

Communications and Engagement strategy

2026 – 2028

Introduction to the strategy

Effective communication and meaningful engagement are essential to building trust, transparency and collaboration between Hart District Council and the communities we serve. This strategy sets out how we will communicate clearly, consistently and proactively with residents, staff, councillors and partners over the next three years.

Our aim is to ensure that everyone understands:

- Why we are doing something
- How we are doing it
- What we are doing
- The difference it makes to our communities.

The Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge in 2025 highlighted the need to showcase our achievements and prepare for significant changes ahead, with Local Government Reorganisation in 2028. This strategy positions communications and engagement at the heart of that transformation — supporting staff, informing residents and strengthening relationships with stakeholders.

By focusing on four key areas:

1. Strategic communication
2. Relationship management
3. Resident engagement
4. Internal communication

we will create a culture of openness and dialogue that helps Hart thrive now and in the future.

We're committed to ensuring that communication and engagement activity is accessible, inclusive and representative of the communities and workforce we serve. This strategy supports our equality, diversity and inclusion principles.

Strategic communication: Set, coordinate and guide our communication activity

Strategic communication will sit at the heart of how the Communications Team will operate. We will work with senior leaders, staff and councillors to help strengthen the way we communicate important strategies and initiatives to our audiences.

The Communications team will:

- work with staff and stakeholders to connect our vision, Corporate Plan 2026–31, and service plans in a way that makes sense for different audiences
- take a leading role in the transition to the new unitary authority in 2028, collaborating with senior officers in managing communications to external and internal audiences
- identify issues and risks that could impact on the reputation of the Council by monitoring social media content, print and digital media
- offer support and creative ideas to any project, campaign or initiative that requires communication, to help teams achieve their core objectives as set out in our Corporate Plan
- work with front-facing teams to develop bespoke strategic narrative plans to help identify:
 - o clear team aims and objectives
 - o core messages for their audiences
 - o links to our Council narrative statement
 - o key audiences
 - o initiatives or campaigns for the next 12 months
 - o measures of evaluation
- gather intelligence from a range of audiences and sources to help inform our approach to campaigns and Council activities
- identify potential media opportunities by developing relationships with local, regional and national media outlets
- monitor and review our current communication channels as well as explore new methods and channels of communication
- manage and protect our brand with clear and effective guidelines for officers, Members and partners.

Relationship management: Develop two-way conversations with our partners

For the Communications Team to be successful in **relationship management**, closer connections need to be created and maintained. This will include senior officers, Members and our partners to ensure Hart talks up its successes and leaves a legacy after 2028 when the new unitary authority is created.

The Communications team will:

- actively contribute to the formative discussions with our Local Government Reorganisation partners, including Hampshire County Council, to help plan the transition to the new unitary
- create and provide communication and media training to officers and Members to help develop a mature communications offer across the services
- stay up to date with media and digital trends by working with the Local Government Association, Socitm and other recognised local government agencies
- collaborate with teams to identify and create news and project stories to share across the range of audiences to get the best possible coverage and exposure
- develop a comprehensive list of agencies, authorities and partners working across Hampshire to issue relevant and timely communications (Appendix 1)
- build trust and display honesty, authority and integrity when dealing with all our stakeholders
- evaluate media coverage, public sentiment and reach of engagement to understand impact of Council stories which will be turned into insight and shared across teams
- work with directors, officers and relevant Portfolio Holders to develop specific plans for each front-facing team.

Resident engagement: Build and maintain relationships with our communities

Genuine **resident engagement** between the Council and our communities allows us to understand what local people are thinking, saying and doing. Any effective communication function isn't just about getting our audiences to listen to our news; it's also about encouraging them to engage with us and listening to what they have to say about us.

The Communications team will:

- shape and develop our [Council narrative](#) to fit the rapidly changing landscape in local government and help explain our story to audiences
- develop guidelines around our approach to engagement and consultation and develop a strategic view on activities
- use a range of tools, including user testing and AI, to enhance the experience across our corporate website to ensure it is accessible, simple and readable
- develop our approach to planning, implementing and evaluating communication activities and campaigns
- work with officers to develop our communication plans to help coordinate all activity that relates to a project, campaign or initiative
- challenge ourselves to develop our digital newsletters and provide the communication filter for all service area external newsletters
- coordinate a training programme to build awareness and understanding for our officers and Members around the way we communicate and engage with residents including design principles, tone of voice, best channels and accessibility
- continuously review, refine and improve communication messages and methods based on audience insights
- seek opportunities to have conversations with residents away from our owned channels.

Internal communication: Help staff stay up to date with what's happening across the Council and beyond

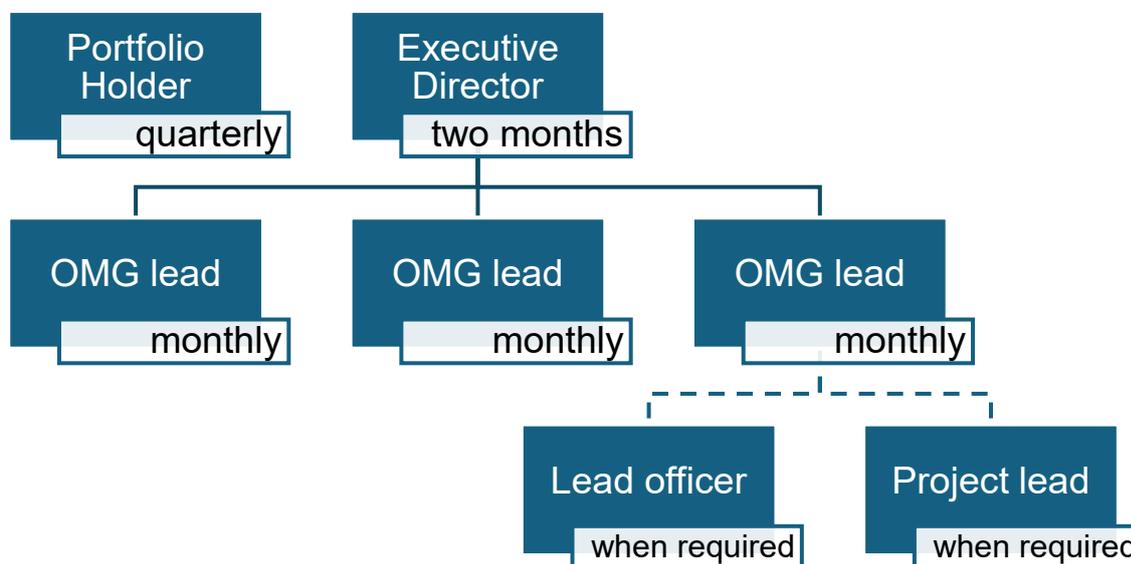
Internal communication will play a vital role in the change process for staff as we move towards the new unitary authority in 2028. We need to help develop the mechanisms to engage with staff in a way that motivates them, maximises their potential and delivers the council vision as effectively as possible.

The Communications team will:

- be integral to the change programme to the new unitary authority, working to plan for the future and celebrate our legacy
- support the service design programme as part of our preparation for the unitary authority
- work with officer leads working on programme and projects that will help deliver on our corporate plan, service plan and other key initiatives as part of our legacy
- coordinate an education programme to build awareness and understanding around the way we communicate and engage with residents including design principles, tone of voice, best channels and accessibility
- review our supporting documentation including our content strategy, corporate and brand guidelines
- present a strong brand identity (appendix 7) on all communication materials and channels, to clearly and consistently identify the organisation and its key messages to stakeholders
- provide design assistance for simple service requests and work closely to develop a formalised agreement with a local agency for more complex requests
- engage with new starters as part of the corporate induction programme to help staff make sense of our communication framework
- continue to develop Team Brief, staff newsletter and other channels to help communicate key messages to staff
- embed the team into policy and strategy reviews to ensure our tone of voice and corporate style is recognisable in all outward facing communications.

Communications operating model

We have developed a new operating model to help service areas consider their communication and engagement requirements across the four areas. Each Communications Officer will be responsible for a service area. They will work closely with each Director, and, in turn, each Operational Management Group member.



This Communications and Engagement Strategy sets out how Hart District Council will communicate with clarity, purpose and confidence during a period of significant change. By placing strategic communication, strong relationships, meaningful resident engagement and effective internal communication at the heart of everything we do, we will build trust, support our communities and empower our people.

As we prepare for Local Government Reorganisation and the transition to a new unitary authority in 2028, this strategy provides a clear framework to celebrate our achievements, support our staff to maximise their potential, and leave a positive and lasting legacy. Through openness, collaboration and continuous improvement, our communications will help ensure Hart's voice is heard, understood and valued — now and into the future.

- Appendix 1 stakeholder contact list
- Appendix 2 campaign framework
- Appendix 3 team strategic narrative plan
- Appendix 4 communications plan light touch
- Appendix 5 communications plan large scale
- Appendix 6 one-page summary
- Appendix 7 brand guidelines
- Appendix 8 content strategy

Approved at Senior Leadership Team: February 2026