

TAMESIDE COUNCIL

Communications Strategy 2023 - 2027

 **Tameside**
Metropolitan Borough

Introduction

Communications is a fundamental function that has the ability to affect change and perceptions that benefits individuals and society. We explain the objectives and policies of the Local Authority, provide clarity and reassurance to the public at times of crisis, and help people to access the information and support they need to get the very best start in life, reach their potential and live long, healthy and happy lives.

Rising demand for services, 13 years of funding cuts, and the highest inflation rates since the 1980s means that Tameside Council is faced with significant budget challenges while at the same time still needing to protect and deliver critical front line services.

We have to radically rethink how we can continue to deliver quality services, while facing such financial challenges. Meanwhile, our residents and staff are struggling through a cost of living crisis themselves. The way in we communicate our values, ambitions, how we will deliver services, support residents and provide value for money during this time is critical.

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Introduction

The way in which residents want to communicate with us is also changing - digital communications is continuing to evolve and grow in importance and resident surveys tell us that people in Tameside most trust their community peers as their source of advice and information for council services. Our approach will always be inclusive, using a range of channels and networks to reach as many residents as possible while also considering how we specifically reach target audiences. We will regularly evaluate our channels and communications activity and take learning to build on success.

This Strategy sets out our approach to communicating with residents, partners, businesses and staff and Councillors. Our communications priorities are aligned to our **Corporate Plan**.

Our Approach to Communications

The CORE role of government communications:

- C** Changing behaviours that benefit society
- O** Operational effectiveness of public services
- R** Reputation and responding in times of crises
- E** Explanation of policies and programmes

Our Communications will operate within legal boundaries and consider the seven principles of the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity (2011).

The principles state that publicity by local authorities should:

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

In addition to this, our communications will:

- be open, honest and transparent
- use clear and simple language
- use consistent and recognisable branding that is developed with the audience not just for the audience
- be accessible and tailored to meet the needs of all our audiences using a wide range of formats, channels and networks so that *everyone* is able to access the information and advice they need at the time they need it, ensuring equitable access to services.
- minimise the creation of further inequalities by targeting communications at and actively involving:
 - traditionally harder to reach groups
 - those working with and supporting them for example MPs, members, VCSE sector, community groups etc.
- be well informed using the data and insight available to us and learning from best practice.

- target audiences in a way that can stimulate positive behaviour changes and choices
- harness and build on our civic pride and sense of community so that residents are more willing and likely to self-support and care for themselves, others and the area they live.
- be two-way, building trusted relationships between the council and our communities that can support growth, service delivery and challenge any misconception
- embrace innovation and technology in a rapidly changing world, and take regular steps to improve communications practices, lower costs and increase quality in service to the public.
- be quick, appropriate and responsible when communicating in a crisis
- build and maintain an appropriate and professional relationship with the media, always looking for creative ways to develop engaging media opportunities for members and the services we offer.

- To build confidence, trust and reassurance in Tameside's ability to deliver services and growth in the borough
- To protect and improve public health and wellbeing
- To boost economic growth with a particular focus on our town centres
- Increase investment into the borough
- Build Confidence in a 'Safe Tameside'
- Support more residents into work and training opportunities
- Support the most vulnerable to understand where and how to get support with complex issues.
- Increase digital access and literacy
- Reduce the boroughs carbon footprint
- Increase attendance at events, activities and attractions across the borough
- Support children to get the very best start in life and to achieve their potential
- Increase pride in the borough
- Improve staff recruitment and retention

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Objectives

- Increase awareness of support grants, food schemes, debt and benefits advice to help people manage their money and prevent crisis situations
- Increase awareness of family support and routes into work so families can thrive
- Decrease crime and violence with a particular focus on Domestic Abuse, Violence against Women and Girls and ASB in our town centres.
- Raise awareness in criminal prevention and enforcement across a range of services.
- Encourage a digital first approach when accessing services and raise awareness of how to access and learn to use digital devices.
- Raise awareness of growth and development programmes of work and how that will benefit residents in terms of quality housing, job opportunities and boosting local businesses
- Raise awareness of what we are doing as a council and what residents can do to reduce their carbon footprint – far more than recycling
- Increase awareness of our free green and open spaces for walking and cycling
- Increase awareness of our cultural offer
- Increase awareness of our health and wellbeing support services including mental health
- Increase awareness among staff of recruitment support and promotion and improve channels to promote active job roles as an organisation
- Increase awareness of the council's services and achievements

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Target Audiences

- Staff and wider workforces across the borough
- General public
- Visitors
- Businesses
- Partner organisations
e.g. Housing Associations, GMP, Fire, Action Together
- MPs and members
- Schools and parents
- Vulnerable groups
- Media and influencers

Strategic Themes

Our People

- Best start for life
- Opportunities to learn and earn
- Healthy and active lives
- Ageing well

Our Place

- Safe, green and clean
- History, heritage and events
- Investment in infrastructure and facilities
- Housing and homelessness support

Co-operative Tameside

- Partnership working
- Resilience and supportive networks
- Building trust and relationships

Innovation and Improvement

- Digital First
- Children's improvement
- Efficient and effective services

Key Campaigns

Local authorities have a duty to communicate the large range of public services they offer. In addition, there is an obligation to support key partners in expanding the reach of their communications - as we would expect their support with Council messaging.

This presents a challenge in our audiences becoming fatigued with a high volume of messaging, especially at a time when people don't have much additional capacity to take on board messaging beyond their immediate needs.

During these times of financial challenge and developing new ways to deliver services, there is a clear increase in demand for communications. This in part reflects a greater understanding of the value of communications, however the answer to a problem can't just simply be to 'do more comms'. Our aim is to provide quality, informed, communications over a concise stream of campaigns that capture the strategic themes, aims and objectives listed above and are delivered as outlined in our supporting operational plan.

Key campaigns include:

- **Helping Hand Tameside**
Poverty / cost of living crisis response
- **Think Green Tameside**
Reducing our carbon footprint
- **Children at the Heart of Tameside**
Including Local Offer, Family Hubs and the best start for life
- **Our Streets**
Cleaner and safer streets
- **Be the Difference**
Recruitment and retention with a focus on Adult and children's social care
- **Living Well At Home**
Older people support services
- **In Tameside**
Live, work, invest and visit
- **Proud Tameside**
Highlighting our people and our places
- **Fostering**
- **Domestic Abuse / VAWG**
Includes, Break the Cycle, Cut it Out, Open Up, White Ribbon, Take Control

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Key Projects

Our Communication Strategy will also align with and support the delivery of our Corporate Key Delivery Projects

Each of the projects listed below will either form part of an overarching campaign as outlined above or will have a communications plan and campaign in its own right.

Project	Anticipated Outcome	Priority and Objectives Covered
Review the Council Tax Support Scheme	More financial help for those who need it, making it easier for families to handle their council tax bills and feel secure.	<p>Financially sustainable public services Promote fair wages and equitable employment practices.</p> <p>Safe, green and supportive communities Reduce child poverty and improve child and family social support systems.</p>
Review our digital offer for residents	Better online services to make it simple and convenient for residents to access information and support from the council.	<p>Opportunity to learn and earn Enhance digital skills and access to technology for all residents. Promote lifelong learning and upskilling programs for adults.</p>
Children's Social Care Improvement Plan	To move the service from Inadequate to Requires Improvement and towards Good so that all children, young people and families in Tameside have the best start in life to grow, thrive and achieve their best outcomes.	<p>Best start in life Promote child protection and safeguarding measures, and support cared for children.</p> <p>Reduce child poverty and improve child and family social support systems. Promote early intervention and support for children with additional needs.</p>

Project	Anticipated Outcome	Priority and Objectives Covered
<p>Develop Age Friendly Tameside Offer</p>	<p>A strategic approach to deliver real improvements to the lives of older residents to live well and thrive in their homes and communities. This will focus on improving financial security, tackling inequalities and preventing frailty; championing the voice of older people; delivering excellent primary, secondary and social care services to support those with complex long-term conditions; and ensuring a holistic approach to end of life care. This will result in reductions in falls, increases in those aged 66 and above living in their own home, having established approaches to ageing in place, and increasing the number of people who die in the place they choose.</p>	<p>Healthy and active lives Support people to be as resilient and independent as possible.</p> <p>Enhance access to and quality of care for those who need it.</p> <p>Encourage and support people towards more healthy behaviours.</p>
<p>Deliver a series of schemes to tackle health inequalities with specific focus on Healthy Places and Work & Skills</p>	<p>Disparities in health outcomes for Tameside residents are reduced, taking a system wide approach to addressing issues around tobacco, food, healthy weight, and physical activity through the Healthy Places Framework. This includes better access to help and support and improvements in the natural and built environment. There will also be improved access to skills development opportunities, supported access to employment and higher paying, more inclusive jobs across the borough</p>	<p>Healthy and active lives Develop system-wide responses to reduce health inequalities and improve health outcomes for all residents</p> <p>Encourage and support people towards more healthy behaviours</p> <p>Opportunity to learn and earn</p> <p>Promote lifelong learning and upskilling programs for adults.</p>

Project	Anticipated Outcome	Priority and Objectives Covered
Godley Green Garden Village	Deliver more than 2000 affordable new homes in a sustainable development that includes shops, offices, a medical centre, and 150 acres of open space.	<p>Safe, green and supportive communities Champion and deliver environmental sustainability including waste reduction, recycling and reuse</p> <p>Increase the supply of high-quality, affordable homes and improve the housing circumstances of those most in need.</p> <p>Design sustainable town centres and other public spaces based around resident needs.</p>
Promote key sites for development to attract investment, development, new businesses and employment	Bringing new businesses and jobs to our area, boosting the local economy and creating pride in our community.	<p>Opportunity to learn and earn Provide the infrastructure and support for local businesses to create job opportunities. Encourage entrepreneurship and support business growth and social enterprises.</p>

Project	Anticipated Outcome	Priority and Objectives Covered
Ashton Mayor Development Zone (MDZ) / Levelling Up Fund (LUF) inc. restoration of Ashton Town Hall	Bringing new life to Ashton town centre, celebrating our heritage while creating vibrant spaces for everyone to enjoy.	<p>Safe, green and supportive communities Invest in community infrastructure and facilities.</p> <p>Design sustainable town centres and other public spaces based around resident needs.</p> <p>Champion and deliver environmental sustainability including waste reduction, recycling and reuse.</p>
Stalybridge regeneration and Levelling Up Fund (LUF)	Revitalising Stalybridge with better facilities and public spaces, making it a lively and welcoming town for all.	<p>Safe, green and supportive communities Invest in community infrastructure and facilities.</p> <p>Design sustainable town centres and other public spaces based around resident needs.</p> <p>Champion and deliver environmental sustainability including waste reduction, recycling and reuse.</p>
Develop cultural offer	More cultural events and activities to enjoy, celebrating our diverse heritage and bringing the community together.	<p>Safe, green and supportive communities Invest in community infrastructure and facilities.</p> <p>Enhance community safety through crime prevention initiatives.</p>

Project	Anticipated Outcome	Priority and Objectives Covered
Delivery of Active Travel Fund/Mayor's Challenge Fund projects	Safer, more enjoyable routes for walking and cycling, encouraging a healthier lifestyle and reducing traffic.	<p>Healthy and active lives Encourage and support people towards more healthy behaviours.</p> <p>Support people to be as resilient and independent as possible.</p> <p>Champion and deliver environmental sustainability including waste reduction, recycling and reuse.</p>
Develop New Estate Strategy	Upgrading our council estates to provide high-quality, affordable homes, making residents feel proud of where they live.	<p>Safe, green and supportive communities Increase the supply of high-quality, affordable homes and improve the housing circumstances of those most in need.</p> <p>Invest in community infrastructure and facilities.</p>
Tameside Local Plan/Places for Everyone	A plan for growth that protects green spaces, provides more homes, and supports local jobs, making Tameside a wonderful place to live.	<p>Safe, green and supportive communities Champion and deliver environmental sustainability including waste reduction, recycling and reuse.</p> <p>Increase the supply of high-quality, affordable homes and improve the housing circumstances of those most in need.</p>

Workforce Communications

It is vital that internal communications are not neglected and our workforce is kept fully up to date.

We will make best use of our internal communications and staff by:

- **Ensuring all councillors have the information they need to lead in the community:** All councillors have a vital role to play and are well placed to act as key message carriers. To do this, it is essential that timely and accurate information is shared with all councillors to support them to respond to and reassure their residents. They will receive a weekly communications update via email.
- **Using internal channels to ask for assistance:** When putting requests out to the voluntary sector and public, we will also direct requests specifically to staff.
- **Utilising staff as potential communicators:** We will encourage staff to be key influencers and help to promote positive messages.
- **Acknowledging our workforce's ongoing achievements,** commitment and dedication, highlighting teams and individuals for their work
- **Building on the feedback from the workforce survey** to develop our internal communications channel

Key themes for internal messaging to staff:

- **Mental health and wellbeing**
- **Active and safe travel**
- **WorkSmart**
- **Learning and development**

Key Partners

An effective communications response requires working closely with local partners, specialist professionals and services.

Effective partner communications ensures that the right information reaches the right people at the right time from trusted and reliable sources. This avoids confusion and false messaging and instils trust and reassurance in the messages we provide.

A list of all our key partners that our communications team continue to engage with including their social media and website links can be viewed in our Public Communications Strategy.

Key Platforms and Networks

It is important to note that there is a clear distinction between communications and conversations. So any messages pushed through our owned and earned channels are expected to run alongside service led conversations and engagement with the relevant audience.

For a full list of all our public facing owned and earned channels and networks, please view our public communications strategy.

Owned internal facing channels

Chief Executive's brief	All staff	Weekly
LiveWire	All staff	Monthly
Staff portal/Intranet	All staff	Ongoing
Emails	All staff	
Office poster sites	Staff working from our buildings	

We need to evaluate our communications on an ongoing basis through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data ensuring that the campaigns and communications we deliver are achieving the planned aims and objectives. We will look not just at the way we communicate with our residents but how our residents are communicating with us so that we are not simply a conduit of information but we are instead building trusted relationships.

We will do this using a number of methods:

- Media monitoring and analysis through 'Meltwater' understanding coverage, reach and sentiment
- Social media analytics evaluating demographics of our followers, when they are engaging with us and what they engage most with through which platform
- Website hits looking at pages linked to specific campaigns and any increase pre and post campaign
- Service data looking at any improvements or increased contacts pre and post campaign
- Champions and general public looking at anecdotal feedback on campaigns and recognition
- External evaluation – metrics available from any out of home or paid for digital advertising
- Resident Surveys and quick polls – using any GM or council led survey data and social media for quick polls on specific topics.

Our communications will also be evaluated and reviewed on an annual basis and monthly digest reports will be provided to the senior leadership team.

Delivering the Strategy

The day to day delivery of the Communications Strategy will be led by the councils Corporate Communications Team, with the support of the Chief Executive and Strategic Directors, Council Leader and Cabinet. The overall responsibility for the successful implementation must also rest with every member of staff, all Elected Members, as they are our ambassadors and play a crucial role in delivering the corporate narrative and have access to direct communications with service users.

The Corporate Communications Team includes;

- **Head of Communications** – responsible for setting the strategic direction of communications and managing the service which includes;
 - **Communications Manager** – Responsible for the management of proactive, reactive and crisis communications. Upholding the reputation and voice of the Council. Coaching and day to day line management of Officers.
 - **Senior Marketing and Communications Officers** – Assigned as dedicated leads for specific Directorates, they are key partners and responsible for higher profile or more complex marketing and communication campaigns and media handling. Support officers with marketing and communications advice.
 - **Marketing and Communications Officers** – responsible for marketing communication campaigns and activity including social media and support the Senior Officers.
 - **Design and Print Team**
 - » **Design Lead** – responsible for the day to day management of design and print needs / designing all communication materials and outsourcing print
 - » **Designers** – designing all communication materials and outsourcing print