

Maidstone Borough Council Communications and Engagement Strategy 2023 - 2026



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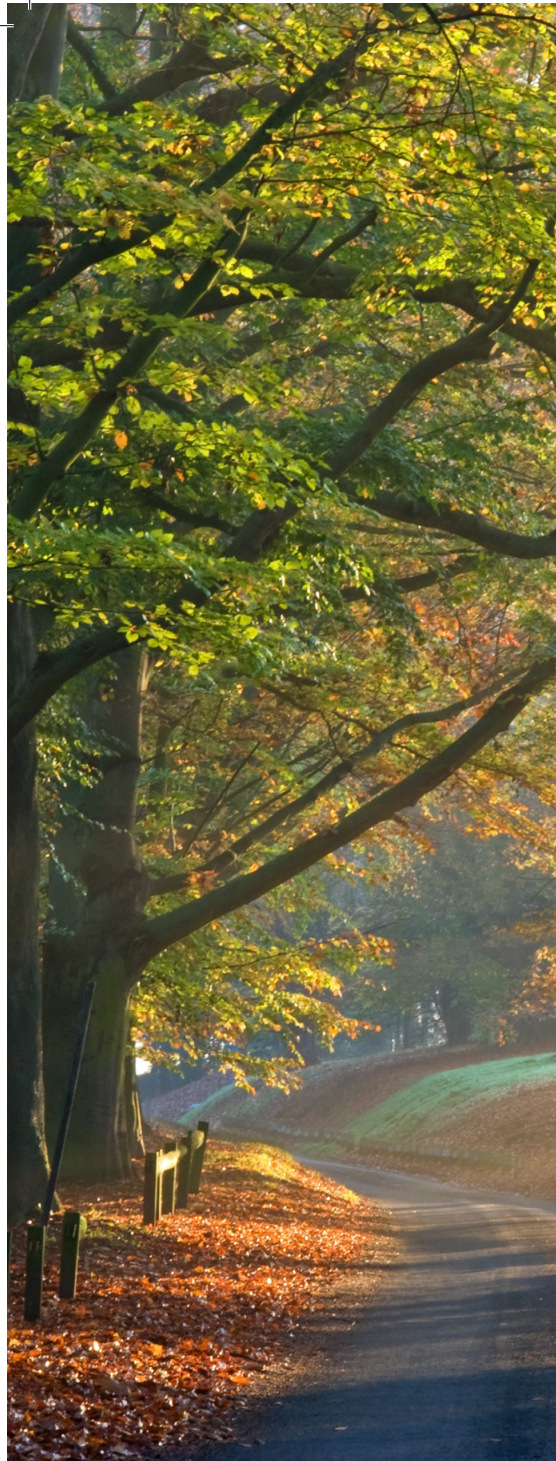
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Introduction

The MBC Communications and Engagement Strategy is driven by our Strategic Plan which sets out the Council's long-term aspirations for the whole borough and how they will be achieved.

At the centre of the Strategic Plan is a vision to make Maidstone a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential.





Purpose of the Strategy

The aims and objectives of the Communications and Engagement Strategy are to support the delivery of the MBC Strategic Plan by ensuring that all campaigns and projects are aligned to and support the narrative of the four priorities.

We deliver an excellent service internally and externally to demonstrate and promote the effectiveness of the Council, helping to build a good reputation and promote a positive perception of who we are and what we do.

Communications Priorities

The Communications team promotes, protects and upholds the Council's reputation as an effective, efficient and innovative organisation. We support the delivery of the Strategic Plan through working with Members, Services, Residents and other key Stakeholders delivering timely and effective campaigns, messages and events which promote and deliver the Council's Priorities. The Action plan for 2022-23 sets out the communications priorities highlighted below are key areas of activity.

Thriving Place

We will coordinate and facilitate engagement events (both internally and externally) to help create pride of place across the borough, this includes the delivery of the pride in place project funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Homes and Communities

We will increase the opportunities for people to engage with the Council on issues and services that affect them by developing existing and new channels of communication. We will deliver campaigns that support our goals to prevent homelessness and provide affordable homes for our residents

Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure

We will continue to support the Local Plan Review including making sure public facing documents are accessible and promoting engagement opportunities. We will promote our regeneration projects and our open for business approach.

Safe, Clean and Green

We will deliver communications support to achieve our ambitions for climate change and biodiversity through engaging and informing residents and businesses. We will deliver communication support as part of the Safer Streets Fund to promote Maidstone borough as a place where people feel safe and are safe.





Importance of Communications

It has never been more important for councils to communicate effectively with residents, media, partners and employees.

Whether it's to encourage greater self-service or to promote understanding of local priorities, effective communication has the power to engage communities, challenge misconception and help your council achieve its objectives.

Local Government Association

Through effective messaging, communications and engagement, we will support and deliver the four priorities contained within the Strategic Plan; Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure, Homes and Communities, A Thriving Place and Safe, Clean and Green.

It is vital that we communicate effectively with all our stakeholders, including residents, communities, businesses, charities and other public sector services. Good communications not only builds relationships but also maintains them. It helps provide clarity, accountability and reduce conflict.

Many residents, organisations, businesses and stakeholders interact with the Council regularly. During the pandemic we strengthened our relationship with the community and voluntary sector, we will continue to invest resource in maintaining those relationships and engaging with our residents.

There are a wide range of channels and techniques that the Communications Team use to tailor our messages, promotional material and publications to ensure we reach the right audiences.

With ever changing technology and information sharing communications needs to continuously evolve and improve the way messages are shared whilst promoting the work of the Council. This strategy aims to provide a consistent approach in delivering key messages from Maidstone Borough Council, protecting and promoting its reputation, establishing a strong identifiable brand and ensuring we have a borough that works for everyone.

Importance of Engagement

Effective community engagement is essential to ensure the services the Council delivers are fit for the communities it serves. At other times the Council voluntarily and actively seeks out the views of the community to ensure that it is delivering a high quality, cost effective services which meet the needs of our communities. An example of this is the Residents Survey which helps the Council to understand the needs of everyone across the borough and shape decisions and services required moving forward.

Events also play a large part in community engagement and MBC is committed to delivering and facilitating a wide range of events across the borough. It works closely with partner organisations to explore new ways of engaging with our communities. We value our partnerships, particularly with community and voluntary groups, as well as statutory/public sector partners and working with elected Members to promote the work of the Council.

One of the main focusses of our engagement will be to restore Pride in Place for the Maidstone Town Centre; according to High Street Renaissance research – 69% of people think culture on their high street makes their area a better place to live.

By developing our engagement we will help:

- Create civic pride
- Attract footfall to the high street and town centre and generate spend in our Borough
- Involve our residents in shaping and informing decisions and services





Who We Are and What We Do

The Communications Team is responsible for producing and delivering all internal and external messaging this includes via digital channels, social media platforms as well as working with the media. We also proactively create campaigns, marketing, branding and design for all our services.

We work to protect and enhance the trusted name of Maidstone Borough Council as well as the reputation of borough itself. By targeting the right audiences the Communications team support services to achieve better outcomes for the borough through promotion, raising awareness, changing perceptions and behaviour. We also help to identify, prevent and mitigate risks before they become a crisis during critical incidences.

The Communications Team is responsible for producing the MBC residential magazine – Borough Insight which is produced twice a year, (Spring and Autumn), reflecting, promoting and reporting on key issues, services and campaigns delivered, supported or led by the Council. A community focussed publication, the magazine is printed and delivered to 82,000 residential properties across the borough.

As well as reaching out externally we recognise the importance of internal communications. The Communications Team works on internal campaigns throughout the year promoting our priorities, key messages and initiatives such as health and wellbeing.

Channels of Communication

Press and Media Engagement

Press releases form the initial communications tool to provide accurate and timely information which is shared across a variety of channels; including the media, social media, digital and internal comms.

From August 2021 to July 2022

- Number of press releases issued: 166
- Number of press enquires answered by communications: 501

Digital Communications

Communications is responsible for all of the Council's social media channels including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Nextdoor and LinkedIn. The followers and engagement has grown year on year and continues to do so, informing and engaging residents.

We have also recently introduced GovDelivery – 'Stay Connected' digital newsletters which cover a variety of subjects including events, what's on, business, environment, waste and recycling.

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels between August 2021 - July 2022:

- Followers: 27,931
- Impressions: 4,321,787
- Engagements: 202,858

Branding, Design and Print

The Communications Team is responsible for ensuring that the Council's corporate identity is used consistently throughout the organisation in all messaging and design work. A strong brand inspires confidence and positivity, which is why consistency is needed and a corporate identity style guide has been developed which is adhered to throughout our publications and literature.

Visitor Economy and Events

We use the 'Visit Maidstone' brand to improve the image of the borough, promoting the area as an attractive place for visitors and residents, ensuring protection of our cultural assets, and enhancing residents' pride in place. Most of the promotional work is through digital channels and partnership working with Tourism South East and Visit Kent.

April 2022 – March 2023:

- The Visit Maidstone website had 493,240 sessions and 800,000 page views.
- 331 Facebook posts with a reach of 224,153 accounts.
- Instagram: reach of 16,436 accounts, with 1,594 profile visits and 599 new followers.
- Twitter: 190 Tweets and reached 42,953 impressions, with 7,188 profile visits.





How We Measure Success

The Communications Team delivers messages which reflect the strategic plan; to help achieve this they work to an action plan which outlines the four priorities, meet with each service area across the Council to help deliver messages around their work and review the plan on a monthly basis to ensure that messages are delivered in a timely manner. This helps to achieve the aims and deliver the outcomes of the Communications Strategy. PR campaigns created by the MBC team are driven by the priorities outlined in the Council's Strategic Plan.

We monitor daily, articles about Maidstone Borough Council across all media platforms and undertake sentiment analysis, the value of the coverage and the reach. We work with services to identify their desired outputs and outcomes and structure communications plans to meet this need. Assessing following the project whether these have been achieved.

Through using the Onclusive Media monitoring we can see accurate analytics:

31 July 2021 to 1 August 2022:

- Volume of articles published: 5,360
- Total average Advertising Value Equivalent - £14.5m
- Reach – opportunities to see: 494million people
 - Press: 29 million
 - Web: 312 million
 - Broadcast: 153 million