



EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Communication, Engagement and Consultation Strategy Update 2023	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Corporate Management Team: 20th September	X
	Pre Cabinet: 28th September	X
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group: 5th / 11th October	X
	Cabinet: 23rd October	



Is this an Executive Decision:	YES	Is this a Key Decision:	NO
Is this in the Forward Plan:	YES	Is the Report Confidential: If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:	NO N.A

Essential Signatories:

ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE

Monitoring Officer: **John Teasdale**

Date Signature

Interim Chief Finance Officer: **Lisa Turner**

Date Signature

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

Date: 23rd October 2023

REPORT TITLE: Communication, Engagement and Consultation Strategy Update 2023

PORTFOLIO: Leader of the Council

CHIEF OFFICER: Mark Rizk

CONTACT OFFICER: James Abbott (Corporate & Commercial Manager)
Ext. No. x1244

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. To provide an overview of the refreshed Communication, Engagement and Consultation Strategy which is recommended for approval.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This document provides the long term strategic approach to the Council's communication, engagement and consultation. The document will guide the Council in meeting its communication, engagement and consultations targets and objectives throughout the lifespan of the strategy.
- 2.2. The strategy sets a framework for council communications both internally and externally, and gives direction to all media, online, internal, marketing, publications and public relations communications activity undertaken on behalf of the authority.
- 2.3. The strategy will guide the Council on how to build trust and enhance engagement with stakeholders, influence how we communicate with members and officers, and structure our consultation process with residents

2.4. Initially approved in December 2021, the strategy has been updated and enhanced to include the introduction of the Gunning Principles when considering consultation, the strengthening of consultation and engagement elements and additional actions within the strategy's Programme Plan.

3. **Background**

3.1. The initial communication, engagement and consultation strategy was first approved in December 2021.

4. **Contribution to Corporate Priorities**

4.1. The strategy supports the delivery of all Corporate Priorities.

5. **The Strategy**

5.1. **Overview**

5.1.1. The main focus of the strategy review was to strengthen aspects related to engagement and consultation. In addition, new actions are also included with the Programme Plan to reflect the progress of the previous strategy and current aspirations.

5.1.2. The following sections of the report describe the enhancements to the strategy.

5.2. **Engagement and Consultation**

5.2.1. The revised strategy strengthens the Council's approach to consultation and engagement. Section 3 of the Strategy describes the Gunning Principles and how they will be used with regards to engagement and consultation.

5.2.2. The Gunning Principles are the founding legal principles applicable to public consultation in the UK. They consist of four principles that must be met:

- **Proposals are still at a formative stage:**

A final decision **has not yet been made**, or predetermined, by the decision makers

- **There is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration':**

The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be **available, accessible, and easily interpretable** for consultees to provide an informed response.

- **There is adequate time for consideration and response:**
There must be **sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate** in the consultation. There is no set timeframe for consultation, despite the widely accepted twelve-week consultation period, as the length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation.
- **‘Conscientious consideration’ must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made**
Decision-makers should be able to **provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account.**

5.2.3. A practical example of a process that can be considered to be compliant with the Gunning Principles, is provided for illustrative purposes in Figure 3 of the Strategy, noting that all individual consultations should be tailored to be bespoke to the specific consultation subject matter.

5.2.4. The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet model. The full Council elects a Leader who, in turn, appoints and chairs the Cabinet. Each Cabinet member has a [specific area of responsibility](#). The Cabinet meets regularly so decisions are made in a timely manner. The Cabinet may also be called the Executive. Appropriate consultation contributes to effective decision-making by the Council, and its Cabinet, on behalf of the Borough and its citizens. Mechanisms for enhancing engagement are detailed throughout this Strategy, for example public participation in the scrutiny and overview of the Council.

5.2.5. The original strategy consisted of three themes (Understanding our Audience and Sense of Place; Communicating Effectively; and Measuring Success) which help categorised a number of actions.

5.2.6. A new theme has been included within Section 4 of the Strategy called ‘Engagement and Consultation’, with a number of additional actions now included which are described below.

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Sessions.

5.2.6.1. Members of the public will be able [to ask regular questions to Cabinet Members](#) using both online and in-person approaches. This will increase transparency and enhance local democracy.

5.2.6.2. An online form will be made available to allow questions to be raised to Cabinet members directly, with face to face appointments available as well. In person community forums can be run on an ad-hoc basis.

Streaming Council Meetings

5.2.6.3. To further increase transparency, the Council will livestream public meetings online. The meetings will be streamed over the internet, allowing the public to watch proceedings from their home.

Citizens' Jury

5.2.6.4. A Citizens' Jury provides a platform for local people to engage in decision making. This will allow local people to directly influence and help shape key local decisions.

5.2.6.5. The Council will explore options for the most appropriate way of implementing a Citizen's Jury, which could include utilising a model through which an independent organisation co-ordinates a Jury of randomly selected citizens who will consider an issue and make recommendations to the Council on what should be done.

Public Participation in Scrutiny

5.2.6.6. The Council has [introduced public participation in Scrutiny](#), giving citizens opportunity to raise a question directly to the committee.

5.2.6.7. Introducing public participation at scrutiny committees, enabling citizens to address scrutiny committees directly with appropriate questions, further increases transparency and local engagement with democratic processes.

Openness and Transparency

5.2.6.8. The Strategy makes a commitment to the principles of openness and transparency in its communications, engagement and consultation activities, noting that in the practical application of these principles, the Council needs to have regard to legal obligations, which in some cases, may require information to remain confidential. Information can subsequently be communicated at the point it is no longer confidential.

5.3. Strategy Themes

5.3.1. The four themes of the revised strategy (see Figure 5 of the Strategy) are shown below, including associated actions:

Understanding our Audience and Sense of Place (AP)

- Place Branding (AP1)

Communicating Effectively (CE)

- Annual Communications Plan (CE1)
- Digital Communications (CE2)
- Website Content Refresh (CE3)
- Internal Communications (CE4)
- Review of Communications Toolkit (CE5)

Engagement and Consultation (EC)

- Communicating the Gunning Principles (EC1)
- Cabinet member question and answer sessions (EC2)
- Streaming Public Council Meetings (EC3)
- Citizens' Assembly Panel (EC4)
- Public Participation in Scrutiny (EC5)

Measuring Success (MS)

- Monitoring and evaluation of communication (MS1)

5.3.2. The Programme Plan has also been updated to include new outcomes and targets across these four themes, including detail of the specific actions action detailed above under each of the four theme heading.

5.3.3. The revised strategy document is available in full at Appendix 1 – Beyond Communications: A Strategy for Communication, Engagement and Consultation.

5.3.4. An Equalities and Health Impact Assessment (EHIA) has been undertaken as necessary and is attached as Appendix 2, and a summary of the progress of the previous strategy's actions has been attached as Appendix 3.

6. Financial Considerations

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: **Anya Murray***

6.1. Any financial requirements for the delivery of this Strategy would be met either from either existing resources / budgets or, should it be required, via a funding bid during the annual MTFS refresh and as such subject to a separate decision(s).

7. Risk Assessment and Management

- 7.1. The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:
- 7.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):
- 7.2.1. Enhance methods of communication, engagement and consultation with residents, officers, members and partners.
- 7.3. **Negative** (Threats):
- 7.3.1. Failure to adhere to our communication and consultation principles could have negative reputational impacts on the Council.
- 7.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

8. Legal Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:
John Teasdale

- 8.1. The Local Government Act 1986 contained the statutory power for the Secretary of State to issue a Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity which all Local Authorities are required to have regard to. This was further strengthened by the insertion of a new section 4A of the 1986 Act by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 which grants the Secretary of State the power to direct specific authorities to comply with requirements of the Code.
- 8.2. The current Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity sets out guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity. Seven principles underpin the guidance which requires all local authority publicity to be lawful, cost effective, objective, even handed, appropriate, to have regard to equality and diversity and to be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.
- 8.3. It is important to note that the Local Government Act 1986 specifically prohibits Local Authorities publishing any material which appears to be intended to affect public support for any particular political party.

9. Equalities and Health

- 9.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is attached as Appendix 2.

9.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

10. **Data Protection Implications – Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)**

10.1. A DPIA must be completed where there are plans to:

- use systematic and extensive profiling with significant effects;
- process special category or criminal offence data on a large scale; or
- systematically monitor publicly accessible places on a large scale
- use new technologies;
- use profiling or special category data to decide on access to services;
- profile individuals on a large scale;
- process biometric data;
- process genetic data;
- match data or combine datasets from different sources;
- collect personal data from a source other than the individual without providing them with a privacy notice ('invisible processing');
- track individuals' location or behaviour;
- profile children or target marketing or online services at them; or
- process data that might endanger the individual's physical health or safety in the event of a security breach

10.2 Following consideration of the above, there are no Data Protection implications arising from this report which would require a DPIA.

11. **Human Rights**

11.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

12. **Sustainability** (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

12.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) **N/A**

13. **Recommendation(s)**

13.1. To adopt the refreshed Communications, Engagement and Consultation Strategy as detailed in Appendix 1.

14. **Appendices**

14.1. Appendix 1: Beyond Communications: A Strategy for communication, engagement and consultation.

14.2. Appendix 2: EHIA

14.3. Appendix 3: Previous Strategy Targets Delivered