

Conwy County Borough Council

Communications & Engagement Strategy



April 2018



Conwy - Sir flaengar sy'n creu cyfleoedd

Conwy - a progressive County creating opportunity

Contents

1	Strategy Summary	2
2	Introduction	6
3	Strategy Aims & Objectives	8
4	Context	9
4.1	Corporate Plan and behaviour change objectives	9
4.2	From Customer to Citizen	10
5	Communications & Engagement Principles	11
5.1	A Consistent Approach	11
5.2	A Planned Approach	12
5.3	A Proactive Approach	13
5.4	An Authentic Approach	13
5.5	An Approach that is Accessible to All	14
6	Engagement and Communication Channels	16
6.1	Face to Face	16
6.2	Telephone	17
6.3	Social Media	17
6.4	Website & App	18
6.5	Press/PR	18
6.6	Internal Communications	19
7	Resources for Delivery	20
7.1	People	20
7.2	Communication Tools	20
7.3	Evaluation	21
8	Conclusion	22
9	APPENDIX 1	23

1 Strategy Summary

In the context of the challenging financial climate and in the face of increasing demographic challenges, Local Authorities are having to reconsider the way in which services are delivered for residents. Conwy County Borough Council is both an enabler and provider of services. It is for this reason that our new internal and external-facing strapline is 'the right environment'. It is the Council that creates the environment for good things to happen, others will share responsibility for the actual delivery of those good things.

In order to make this change we need to re-set the expectations of communities. We need to enable residents to understand the big picture of where we're going, and to understand the role they play in how we get there. As a result there has never been a more important time for a strategic approach to the way in which we manage our engagement and communications.

This strategic approach requires a shift away from viewing residents as 'customers', who have a transactional relationship with us and expect services to be delivered to a particular standard. Instead we need to engage with residents as 'citizens' who have a sense of ownership for services, and take responsibility for the way in which they are delivered.

In making this shift there will be a need for both in-depth engagement with residents, and also simple communications. It's important to recognise residents will want to interact with us on their own terms in their own way. Some will want simply to search for information, others will want full engagement. We therefore need engagement and communication activities which can deliver across the whole of this spectrum.

These activities will be delivered according to five key principles. Our approach needs to be: **consistent, planned, proactive, authentic and accessible to all.**

Key actions for adopting a more **consistent** approach to engagement and communication include:

- Creating a communications framework which identifies three strategic messages which we want to be known for and which deliver against our vision of being 'a progressive county, creating opportunity'
- Ensuring wherever possible that project and service-specific communications plans link back to these strategic messages
- Ensuring all Officers and Members are familiar with these messages and that all 'spokespeople' within the Council are confident about using these messages when speaking publicly or giving interviews
- Rolling-out writing and style guides for all staff along with a set of branded templates etc for creating public-facing documents and promotional materials
- Ensuring that all publicity materials throughout the Council conform to the brand guidelines and deliver against the strapline of creating 'the right environment'.

Key actions for adopting a more **planned** approach to engagement and communication include:

- Having a communications plan in place for every significant project, service change and new initiative that focuses on the key messages that are relevant to residents, the plan being regularly reviewed
- Having an engagement forward work programme to manage how we involve citizens from the very start
- Identifying the key decisions that are coming through important democratic meetings and ensuring the communications are ready as soon as the decision is made
- Adopting the same rigour around the communications planning cycle as we have around the budget planning cycle.

Key actions for adopting a more **proactive** approach to engagement and communication include:

- Consulting and engaging residents in advance of service changes in order to understand priorities, and so that we develop options together
- Communicating about an issue at the start of the formal democratic process rather than waiting until the final decision
- Preparing press releases in advance of important issues coming to meetings such as Cabinet, Council, Planning Committee etc so that they are translated and ready to issue as soon as the decision is made
- Building and fostering relationships with key media contacts and influencers so that we can work with them proactively on major stories.

Our **authentic** approach to engagement and communication will be carried out with honesty and integrity and will challenge inaccuracy where necessary.

Key actions include:

- Providing all senior staff and Members with special responsibilities (such as the Leader, Cabinet Members and Chairs) with media training and mentoring
- Identifying a small group of individuals who will be the 'go-to' people for interviews etc
- Planning spokesperson availability as part of the communication of major stories
- Using more people-led videos to share information
- Using Team Brief to ensure all staff are aware of major projects, initiatives and service changes so they can be ambassadors on behalf of the Council within their communities.

Key actions for adopting an approach to engagement and communication that is **accessible to all** include:

- Reviewing our current arrangements in relation to accessibility
- Developing an accessibility statement
- Raising awareness of the needs of people with a sensory impairment
- Reviewing what information we have in an accessible format and our interpretation provision within our budget constraints.

In delivering the actions for each of the five principles above we will need to adopt a new approach to the way in which we make use of our primary engagement and communication channels.

Face to Face

The opening of Coed Pella gives us the opportunity to re-design our face to face interaction with residents. In doing this we will adopt a new approach that extends far beyond the new building in Colwyn Bay. We will develop our libraries so that they become the primary point of contact with the Council for residents in communities across the County. It will be a hub and spoke approach, with staff in the town and community libraries having the same capabilities and access to information as those in Coed Pella.

Staff in other locations such as Mochdre and Bodlondeb will also have access to the knowledge database so that they can deal with enquiries from residents at the first port of call.



Telephone

We need a simpler, easier-to-access approach to our telephony system which groups complimentary service areas within dedicated call centres, learning from the experience we've already had in services such as Environment, Roads and Facilities. By adopting this approach we will be able to reduce and consolidate the number of telephone numbers we publicise. It will become much clearer to residents which number they should call for particular enquiries and there will be less risk of them being passed from pillar to post within the phone system.

Social Media

The main drive for our social media needs to be to move from quantity to quality. Over recent years, we have developed over 40 Facebook sites in addition to multiple Twitter accounts etc. The problem is that we are not delivering quality content across these sites, and on the whole we have low levels of engagement. To use social media more effectively as an engagement and communication tool we need to have fewer sites that are regularly updated with our own engaging content.

We need to have overall ownership of our social media output so that our communications are current, meaningful, and consistent across services. We also need to ensure that all social media content complies with the Welsh Language Standards.

Website & App

The corporate website and App Conwy will become ever more important communication tools over the coming years. Given our dual role as both the enablers and providers of services, we will increasingly need to focus our communication efforts on our in-depth engagement activities, and so channel-shift residents towards digital channels for simple information sharing. This will be the role of the website and app. They will be the places people in Conwy turn to when they have questions about services.

Press/PR

The media is one of the most visible and audible communications tools available to us but also one of the ones that we are least able to control. We need to communicate effectively through the media and encourage public engagement by promoting the work of the Council in clear, timely and easy to understand language. To do this we will need to develop strong relationships between the media and key contacts within the Council beyond the Communications Team. We will also need to improve the way we plan our communications so that we share stories earlier and promote our own messages confidently.

Internal Communications

With all the focus on different communication channels, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that one of the most effective channels we have for engaging residents and sharing information is our own staff. We have 5,500 people who are proud to work for Conwy, and who can help their friends and neighbours understand what we're doing, if we brief them effectively.



It's important that the senior leadership of the organisation remain visible to the wider team so that they can share updates and respond to questions. It would also be helpful for senior staff to do video updates on matters of particular importance which can be accessed by staff through the intranet.

The purpose of all of the above is to achieve the aim of this Communications and Engagement Strategy of **building trust and understanding among the residents of Conwy as we move from being the providers to the enablers of services**. The sections below explore how we will do this in more detail, and also outline the resources required for delivery. If successful, it will ensure residents support us and work with us as we start to create the service-delivery models of the future.

2 Introduction

Local Authorities are facing a period of unprecedented change. A new funding landscape means that Councils are having to rethink which services they deliver, and how they deliver them. In fact, the question is being asked, whether the Council's role is actually to deliver at all? As we look ten years into the future in Conwy, we are recognising that the Council will become the enabler of some services, rather than the provider of all services. We want to make sure that residents have access to the services they need, but we also recognise that we may not be the ones who are either most able or most appropriate to deliver them. This means that residents will increasingly be taking responsibility for their own well-being and contributing positively to their communities. We recognise this in our Corporate Plan where we list a number of areas in which we are seeking to drive behaviour change among residents.

The sheer scale of this change in service delivery requires a re-setting of expectations among communities. If we don't share the challenge with residents and work with them to create the service-delivery models of the future, the relationship between the Council and its residents will break down. They will simply see more and more services being cut, without any reduction in their Council Tax and will become ever more resentful and vocal about what they perceive to be the Council's failings.

The stakes are particularly high for Conwy in this context. In the National Survey we are rated by residents as the best performing authority in Wales for the quality of services we deliver. For a Council that performs so highly, there is a long way to fall if residents become dissatisfied. We already face regular criticism in the press and social media from a vocal minority. If we don't take residents with us as we re-shape the organisation to meet the challenges of the coming years, the militant minority will start to influence the supportive majority.

One of Conwy County's greatest assets is our reputation. This reputation is built on trust, and a Council which has the trust and understanding of its residents can achieve so much more than an authority that tries to simply enforce its corporate will. Reputation is built gradually over time and can be destroyed very quickly but it doesn't have to be static. We can shape our reputation by deciding what we want to be known for. This comes from having clarity of purpose expressed concisely and delivered consistently with integrity.

This is why effective engagement and communication is so fundamental to everything we do. It's not enough simply to do the right thing for the right reasons. If we don't communicate both the 'why' and the 'how' of the things we're doing we will lose understanding and trust. We need to enable residents to understand the big picture of where we're going, and to understand the role they play in how we get there. This means we need to factor good communication and engagement into everything we do. And we can only do this if we have a clear structure in place. We need to know exactly what we're saying, when and how.

To build trust and understanding there is a need for both engagement and simple communication. Engagement is required around major initiatives and changes that will impact residents' lives over the medium to short-term. These include initiatives such as the development of the Corporate Plan, or the move to four-weekly waste collections. In these instances we need to involve residents in all aspects of the decisions that are being made: listening to them so that they shape our decision-making and educating them about what the decision means for them. By contrast, there are other times when simple communication is enough. If a major hazard requires us to close a road at short notice we simply need to make sure that we share the relevant information as clearly, concisely, and accessibly as possible with all relevant people and organisations. It's also important to recognise that residents will want to interact with us on their own terms in their own way. Some will want simply to search for information, others will want full engagement. So we need an engagement and communication framework which can deliver across the whole of this spectrum.

The purpose of this strategy is to outline the changes we need to make to the way in which we structure our engagement and communications, as well as the way in which we use the communication channels available to us. Our approach to engagement is explored more fully in the Community Involvement Plan. And there will be a number of individual plans which outline in more detail our approach to specific channels such as social media, telephony etc. This strategy looks at how all of these activities work together; at how we can make sure that all the engagement and communication we do combine to take residents with us as we act as both the enabler and provider of services. Its primary focus is on creating trust and understanding among the people of Conwy in order to build the reputation of the Council, and create confidence in the service-delivery models of the future.



3 Strategy Aims & Objectives

The overall aim of this strategy is:

“To build trust and understanding among the residents of Conwy as we develop our dual role as both the enablers and providers of services”

The following objectives define how we will do this over the period of this strategy:

- 1 Build upon the reputation of Conwy County Borough Council by putting our corporate values at the heart of all we do and delivering within a consistent brand framework
- 2 Develop a planned structure for all our engagement and communications with a clear hierarchy of strategic messages that link directly to our Corporate Plan vision and outcomes
- 3 Deliver co-ordinated, proactive, positive communications around the priority strategic messages
- 4 Strengthen, develop and maintain opportunities for local people and groups to influence policy, service delivery and what happens in their communities
- 5 Build organisational confidence and competence in managing engagement and communication proactively and effectively
- 6 Facilitate the behaviour change objectives of the Corporate Plan.











4 Context

4.1 Corporate Plan and behaviour change objectives

The Corporate Plan 2017-2022 identifies the Council's priorities for the next five years and sets out the actions needed to achieve them. It was developed through an ongoing conversation with Conwy's communities. Integral to the Corporate Plan are the eight long term citizen outcomes which reflect the aspirations both of the Council and of residents.

People in Conwy:

-  **OUTCOME 1:** Are educated and skilled
-  **OUTCOME 2:** Are safe and feel safe
-  **OUTCOME 3:** Have access to affordable, appropriate, good quality accommodation that enhances the quality of their lives
-  **OUTCOME 4:** Are healthy and active
-  **OUTCOME 5:** Live in a county which has a prosperous economy
-  **OUTCOME 6:** Value and look after the environment
-  **OUTCOME 7:** Live in a county where heritage, culture and the Welsh language thrive
-  **OUTCOME 8:** Contribute to their community. They are informed, included and listened to.

Each of these outcomes has a range of identified actions for delivery, and many of these point to the requirement for behaviour change in our communities. The plan includes the following as areas where residents can become more involved in the delivery of the plan's objectives:

- Supporting your children's education
- Safeguarding - looking out for people, reporting concerns
- Exercise - the great outdoors
- Buy local
- Promoting the area
- Energy efficiency
- Recycling
- Supporting or developing local events
- Welsh - learn and use it
- Volunteering
- Get involved in developments.

Effective engagement and communication will be needed around these areas if we are to move the 'behaviour change' objectives of the plan from a commitment on paper to delivery in reality.

4.2 From Customer to Citizen

In order to achieve these behaviour change ambitions, a fundamental shift is required away from seeing our residents as customers, to seeing them as citizens. At the time of previous Corporate Plans, the concept of residents as ‘customers’ was helpful. It set an expectation around the standard of service delivery we should aspire to. As we increasingly act as both the enabler as well as the provider of services, the relationship the Council has with residents needs to change.

The use of the word ‘customer’ suggests a transactional relationship: in effect, the resident buys the service from the Council and expects delivery to a particular standard. The ultimate expression of this relationship is in the all-too-familiar refrain: “they’re putting up my Council Tax but cutting the number of times they empty my bin”.

By contrast, a ‘citizen’ has a direct stake in those services. They have a sense of ownership for them, and take responsibility for the way in which they are delivered. The behaviour change objectives of the Corporate Plan lay the ground for this shift: moving away from ‘customers’ who expect the Council to do things for them, to ‘citizens’ who actively play a part in the well-being of their communities.

Moving from interacting with residents as ‘customers’ to interacting with them as ‘citizens’ requires a different approach to communication and engagement. A *customer* wants to be told what services are available to them, how they can access them and what they’re entitled to if the promised service isn’t delivered. By contrast a *citizen* needs to understand the context in which the services are being delivered, the role they can play in enabling this delivery and how these services can be safeguarded or improved for the future. This shift will define the approach taken to engagement and communications within this strategy.



5 Communications & Engagement Principles

To achieve the objectives set out in this strategy, Conwy's communications need to be:

- Consistent
- Planned
- Proactive
- Authentic
- Accessible to all.

These five principles should guide all that we do when sharing information, or engaging with residents.

5.1 A Consistent Approach

When it comes to communications, consistency is king. In a world of 24 hour news and a plethora of social media channels, people are being constantly bombarded with messages, news and information. In such a noisy environment it can be difficult to be heard. The key to successful communication is to keep saying the same thing over and over again, to ensure the message cuts through.

In any organisation the temptation is to talk about all the things that are important to us. This is particularly tempting in a Local Authority environment where we deliver such a wide variety of services to such a wide variety of people. The danger is that the more we try to say, the less people will hear it.

An example of this happening in practice was the EU Referendum. The Leave campaign identified two reasons for leaving the EU: stopping immigration and putting £350m a week back into the NHS. Whether people agreed with them or not, everyone knew that these were the two messages that the Leave campaign were talking about. By contrast the Remain campaign had an almost endless list of reasons why we should stay in the EU. Every time they talked about it they talked about another reason to remain. The result was that of all these reasons, none of them 'stuck' in the public consciousness. Their communication had less cut-through and therefore less impact.

We need to be wary of doing the same thing in Conwy. There are lots of great things the Council does within the County but if we talk about all of them, people just won't hear them. To communicate really effectively we need to be really confident about what we want to be known for. We then need to turn this into a limited number of clear messages which we share as often, and through as many different channels, as we can. We then need to demonstrate how everything we talk about links back to these key messages. **This is how we build trust with citizens: by saying what we stand for and then continually demonstrating how we're delivering against that commitment.**

The consistency around the messaging is supported by a consistent visual identity or brand. This enables us to become recognisable wherever people encounter us. To deliver this we need: a set of designed templates with a defined colour palette for all of our publicity materials; a consistent font and writing style for all of our publications; a consistent strapline ('the right environment') to reaffirm what we're here for and the Conwy Council logo to badge everything we do.

Businesses use brand to move customers away from one-off purchases towards a long-term relationship where they become loyal to a particular product. In a similar way, we as Conwy Council can use branding as the consistent glue that binds all of our services and activities together within the same values and standards. In this way a consistent brand will help us build trust and understanding among our residents.

Key actions for adopting a more **consistent** approach to engagement and communication therefore include:

- Creating a communications framework which identifies three strategic messages which we want to be known for and which deliver against our vision of being ‘a progressive county, creating opportunity’
- Ensuring wherever possible that project and service-specific communication plans link back to these strategic messages
- Ensuring all Officers and Members are familiar with these messages and that all ‘spokespeople’ within the Council are confident about using these messages when speaking publicly or giving interviews
- Rolling-out writing and style guides for all staff along with a set of branded templates etc for creating public-facing documents and promotional materials
- Ensuring that all publicity materials throughout the Council conform to the brand guidelines and deliver against the strapline of creating ‘the right environment’.

5.2 A Planned Approach

Approximately 80% of the things we as the Council need to communicate about are known to us in advance. Whether it’s the budget, a new project, or a change to a service, the majority of the work we do that impacts on residents evolves within a structured planning framework. This means we need to embed our engagement and communication more firmly within every stage of this framework.

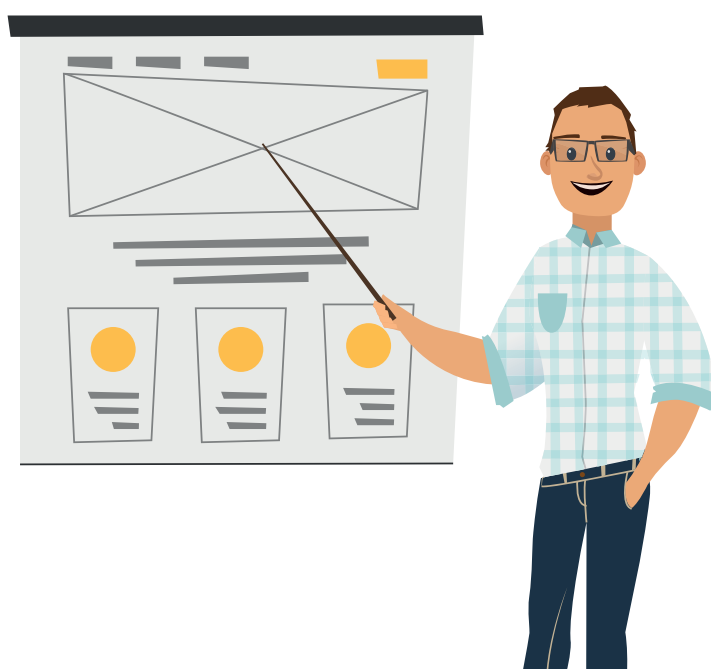
For major projects we often produce a communications plan at the start of the project. But to be truly effective, this plan needs to be regularly reviewed and updated, taking account of the way in which stakeholders, critics and residents are all talking about, and engaging with the project.

Ideally where service changes are being considered, residents should be involved in contributing to that change. When we get to the point of putting forward one or more preferred options, we need to spend as much time planning how this decision will be shared with residents, as we do in planning how it will come through the democratic process.

Most importantly of all, everything we say about projects, service changes and new initiatives should relate back to our agreed priority messages, the things we want to be known for and which are the basis of our reputation.

Key actions for adopting a more **planned** approach to engagement and communication therefore include:

- Having a communications plan in place for every significant project, service change and new initiative that focuses on the key messages that are relevant to residents, and which is reviewed at regular intervals
- Having an engagement forward work programme to manage how we involve citizens from the very start
- Identifying the key decisions that are coming through important democratic meetings and ensuring the communications are ready as soon as the decision is made



- Adopting the same rigour around the communications planning cycle as we have around the budget planning cycle.

5.3 A Proactive Approach

In relating to residents as ‘customers’ we have tended to wait until we are absolutely sure of a decision before communicating about it. Engaging with residents as ‘citizens’ enables us to share information much earlier, and this in turn gives us greater opportunity to be in control of our messages.

Under the current arrangements we usually wait until the decision on a project or service change is made at the relevant public meeting (Cabinet, Council, Planning Committee etc) before we say anything officially about it through a press release. However this doesn’t stop it coming into the public domain. The publication of Scrutiny Committee agendas makes the subject public regardless of whether we have said anything official about it. As a consequence, others often get their message out about our initiative first and start forming public opinion about it according to their own agenda. We are then forced into a reactive position once the decision is made trying to explain or defend it.

By engaging with residents as citizens, we can be more confident in sharing information at an earlier stage, talking about the reason why a change is being considered and what the options might be. Clearly sensitivity is required as, in some cases, sharing speculative options early may cause unnecessary alarm. But by the time an issue appears on a Scrutiny agenda, we need to be really clear about: what our message is around that issue, how it relates to the overall strategic messages and what it means for residents. We can then communicate clearly and confidently. When the decision is finally made within the Council chamber, the press release should already have been prepared and should therefore usually confirm something that residents are already aware of. This proactive approach will limit the extent to which others can hijack our stories before we’ve had a chance to say anything about them.

It’s important to remember that being proactive isn’t just about the stories that we know about way in advance. It’s also about reacting to live issues in an agile, confident way so that we get on top of them early. By being proactive with the unplanned matters that come out of the blue, we will build confidence among residents and make sure that we are able to take control of stories rather than allowing others to shape the agenda.

Key actions for adopting a more **proactive** approach to engagement and communication therefore include:

- Consulting and engaging residents in advance of service changes in order to understand priorities, and so that we develop options together
- Communicating about an issue at the start of the formal democratic process rather than waiting until the final decision is made
- Preparing press releases in advance for important issues coming to Cabinet, Council, Planning Committee etc so that they are translated and ready to issue as soon as the decision is made
- Building and fostering relationships with key media contacts and influencers so that we can work with them proactively on major stories.

5.4 An Authentic Approach

Research shows that people are increasingly looking for authenticity. Whether it is experiences, products or relationships, they are looking for the ‘real deal’. The most powerful asset we have in engaging and communicating about the work of the Council therefore is the people who serve within it. By and large, people don’t engage with organisations or corporate bodies, they engage with other people. It’s really important

that when we're communicating with residents, they're able to hear from the authentic, real people who are making the decisions and delivering the services.

This can be particularly challenging when we're sharing what may be unpopular news, particularly as we live in the communities that are affected. However a warm, authentic person who is sharing the message confidently and clearly is likely to get the message across much more effectively than an anonymous 'Council spokesperson' or a corporate statement.

To become more authentic in the way we communicate we need to enable more people within the Council to have the confidence and capability to speak publicly and take interviews. This is particularly the case with senior staff and Members with special responsibilities. It's important that whenever the opportunity or need arises we have people who are ready and able to communicate clearly in an accessible way. This includes instances where we need to challenge inaccurate statements that have been made about CCBC by others.

We also need to make sure that whatever we say or do in engaging with residents, we do it in a way that is absolutely true to our values. This will be the 'Conwy way', the way that is uniquely and authentically us and which is rooted in our corporate values. The more we do this, the more people will respect us for it. The more they respect us, the more they will trust us. Being authentic is therefore one of the most important ways of achieving our aim of, 'building trust and understanding among residents as we deliver our dual role as both enablers and providers of services'.

Key actions for adopting a more **authentic** approach to engagement and communication therefore include:

- Providing all senior staff and Members with special responsibilities (such as the Leader, Cabinet Members and Chairs) with media training and mentoring
- Identifying a small group of individuals who will be the 'go-to' people for interviews etc
- Planning spokesperson availability as part of the communication of major stories
- Using more people-led videos to share information
- Using Team Brief to ensure all staff are aware of major projects, initiatives and service changes so they can be ambassadors on behalf of the Council within their communities.

5.5 An Approach that is Accessible to All

In engaging and communicating with residents, it's important that we're able to use communication techniques that meet the needs of individuals and communities. Our Community Involvement Strategy identifies seven characteristics which demonstrate our commitment to engaging effectively in a way which is accessible to all:

- 1 Accessible and inclusive - all people within our community have the choice and opportunity to get involved
- 2 Clear and professional - establishing trust, reliability and credibility
- 3 Targeted - the right people get the right information to be involved
- 4 Open, honest and transparent - having a clear purpose and that we are honest about any limitations
- 5 Timely and relevant - giving people enough time and notice to get involved
- 6 Sustainable - to ensure on-going mutually beneficial relationships
- 7 Two-way - we will have a conversation, listening, not just talking.

It is taken as read that all of the business of the Council can be conducted through the medium of Welsh or English. However we have much more to do



in making sure that we can communicate in a way that is accessible to people with visual or auditory impairments. This is the focus of a new Sensory Impairment Action Plan which identifies the measures we need to put in place to ensure that no-one is excluded from engaging with the Council.

We also need to recognise that we may need to tailor our communication for different audiences. We should challenge ourselves for example as to whether we are sharing information in a way that is engaging for younger people. And we also need to consider locations of communication events to ensure that we are accessible to all parts of the County. 'Fairness' is fundamental to our corporate values and also to the inscription beneath our armorial bearings. This fairness should be fundamental not just in what we do, but in the way we engage people with what we do. This will be another way in which we build trust among residents.

Key actions for adopting an approach to engagement and communication that is **accessible to all** therefore include:

- Reviewing our current arrangements in relation to accessibility
- Developing an accessibility statement
- Raising awareness of the needs of people with a sensory impairment
- Reviewing what information we have in an accessible format and our interpretation provision within our budget constraints.

6 Engagement and Communication Channels

Communication in a large organisation like Conwy Council is complex and challenging due to several factors such as: the number of staff and sites across the County; the pace of change and the amount of information needed to be shared in a timely manner.

There are a wide variety of channels available to us when deciding the best way to engage with internal and external audiences. The schematic included at **Appendix 1** summarises the tools we can use in different circumstances.

Many of our communication channels have evolved over time. Over recent years social media has become an ever-more important way of communicating with residents but this has grown organically without a clear set of corporate principles to shape how we use it. And the growth in interaction through social media hasn't seen a reduction in the use of the telephone. We take over 2.6 million calls a year across all our phone lines and we have over 80 telephone numbers which are directly available to the public. So there is greater demand than ever, across more channels than ever. This means we need to be absolutely clear what the role is for each of the communications channels within our overall strategy.

One thing that is clear is that as the role of the Council changes and we increasingly become both enabler and provider of services, we need to enable residents to be able to 'self-serve' wherever possible. This is where the distinction between engagement and simple communication is most pronounced. If it's a case of residents simply accessing information, we need to be channel-shifting so that they use digital channels more than the labour intensive ones such as telephone or face to face. Where we are engaging more deeply with residents and involving them in service changes however, this will often need to be done on a more personal level.

Each of the main channels available to us has its own plan for future delivery. They have been summarised here in order to set the overall direction, and to show the synergies between them.

6.1 Face to Face

The opening of Coed Pella gives us the opportunity to re-design our face to face interaction with residents. In doing this we will adopt a new approach that extends far beyond the new building in Colwyn Bay. We will develop our libraries so that they become the primary point of contact with the Council for residents in communities across the County. It will be a hub and spoke approach, with staff in the town and community libraries having the same capabilities and access to information as those in Coed Pella.

Our Citizen Advisors will be multi-skilled, trained to deliver basic information about all Council activities without reference to departments. They are likely to use the Conwy intranet as their primary reference portal and will act as 'digital champions', encouraging residents to channel-shift and supporting them to self-serve through accessing the website. By using the digital channels so actively, they will become key partners to the IT team, advising them on changes that need to be made to make them more useful to residents.

They will continue to answer phone enquiries but will also respond to enquiries that come in through other channels such as the website, email and social media sites. The role will evolve from being a traditional 'receptionist' to a dynamic one where the Advisor is engaging with visitors to the public space in Coed Pella and supporting them to resolve their queries.

The presence of duty officers close to the front of house will ensure that bespoke advice is available without delay to our visitors, with specialist officers also being available for the more complex situations.

6.2 Telephone

Our current approach to telephony is a potential minefield for residents to navigate. We have over 80 publicised telephone lines, some of which link to a single member of staff. This causes resilience problems when key staff members are away, and also raises risks around our ability to comply with the Welsh Language Standards. We need a simpler, more robust approach which groups complimentary service areas within dedicated call centres, learning from the experience we've already had in services such as Environment, Roads and Facilities.

By adopting the call centre approach we will be able to consolidate the number of telephone numbers we publicise. It will become much clearer to residents which number they should call for particular enquiries and there will be less risk of them being passed from pillar to post within the phone system. We are about to trial an online chat function within the ERF contact centre which will offer automatic responses to common questions. This offers the opportunity to respond quickly to queries without any officer intervention.

Consolidating multiple telephone lines into a small number of call centres will be no simple task. It will touch every part of the organisation and will require some major changes in the way we organise ourselves. As a result it needs dedicated project management support to deliver it, and will need to be rolled-out within the programme structure of Modernisation once the move to Coed Pella is complete.

6.3 Social Media

The main drive for our social media needs to be to move from quantity to quality. Over recent years, we have developed more than 40 different Facebook sites in addition to multiple Twitter accounts etc. The problem is that we are not delivering quality content across these sites, and on the whole we have low levels of engagement. To use social media more effectively as an engagement and communication tool we need to have fewer sites that are more relevant, interesting and engaging.

We need to consolidate the number of sites we have, grouping them according to key themes. The sites that we have moving forward need to be updated regularly, using our own content. All sites should fit within an agreed framework that clearly reflects Conwy's brand and values. They need to look, sound and feel distinctively Conwy.

All our social media sites should have Welsh/English duplicates so that residents can land on a site in the language of their choice. An extensive pool of Welsh language phrases will be developed so that we can communicate bilingually at speed. Approvals for new sites should come through the Communications, Marketing & Events Manager to ensure consistency with the overall framework. Her team also need administrative access to all sites in case of the need for urgent updates or amends.

Social media will become an ever-more important communication tool. We need to ensure our teams have the capability and capacity to be using it effectively to engage with residents. Social media capability will also be a key part of the role of our Citizen Advisors moving forwards, as engaging effectively through social media will become as fundamental as engaging on the phone.



6.4 Website & App

The corporate website and App Conwy will become ever more important communication tools over the coming years. We will increasingly need to focus our more labour intensive communication channels on our in-depth engagement activities, and channel-shift residents towards digital channels for simple information sharing. This will be the role of the website and app. They will be the places people in Conwy turn to when they have questions about services. They can also be used to nudge people in a particular direction, supporting our behaviour change objectives.

For this approach to work, we need to make sure that both the website and the app are kept regularly updated. Mechanics need to be in place to prompt content-generators every few months to review their content and ensure it's up to date. We need to make as many links as possible between the Conwy website and the Dewis website as a way of providing locally-relevant and regularly updated information on the full breadth of well-being support around the County.

The biggest challenge of all will be in integrating a multiplicity of back end Council systems so that information is fully integrated. This will allow greater automation and will make it much more convenient for residents, improving the user experience. Overcoming this significant challenge needs to be a high priority if we are to make the step change we are looking for in enabling our residents to self-serve, finding the information they need quickly and easily.

We will have to guard against developing multiple apps in the way that multiple social media sites came on line over recent years. The Conwy App should be the single go-to place for easily-accessible information about services in Conwy with only very rare exceptions being made for services such as Venue Cymru who are delivering to audiences well beyond Conwy County.

6.5 Press/PR

The media is one of the most visible and audible communications tools available to us but also one of the ones that we are least able to control. We need to communicate effectively through the media and encourage public engagement by promoting the work of the Council in clear, timely and easy to understand language. This is an important way of promoting what we do, encouraging people to access information and services and celebrating our successes. We also need to be able to provide a robust response and rebuttal to any false claims that are being made about us.

To do this we will need to develop strong relationships between the media and key contacts within the Council. The Communications Team have a fundamental role to play as the gateway to all media outlets. For this reason, it's important that they have sight of all press releases being issued to the media from across the Authority. They are not the only ones however, who will need to have strong relationships with media contacts. There will be times when it's helpful for Cabinet Members and senior staff to brief reporters directly, or have a word about issues of concern. This will only be possible if we value and foster those media relationships.

We can also only make the most of the media channels available to us if we improve the way we plan our communications. As outlined in the 'Planned Approach' section above, we can't wait until after a decision is made in the Council Chamber before we start to prepare and then translate a press release. We need to be much more aware of which major stories we want to share with the press, and put processes in place to ensure we are in control of getting those messages out first.

6.6 Internal Communications

With all the focus on different communication channels, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that one of the most effective channels we have for engaging residents and sharing information is our own staff. We have 5,500 people who are proud to work for Conwy, and can help their friends and neighbours understand what we're doing, if we brief them effectively.

We have already refined the Team Brief to make it more focused on the 'news' of the Council, and this should be regularly reviewed to ensure it delivers an effective briefing in the way we need it to. Other tools such as the daily news round-up should be used by managers to cascade information on topical issues to their teams.

It's important that the senior leadership of the organisation remain visible to the wider team so that they can share updates and respond to questions. It would also be helpful for senior staff to do video updates on matters of particular importance which can be accessed by staff through the intranet.

Staff will often be a good barometer of public feeling within the County. In the majority of cases they are also our residents. Listening to them and engaging them as we develop policy, projects and service changes is another important way of involving communities in the work that the Council does.



7 Resources for Delivery

There are a wide range of resources and tools that can be used to implement this strategy but very few of them need to incur extra costs. The whole focus of the strategy is on doing things differently, rather than doing a lot of new things.

7.1 People

The leadership of the organisation has a key role to play. The Chief Executive, Members with special responsibilities, Directors and Heads of Service can all drive the strategy by role-modelling its principles and applying them to the way they go about their work. Managers have a particularly important role in helping their teams understand the new approach outlined in the strategy and ensuring that those teams play their part in delivering it.

Each service area will designate a Communications Lead. These officers, amongst other things, will be responsible for ensuring that their particular service contributes news to the Team Brief, the Bulletin, the Council's website and other corporate sources of information as appropriate. They will be trained in the effective use of social media, and also in the use of the new assets that are being introduced to support the Conwy brand. Together they will form a Communications Officers Group that can provide mutual support and drive forward the delivery of the strategy within services.

Operational responsibility for delivering the Strategy lies with the Corporate Communications and Marketing Team. They will prepare a Communication Action Plan to underpin the implementation of the strategy and this will form the basis of the Team's Annual Operation Plan.

The Corporate Communications and Marketing Team will provide advice and guidance to Members and Officers on the planning and delivery of significant communications, particularly those coming through for Cabinet decisions. They will ensure that press releases and other materials are prepared in advance, to enable us to shape our major stories proactively. The allocation of a fixed-term digital post within the team will help drive the much-needed changes around the use of social media.

The Communications Strategy Group, chaired by the Director of Economy and Place will regularly review progress of the strategy providing support and challenge as necessary. It will commission an evaluation plan which will establish a baseline level of awareness around the identified key messages and then measure progress against this baseline on an annual basis. The whole Strategy will be comprehensively reviewed in 2022 in line with the Corporate Plan.

All of the above will help to support the delivery of the plan, but additional expert resource will be required in the short-term in a training and development capacity to generate the step-change that is required to make a long-term, lasting difference. A vital component to the delivery of this strategy will be securing the services of a highly experienced freelance PR/Communications expert who can support the development of the team in moving to this new way of working and help us embed the new approach.

7.2 Communication Tools

In addition to the people resource behind the strategy, there are a range of tools we can use to support its successful delivery. These include things like the annual Communications and Engagement Calendar which will be linked to our strategic objectives. As mentioned above, the Team Brief is an essential tool in ensuring our

staff understand the key messages behind our major projects and initiatives. And the team meetings where the briefing is delivered are vital for bringing these messages to life.

One of the most valuable tools we have in delivering this strategy is our brand. As stated above, the brand will help us as we work to become more consistent in the way that we present the organisation and the work that we do. It is the way in which we take the values of Conwy and share them with residents in every situation where they interact with us. In this context the new assets that have been developed to support the brand are critical. The style guide, writing guide and publication templates will enable us to make sure that all our communication and engagement is distinctively and authentically Conwy.

The brand statement of ‘the right environment’ encapsulates our brand values and will act as the golden thread which will run through all our activities, underpinning our dual role as both enabler and provider of services. It captures the principle that we provide the environment for things to happen, but others will share responsibility for delivery.

7.3 Evaluation

We will need to develop a framework for evaluating our communications and engagement to enable us to understand whether the activities we undertake to become more consistent, planned, proactive, authentic and accessible to all are effective. The most useful benchmark of this will be the extent to which people in Conwy associate us with the three strategic messages that we have identified as being the things we want to be known for. We can do this by establishing a baseline level of awareness in year one of the strategy and then measuring awareness against the same statements annually. Other useful evaluation tools include the All Wales Survey, and the metrics available to us through social media platforms such as Facebook. The Principal Research & Information Officer will have a vital role to play in developing and delivering this evaluation framework.



8 Conclusion

This strategy calls for us to make better use of our engagement and communication in order to take residents with us as we redefine the way in which Conwy Council works in the 21st century. By being more consistent, planned, proactive and authentic in the way we communicate, and by doing that in a way that is accessible to all, we will help people understand the changes that are coming, and build their trust that we are acting in the best interests of our communities. Engagement and communication will be at the heart of everything we do over the coming years. By putting the right behaviours, processes and tools in place, we can make sure that we do this effectively, in a way that helps us deliver the outcomes of our Corporate Plan.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

? WHAT

- Strategic messages
- Customer Charter
- Values
- Vision/mission
- Objectives
- Successes
- Corporate Plan
- Achievements
- Awards
- Our role
- Can and can't do
- Financial constraints
- Aspirations
- Special projects

? WHO

- WLGA & LGA
- AMs, MPs, MEPs
- Staff
- Citizens
- Elected Members
- Stakeholders
- Suppliers
- Community groups
- Welsh Government
- Trade unions
- Press/Media
- Staff Council
- Professional bodies
- Partnerships
- Town & Community Councils
- Voluntary sector
- Access groups

? WHEN

- Hourly
 - Face to face
 - Internet
 - Intranet
 - Digital signage
- Daily
 - Text messaging
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Postmaster
 - Email
- Weekly
 - All methods apply
- Fortnightly
 - Members' info sheet
- Monthly
 - Council/Team Brief
 - Project newsletters
- Bi-monthly
 - Events/face to face
- Every 3 months
 - Staff Council
- 6-monthly
 - Corporate Plan updates
- Annually
 - Timetabled consultation
 - Annual Report
 - Bulletin

? HOW

- Face to face (customers)
 - Head offices
 - Physical presence
 - Local presence/in community
 - Arranged meetings
 - In people's homes
 - Events/surgeries
 - Shows
 - Front line staff
- Printed materials
 - Leaflets
 - Posters
 - Forms
 - Bulletin
 - Back of buses
 - Adshells
 - Banners/flags
 - Newsletters
 - Floor/shop graphics
 - Project newsletters
 - Council vehicles
- Consultation
 - Written
 - Informal
 - Formal
 - One to one - softer info
 - Planned cycle
 - Ad-hoc
- Events/Partnerships
- Telephone
 - In person
 - Automated
 - Skype
- Email
- Text messaging
- Face to face (staff)
 - Staff surveys
 - Workshops
 - Induction
 - Team meetings
 - One to ones
 - Staff Council
 - Joint Consultative Committee
 - I-Trent
 - Conwy Rewards
 - PDRs
- Multi-media
 - Radio
 - Newspapers
 - TV/Radio/Press interviews
 - Professional journals
 - Audio/video
 - Meet the press sessions
 - Digital signage
- Web based
 - External
 - Website
 - Social media
 - Internal
 - Intranet

MUSTS

Language of choice	Timely
Readability	Manage expectations
Jargon free	Accessible
Honest	Equality
Transparent	Brand identity
Consistent	Innovative
Proactive	Creative