

Maidstone Borough Council Communication Strategy 2016 - 20

Pride in our borough



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The Council has a vision to make Maidstone a great place where residents can:

- live in decent homes
- enjoy good health and a pleasant environment
- with a successful economy that is supported by reliable transport networks.

The effectiveness of how our vision is perceived is determined to a significant extent by the quality of our communications and engagement. This strategy outlines the approach we will take to ensure our communications and engagement activity is the best possible and helps to achieve our vision.

The council's vision is reflected in our 5-year strategic plan, which was formulated and adopted in 2015. It is important, when communicating with residents, that consistency is maintained over this timeframe so that our messages are clear and regularly reinforced. This does not prevent the communications strategy showing how the vision and strategic plan respond to changing circumstances.

Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision

That our residents live in decent homes, enjoy good health and a pleasant environment, with a successful economy that is supported by reliable transport networks.



Our Values

 Putting People First

Services

Everything we do impacts on our customers, both internal and external. We will listen to and understand their needs, then take action to provide the right service in a positive and professional manner.

Teamwork

Working together to achieve our objectives and goals in a way that utilises the talents and creativity of everyone in our organisation.

Responsibility

We work in an environment that encourages us to take ownership for our actions. Making the right choices and decisions that lead to a satisfactory outcome for all.

Integrity

We have the courage to act on our convictions to build trust and honesty. We work with our partners and customers to create a feeling of openness and transparency in everything we do.

Value

Taking care and weighing up our options, aiming to get the maximum effect for every penny of public money we spend.

Equality

Valuing our differences and understanding how they can contribute to a better working environment and services that are fair and easy to access

Context

The council's vision is that Maidstone is a place where residents, communities and businesses can all thrive. To achieve this the council will strive to help people reach their full potential, businesses to build a stronger economy and communities to flourish.

The council does face significant budget challenges. We must adapt and rise to the challenge of prioritising our finite resources to support the delivery of the council's priority outcomes.

We must ensure that residents understand what these reductions mean to them, and that they have the opportunity to influence decisions taken by the council in setting its budget and priorities.

The purpose of this document is set out below.

EXTERNAL

- Communicate the Council's vision to residents and stakeholders
- Promote pride in Maidstone Borough Council in all communications
- Keep Maidstone Borough residents well informed
- Maintain a culture of two-way communication with all our stakeholders
- Address negative or potentially damaging information about council services
- Reach all sections of the community
- Maintain a strong and consistent identity for the council
- Raise awareness of council services to maximise access to them
- Develop and promote opportunities for residents, community groups and other stakeholders to engage with the council

INTERNAL

- Support council staff in their roles as ambassadors for the organisation
- Support managers to deliver organisational change.
- Have a positive effect on employee engagement and staff satisfaction.
- Support elected members in their role as community leaders
- Keep abreast of technological developments and embrace them where feasible
- Keep staff informed and promote understanding
- Working with partners and others to co-ordinate communications and engagement for the benefit of Maidstone residents and businesses.



Our Communications strategy is guided by the following principles:

1. We will communicate clearly, openly, accurately and regularly with residents, business and our partners, and throughout the council, to promote mutual understanding, and give a better service to the people of Maidstone Borough.
2. Our communication activity will protect, promote and enhance the council's reputation.
3. We will promote activities and services that support and deliver the strategic priorities in the council's strategic plan.
4. Our communications will be open, honest, clear, concise, simple and accessible.
5. We will make use of resident survey data to ensure our campaigns are audience led and outcome focused.
6. Our key messages will be consistent with the council's priorities of keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all and securing a successful economy.
7. We will ensure that there are clear opportunities for residents and partners to have an influence on decision making.
8. Our internal communication will ensure that employees understand that customer focused, good communication relates to all staff and we will work to embed best practice across the whole council.
9. We will use appropriate channels to help engage and inform residents and to drive behaviour change to encourage them to do things differently.
10. Communication will be creative, cost effective and innovative, comply with relevant laws and information standards and follow industry best practice.



The communications team plays a key role in how residents, staff and stakeholders perceive the council.

We recognise the importance of reputation and will work to protect and enhance the council's trusted name through effective branding, excellent media relations providing good quality information in a timely manner.

Paragraph 4 of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011 (available for download from the gov.uk website) says "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'"

Councillors' Role

Councillors in their role as elected representatives engage with residents, groups and business on a wide range of issues. Councillors provide a link between our community and the council.

Employees' Role

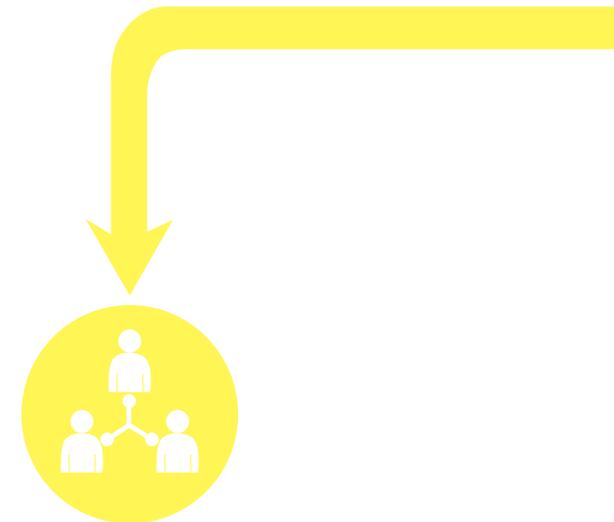
All employees have a responsibility for communication with the public and with their colleagues. It is important that all colleagues are kept well informed about our priorities and programme so they can act as council advocates.

Protecting and enhancing our reputation

We are guardians of the council's brand and reputation and we will use our resident survey data to form the basis for our work and action planning.

Research shows that the better informed people are about their council services, the more satisfied they feel. Good communications therefore can lead to more effective services, a better reputation and stronger relationships.

In our most recent residents' survey in Autumn 2015, 56% of residents believed they were kept well informed about the services and benefits Maidstone Borough Council provides.



Services within the Communication Team

Who we are...

The communications team is based within the finance and business improvement directorate of the council.

The team delivers internal and external communications, digital communications as well as campaigns, marketing, branding, design and print. The communications team also assists with consultations to canvas the views of our residents to inform priorities and service developments.

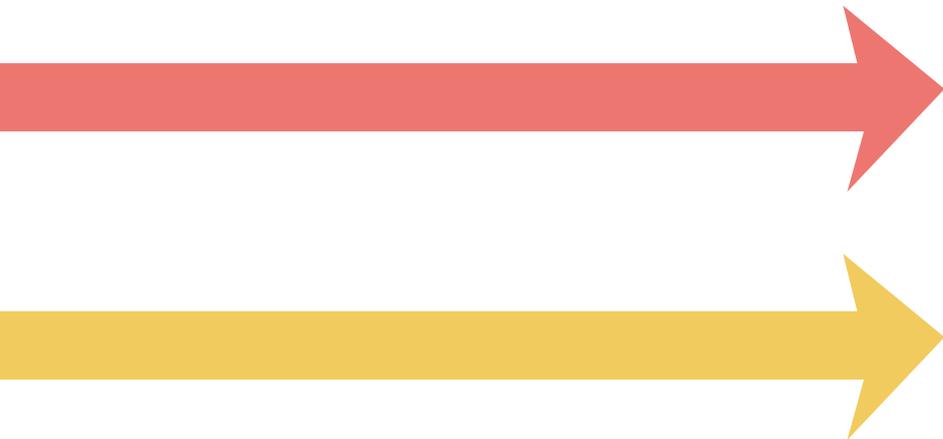
The services provided by the team include:

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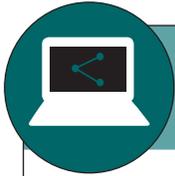


External communications

The communications team issues press releases proactively to inform the public about council initiatives, good work, achievements and events. The team deals with media enquiries, often issuing statements and comments to meet media deadlines. The team also organises radio and television interviews where appropriate. Members of the communications team also meet regularly with key members of the print and broadcast media, as well as other partners and key stakeholders to build and sustain trusted relationships.

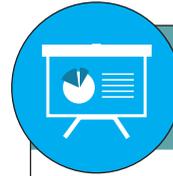


Our starting point



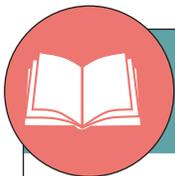
Digital communications

The communications team manages the council's corporate social media pages such as Facebook, Twitter and upload news stories to our public facing website. Members of the communications team are happy to provide help and advice to members who are interested in setting up a social media account and how to use it effectively to engage with local residents.



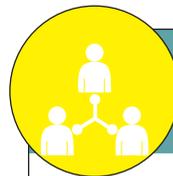
Marketing

The team works alongside colleagues and partners to develop, deliver and evaluate co-ordinated public relations and marketing campaigns to raise awareness of the council's priorities to both internal and external audiences.



Branding, design and print

The communications team is responsible for ensuring that the council's corporate identity is used consistently throughout the organisation and in all communications literature. A strong brand inspires confidence and positivity, which is why consistency is needed and a corporate identity style guide has been developed which should be followed at all times.



Internal communications

There are well-established internal communications channels in the council which celebrate the good work of our staff as well as updating them about key issues.

Councillors and officers receive an electronic communication from the team at least once a week including a media update detailing coverage received in the Kent Messenger and Kentonline.

Our starting point

Communication is not a bolt-on service but should be one of the first things that is considered when service planning. The failure to engage at the start of a project is a real risk to its ultimate success. Our team can provide sound communication advice from the outset to help support any service change which will contribute to successful outcomes.

In order to demonstrate how our narrative and internal and external campaigns are delivering against the council's outcomes, we must benchmark against past performance and target improvements.

In 2015 we conducted a survey with residents to investigate their attitudes towards the council and the Maidstone area. These surveys provide a focus for the council's business and performance planning and allow us to monitor changes in customer perceptions and satisfaction over time.

Key results were:

68%

of residents are satisfied with the way Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) runs things.

52%

of residents agree that MBC provides value for money.

66%

of residents trust the Council, a great deal or a fair amount.

56%

of residents feel fairly or very informed about the services and benefits provided by MBC.

31%

of residents agree that they have the ability to influence decisions affecting their local area.

56%

of residents responded positively to the statement 'MBC is making the area a better place for people to live'.

82%

of residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live

Our audiences

The team will ensure that any communication activity has a clear audience in mind and is outcome-focused in its approach. Campaigns that are linked to our action areas will be prioritised. This is a new approach for the team and the council. There will be an integrated approach to communication and engagement through the channels and methods we use.

All of our activity will be evaluated against measurable outcomes and will demonstrate how it has supported the priorities of the council.

Our Parish Councils are an important community voice as well as community groups and residents associations. We have put in place a parish charter and a new parish liaison officer to improve communication and engagement with Parish Councils.



The Council's narrative

We want to share our story through our communications. Our narrative is informed by our Strategic Plan. It shows our commitment to aligning our priorities with our vision that residents live in decent homes, enjoy good health and a pleasant environment with a successful economy that is supported by reliable transport networks.

Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all

- Providing a clean and safe environment
- Encouraging good health and wellbeing
- Respecting the character of our borough

Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

- Securing improvements to the transport infrastructure of our Borough
- Promoting a range of employment opportunities and skills required across our Borough
- Planning for sufficient homes to meet our Borough's needs

Joint action area for both

- Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions
- Enhancing the appeal of the town centre for everyone

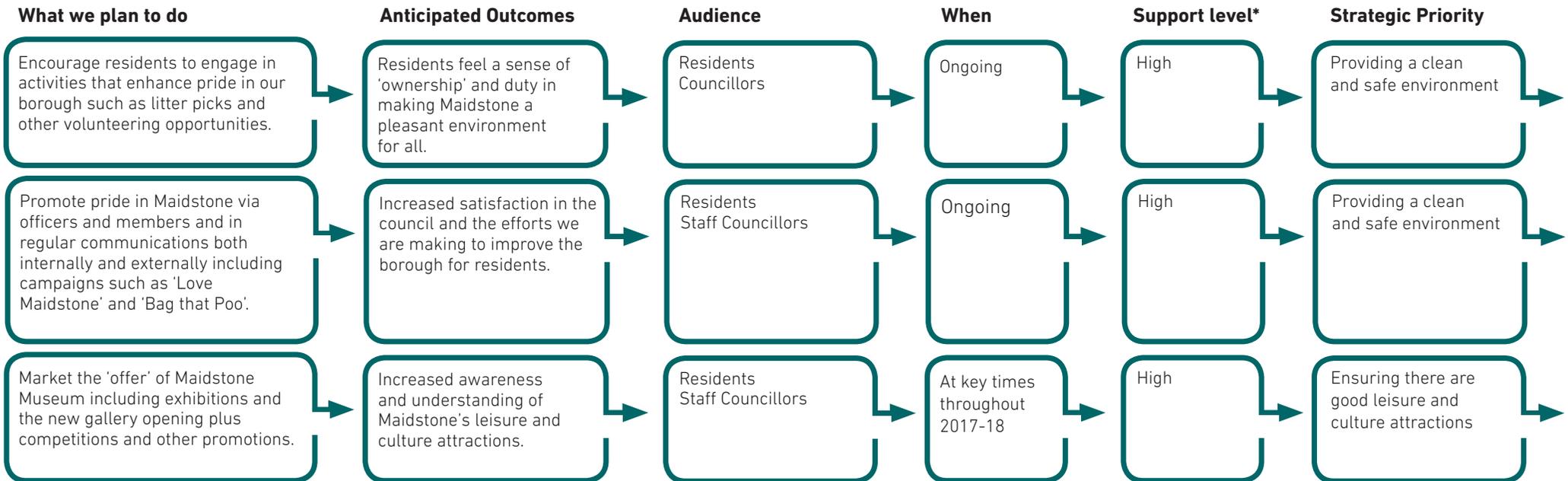


Priority communication activity

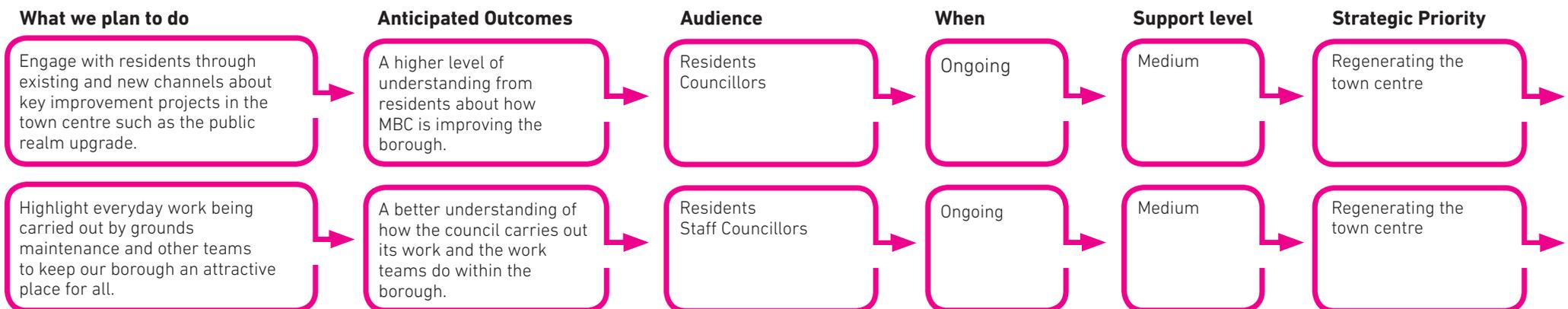
A number of priorities have been identified through resident survey data which align with priorities in the council's strategic plan which, if successfully implemented, will have a positive effect on the lives of residents and enhance the reputation of the council.

Communication and Engagement Action Plan 2017-18

Objective – Encourage pride in Maidstone



Objective – Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all



*This indicates the level of support that the communications team will give

Objective - Engage with residents in an effective way

What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	Audience	When	Support level	Strategic Priority
Use resident data demographics to target 18-24 year olds, over 75 and BME.	An increase in positive participation from the specific age ranges either via our digital communication channels or face to face.	Residents	Ongoing	Medium	We will communicate our vision clearly, openly, accurately and regularly to residents and stakeholders.
Publicise budget roadshows and other resident focused activity and encourage residents to attend and have their say.	Residents feel better informed and engaged in council decisions and confident to give their feedback.	Residents Staff Councillors	July & October 2017	Medium	We will communicate our vision clearly, openly, accurately and regularly to residents and stakeholders.
Promote council events such as Proms in the Park using all communication channels available and encouraging residents to feedback.	Improved awareness amongst residents of the different cultural events held across the borough.	Residents Staff Councillors	Ongoing	Medium	Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions

Objective - Satisfaction with the way Maidstone Borough Council runs its services

What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	Audience	When	Support level	Strategic Priority
Assist in the production of the council's Narrative Report detailing progress towards achieving strategic plan priorities.	Increased trust in the council. Greater understanding of the council's strategic priorities.	Residents	Annually	Medium	We will communicate our vision clearly, openly, accurately and regularly to residents and stakeholders.
Introduce the council's refreshed branding jointly with the digital services team launching the new look materials and beta website.	Greater recognition of council branding.	Residents Staff Councillors	October 2017	High	We will communicate our vision clearly, openly, accurately and regularly to residents and stakeholders.

Objective – Information about council services and benefits

What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	Audience	When	Support level	Strategic Priority
Produce two 'Borough Insight' council magazine's for 2017 and consider a further three editions for 2018. The magazine features advertising sold by the communications team in order to keep production costs reasonable.	Residents feeling more informed about the council through a recognised standalone magazine.	Residents Staff Councillors	July 2017 November 2017 March 2018 July 2018 November 2018	High	We will communicate our vision clearly, openly, accurately and regularly to residents and stakeholders.
A review of our external communications channels including our newsletter and social networking accounts.	More effective communication and better value for money.	Residents Staff Councillors	Annually	Low	We will communicate our vision clearly, openly, accurately and regularly to residents and stakeholders.
An update of our Social media Strategy, building on our existing social media profile.	Clear direction for the council's use of social media to make sure that it effectively contributes to the council's priorities	Residents Staff Councillors	December 2017	Medium	We will communicate our vision clearly, openly, accurately and regularly to residents and stakeholders.

Objective – Staff & Member engagement

What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	Audience	When	Support level	Strategic Priority
Launch a refreshed Wakey Wakey following consultation with staff and councillors.	Improve staff communication channels to ensure new and existing officers have a better understanding of the council and latest updates.	Staff Councillors	October 2017	Medium	Putting People First
Support annual One Council events to ensure topics are relevant and timely and relate to corporate priorities. Ensure events are followed up with staff feedback and this affects any changes necessary.	Increased employee engagement leading to better understanding of the council's strategic plan and priorities.	Staff	Annually	Low	Putting People First
Support HR with their programme of co-ordinated staff communication and engagement activities including - team talks, Staff Forum, health and wellbeing week, and STRIVE awards etc.	Increased employee engagement leading to better understanding of the council's strategic plan and priorities.	Staff Councillors	Ongoing	Low	Putting People First
Improve regular communication with councillors to include advance notice of council events and staffing changes.	Improved engagement with Members	Councillors	As appropriate	Medium	Putting People First
Continue to hold regular member sounding board meetings to ensure Councillors have a chance to share their views on officer projects.	Improved engagement with Members	Councillors	When required	Medium	Putting People First
Launch phase 2 of the intranet ensuring the site continues to offer features and functionality that staff require.	Improved digital communication with staff so they can find information easily and understand what our key priorities are.	Staff Councillors	October 2017	High	Putting People First

Objective - Value for money

What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	Audience	When	Support level	Strategic Priority
Regular stakeholder engagement with various different organisations including the business community and voluntary sector	Increased understanding of how the council is running its services, any significant developments or changes	Residents Councillors Staff	Continuous	Medium	Putting People First Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough
Annual Council tax publicity – value of services provided.	Increased understanding of how council tax is spent, improving trust in the council and belief that it provides value for money.	Residents Councillors	April annually	High	Putting People First Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough
Support councillors to raise their profiles in their local areas to lead their communities and bring forward ideas to the council.	Improved resident engagement with the council.	Councillors	Annually	Low	Putting People First Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough
Improve regular communication with councillors to include advance notice of council events and staffing changes	Improved engagement with residents and officers	Councillors	As appropriate	Low	Putting People First

Objective - Employee and member engagement

What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	Audience	When	Support level	Strategic Priority
Redevelop the intranet	Staff can find information easily and we can promote our priorities and key projects	Staff Councillors	February 2017	High	Putting People First Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough
Review staff newsletter Wakey Wakey to ensure the format and messaging is relevant and informative for staff. Consider other design layouts and engage with officers on their views.	Improve staff communication channels to ensure new and existing officers have a better understanding of the council and latest updates	Staff Councillors	January 2017	High	Putting People First
Support annual One Council events to ensure topics are relevant and timely and relate to corporate priorities. Ensure events are followed up with staff feedback and this affects any changes necessary.	Increased employee engagement leading to better understanding of the council's strategic plan and priorities.	Staff	January 2017	Medium	Putting People First Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough
Forward plan a programme of co-ordinated staff communication and engagement activities including - team talks, Staff Forum, health and wellbeing week, and STRIVE awards etc.	Increased employee engagement leading to better understanding of the council's strategic plan and priorities.	Staff	Annually	Low	Putting People First Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough
Create a member sounding board to work on member engagement.	Members feel informed about the Council and decisions.	Members	December 2016 for first meeting then ongoing	High	Putting People First Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

Evaluating our communication

The team will ensure that each priority campaign is set against clear communication objectives which will be agreed jointly with Directors or Heads of Service.

There are already in place formal measurement mechanisms for our communications and engagement activities. These are in line with communications best practice, and indicate progress towards the achievement of our targets.

We will also continue to support the delivery of the staff survey to evaluate the impact of our internal corporate communication to ensure that every employee feels that they have a voice.

We will regularly review our progress in implementing this strategy and will share updates as required.

