costs should be identified and managed appropriately.

## **6. MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS (LEGAL)**

6.1 The proposals are within the Council's powers but must comply with data protection law and respect privacy rights. Delivery should be fair and transparent, with ongoing oversight

## **7. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Through delivery of the strategy, consideration will be given to equality, socio-economic, accessibility, and data protection, ensuring communication is inclusive, proportionate, and compliant with relevant legislation

## **8. POLICY/STRATEGY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The policy aligns with corporate priorities, particularly delivering an efficient and effective council, by clearly articulating how the Council will communicate and promote its work and services.

## **9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The approach supports preparation for LGR, helping to ensure a smooth transition into a new council through consistent and coordinated communication.

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 Appendix 1. RBC Communications Strategy 2025-29

10.2 Appendix 2. Communications Strategy Action Plan 2026-2027

10.3 Appendix 3. Communications Strategy Action Plan 2025-2026

# Communication Strategy 2025-2029

Rosendale Borough Council (the Council) believes that good communication builds trust, strengthens communities, and improves services. We will communicate with our stakeholders including officers, Members, residents, businesses, partners, community and voluntary groups, in ways that are human, accessible and meaningful.

## 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.

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## Core Themes

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. We will create accessible opportunities for two-way communication so stakeholders can share insight that shapes decisions. We will use a mix of proven channels and pilot emerging platforms to reach people where they are.

### Communication

Communicate with stakeholders using the channels that work best for them, providing clear and timely information and explaining the context behind our work so people understand how and why services are delivered.

### Feedback

Respond promptly to enquiries and keep information up to date. Use a 'you said, we did' approach to show progress on council projects, ensuring communications are targeted, insight-led, and relevant to stakeholders.

### 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, communication has shifted increasingly towards digital channels, and our approach reflects this change. We will adopt a digital-first, but not digital-only model, prioritising digital platforms where they add value while maintaining accessible alternatives for those who prefer or require non-digital methods.

We will use a range of effective channels to explain our work clearly and show the purpose behind what we do, supporting the Council's ambition to be an effective and efficient organisation that fosters pride in the community. By presenting information in a human, engaging and accessible way, we will support stronger understanding of services, priorities and the "why" behind our work

## Priorities to deliver this Strategy

- Increase understanding of the Council's services and supports the delivery of the Council's Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan.
- Improve the use of internal communications to support a culture where staff are informed, empowered, and proud ambassadors for the Council.
- Build and maintain a strong, human, and recognisable Council identity.
- Embed two-way communications by engaging and consulting with our stakeholders to support the Council's decision making process.

## Outcomes of 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 Deliver a digital-first approach that remains inclusive and accessible.

This strategy will be supported by the annual Communications Action Plan. Progress will be reviewed regularly, using indicators such as resident feedback, digital engagement, media activity and staff insight, to help us understand what is working well and where approaches may need to adapt.

## Communications Strategy – Annual Action Plan 2026/2027

Priorities	Actions	Update
<b>Increase understanding of the Council’s services and support delivery of the Valley Plan: Our Place, Our Plan.</b>	Deliver clear, timely and accessible communications explaining Council services, decisions and the ‘why’ behind them.	
	Strengthen forward-planning of communications through monthly planning cycles and improved coordination with service areas.	
	Deliver resident-focused content using plain language, human stories, and visual formats.	
	Ensure communications are accessible and inclusive, delivering a digital-first but not digital-only approach, including print materials.	
	Create an in-house press office following the end of the external PR agency contract.	
<b>Improve internal communications to support an informed, empowered and engaged workforce.</b>	Conduct a review of current internal channels being used to communicate with staff.	

	Support the development and rollout of the new SharePoint-based intranet and keep communications regular.	
	Strengthen two-way communication with staff through regular opportunities to feedback.	
	Deliver clear internal communications to support Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), ensuring staff understand changes, timelines and impacts.	
	Conduct the annual staff satisfaction survey and increase response rates. Use insight to shape internal communications.	
	Support staff wellbeing and engagement.	
<b>Build and maintain a strong, human and recognisable Council identity</b>	Support officers to promote council activity and mitigate challenges or negativity through clear, transparent and timely communications.	
	Continue the rollout of the refreshed corporate branding across digital, print, and physical assets.	
	Identify and support opportunities for award submissions that showcase Council achievements.	

	Strengthen the Council's digital presence through improved content quality and regular performance monitoring.	
	Support high-profile projects and regeneration programmes with clear, consistent and proactive communications.	
<b>Embed two-way communications by engaging listening and responding to stakeholders to build insight, improve decisions and demonstrate impact</b>	Enhance social media as a two-way channel by increasing responsiveness, conversation and resident-focused content, to set the Council's narrative and improve transparency.	
	Monitor and manage the Council's social media accounts, delivering a minimum posting schedule, regular audits and insight-led improvements.	
	Conduct the annual Residents' Survey, ensuring accessible promotion, targeted outreach and clear reporting of results using a "you said, we did" approach.	
	Deliver clear, accessible communications to support LGR public engagement, including FAQs, consultation materials and multimedia content.	
	Pilot new engagement tools and digital platforms to reach under-represented	

	groups and improve the inclusivity of our communications.	
	Maintain collaborative working relationships with other departments and external teams to support joint projects and shared priorities.	
	Maintain positive relationships with local, regional and national media, ensuring balance and accurate coverage.	
<b>Deliver a digital-first approach that remains inclusive and accessible</b>	Implement the social media strategy, shifting from a noticeboard approach to a new resident-focused, conversational model.	
	Increase the use of short-form video, behind-the-scenes content and community-focused storytelling.	
	Review the Council website to improve clarity, navigation and user experience.	
	Ensure non-digital alternatives remain available for residents who prefer or require them.	

# Communications Strategy – Annual Action Plan 2025/2026

Priorities	Actions	Update
<p><b>Increase understanding of the Council’s services and support delivery of the Valley Plan.</b></p>	<p>Provide clear, accessible and timely communications on Council services, projects and decisions.</p>	<p>A monthly Community Bulletin was shared via socials, circulated to community and voluntary partners, and published on the Council’s website to provide information on local support, events, and funding available.</p> <p>Members received regular emails with updates on upcoming press releases and social media campaigns, along with monthly roundup summarising communications from the previous month.</p> <p>Animated explainer videos were developed to provide clear information both internally and externally, e.g. safeguarding, LGR.</p>
	<p>Provide a responsive and proactive press office.</p>	<p>42 press releases were written and distributed in 2025. All coverage can be viewed here: <a href="https://share.coveragebook.com/f/ddc546c14b90c2fa">https://share.coveragebook.com/f/ddc546c14b90c2fa</a></p> <p>Media enquiries were handled promptly and responded to within 24 hours.</p> <p>Reactive statements were issued on several high-profile issues, including the waste transfer station, Rawtenstall cemetery incident, and LGR options.</p>
	<p>Ensure officers and Members understand media protocols</p>	<p>Communications training was delivered to Economic Development and nominated officers from each department. Training was delivered over two sessions on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2025 and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2025.</p> <p>A social media and website ownership audit was completed to nominate officers responsible for updating the Council’s secondary channels/websites, e.g. Bacup 2040, Rawtenstall Market, etc.</p> <p>A sign-off protocol was developed and shared with officers to improve approvals process on communications.</p>

	Refresh and public the Communications Strategy 2025-2029	<p>The strategy was refreshed and approved in 2025 in line with the Council's Valley Plan.</p> <p>Early implementation work began, including updating templates.</p>
<b>Improve internal communications to promote staff wellbeing and engagement</b>	Maintain consistent internal communication channels	<p>Internal communications were maintained through the CEO huddle, Daily Message, and corporate team meeting agenda.</p> <p>A digital staff suggestions box was created, and new staff suggestion boxes were ordered to gather feedback from staff.</p> <p>Your Voice staff engagement group was reviewed and re-established, with clear terms of reference. Meetings were held on a quarterly basis, with ongoing reviews. The meetings were put on hold due to lack of engagement.</p>
	Progress work to re-establish a modern intranet platform	Initial scoping work for a new intranet platform was completed.
	Support the staff engagement and wellbeing initiatives	<p>A programme of wellbeing activities was delivered throughout April 2025 in recognition of stress awareness month.</p> <p>The Council's annual Christmas Staff engagement session was delivered to all staff to highlight 2025 achievements, LGR, and ambitions for 2026.</p> <p>Monthly lunchtime learn sessions were delivered to all staff on a number of topics including; Rossendale Works, Homelessness in Rossendale, Economic Development update, etc.</p>
	Deliver the annual staff satisfaction survey	The 2025 survey received 50 responses, with 95% of responses enjoying working for the Council.
<b>Build and maintain the Council's identity and reputation</b>	Continue roll-out of refreshed corporate branding	<p>Roll-out of the refreshed corporate branding continued across services.</p> <p>Branding guidance was promoted through internal channels.</p> <p>Corporate templates were created and shared to all staff.</p>
	Provide communications support for	Communications support was provided for the Lancashire County

	Elections	Council (May 2025) and Whitworth Ward By-Elections (June 2025).
	Develop and submit at least one award submission per year	Drafted four entries for LGC (Community, Small team, Housing and Public/Private Partnerships) and two for MJ awards (Finance Team and Rossendale Works) in December 2025 for submission in January 2026.
<b>Embedding two-way communications to support decision-making</b>	Manage positive working relationships with local, regional and national media	Media relationships were maintained through the external PR agency.  Regular engagement took place with local reporters and regional outlets.
	Manage and monitor the Council's social media accounts	Social media activity was delivered jointly between the external PR agency and internal officers. A weekly schedule of social posts with minimum of three posts a day covering Councils four priorities was completed.  Quarterly performance data was provided for the corporate Performance Management Report.  A quarterly audit of all social platforms, tracking and monitoring follower numbers and engagement to ensure effective engagement is completed.  The Council's main social media channel, Facebook, followers increased by 13.8%, reactions and likes increased by 36.8%, and comments/interactions increased by 32.2% - when compared to 2024/25.
	Conduct the annual Residents Survey	The Council's annual residents survey was shared in October 2025. The survey received 8,072 responses, increasing by 42% when compared to 2024.  The survey was promoted via multiple communication channels including; social media, posters (QR codes), Daily Message, texts and emails via the electoral database, and in-person engagements via Economic Development.
	Develop the Council's Rossendale	The Rossendale Panel was reviewed and combined with the Council's

Panel database to support resident and stakeholder consultation including facilitation of focus groups

quarterly digital newsletter mailing list. Ongoing consultations were shared via the digital newsletter. At the end of 2025, the mailing list had 1,535 subscribers.