

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Communications & Engagement Strategy

2020 – 2024

Draft Version 1



Introduction and Background

This document outlines Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Communications and Engagement Strategy 2020 – 2024 and Action Plan (to coincide with the current Four Year Plan).

This Strategy and high level Action Plan has evolved from the recommendations of the LGA Peer Review (January 2020) and the council's Four Year Plan.

Within the Four Year Plan, the council has specifically stated that it wishes to 'Improve openness, transparency and customer service'. Key objectives within the Plan are to develop a Communications and Engagement Strategy and achieve 'Raised awareness, active participation and behaviour change through communication and engagement campaigns'.

The Four Year Plan also explicitly sets the council a goal of achieving 'positive publicity as a cultural and creative destination of choice' and delivering a 'public awareness campaign for better air quality' as well as running climate change campaigns. It seeks to promote borough-wide events and youth based activities, and promote enforcement success stories.

The development of the Communications and Engagement Strategy and Action Plan is intended to help the council deliver on its ambitions, including the themes outlined above. The Strategy and Action Plan are living documents, subject to change depending on the evolving needs of the Epsom and Ewell community, the council and the national context of local government.

Communications & Engagement – Strategic Purpose

The Purpose of the Communications and Engagement Team at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is to connect people with information in meaningful, purposeful and appropriate ways, supporting the council's Four Year Plan and Future40 Vision.

Strategic Aims

In order to serve its purpose, the Communications and Engagement Team will adopt, and regularly evaluate, the following aims:

- Enable the council to communicate effectively and with one trusted voice to multiple audiences/stakeholders in the service of the Four Year Plan and Future40 aspirations
- Support the council to meet commercial and other ambitions, in service of the Four Year Plan and Future40 aspirations
- Engage multiple audiences/stakeholders in conversations with the council, meeting their needs around the many different facets of living in, working within or visiting the borough
- Embed data and insight in the development and evaluation of communications products/campaigns
- Effectively support the council with excellent internal/external communications at times of organisational pressure – such as crisis or reputational challenge
- Take an enterprising approach with partners to developing narratives about the wider development of the borough, using the Future40 Vision.

Strategic Objectives

In order to meet the purpose and aims set out above, the team will:

- Develop a replicable model for all communications work, grounded in insight, planning and evaluation practices
- Cultivate relationships with key partners (including the media) to develop a strong position for the council on each of its key themes within the Four Year Plan and Future40 aspirations
- Openly share information relating to communications activity across the council, inviting contribution and collaboration from Members and colleagues
- Empower Members and appropriate officers to be effective communicators on behalf of the council, ensuring that they have the required information, skills and opportunities to do so
- Invest in appropriate communications tools to ensure that the council benefits from efficient working practices
- Ensure that all communications activities are fairly and equitably accessible to all audiences
- Evaluate the progress on each of the aims on a regular, appropriate basis using relevant public outreach and engagement tools/methodologies.

Operating Framework – the EEBC Four Year Plan

The council's Four Year Plan and Future40 aspirations will be the basis for the Communications and Engagement Team to develop great communications.

The themes from these documents are as follows:

- **Green & Vibrant**
 - This includes promotion of the Climate Change Action Plan
- **Safe & Well**
 - This includes promotion of the Community Safety Partnership, together with partners
- **Cultural & Creative**
 - This includes promotion of council owned venues, as well as support for community based creative endeavours (such as the film festival)
- **Opportunity & Prosperity**
 - This includes business/economic growth and development focused projects
- **Smart & Connected**
 - This includes community development initiatives with partners such as the voluntary sector
- **Effective Council**
 - This includes focus on the implications of UK Transition, potential Unitary status, as well as 'day-to-day' business of delivering high quality statutory services, civic life and promoting the statutory work, meetings and activities of the council

Consultation with Residents

The council has a statutory requirement to consult residents on key issues, for example the Local Plan.

The Council should abide by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recommended-code-of-practice-for-local-authority-publicity>

Through the Communications Action Plan, the council will identify key opportunities to consult with local residents and ensure that their voices are clearly heard when the council is designing new activities or initiatives.

Making the most of Financial & Staff Resources

The Communications Team hold a limited budget of its own. This is to be invested in Borough Insight, with capital bids made to invest in the tools needed to deliver an effective, modern communications function.

The LGA recommended simplifying current staff management into a single team structure. This arrangement of staff will simplify management processes, and encourage greater collaboration between teams/specialisms.

The team will adopt a range of working practices designed to maximise efficiency and effectiveness. They will plan and identify yearly activity calendars, in conjunction with the Heads of Service to address day-to-day and emergent priorities.

Risks

The Council needs to be able to capitalise on modern, effective communications, as set out by the LGA Peer Review.

To achieve best value, the Communications and Engagement team will help services adopt a project planning approach to their communications needs. Without adopting this approach, it will be difficult to fully embrace the potential and possibilities identified by the LGA Peer Review.

The Team will also help the council to effectively embrace data and insight. Without this link, the council will not be able to evidence how an understanding of citizen needs, thoughts or opinions benefit the development of policy of local initiatives.

This strategy and action plan answers and overcomes all of these points.

Action Plan

The Action Plan has been developed to address the recommendations of the LGA Communications Peer Review.

The Action Plan includes the following six themes:

- Theme 1. People
- Theme 2. Processes
- Theme 3. Tools & Technology
- Theme 4. Information and Insight
- Theme 5. Campaign Planning
- Theme 6. Training & Development

Monitoring and Reporting

The Council's Communications & Engagement Strategy is a four year strategy which will be approved by Strategy & Resources.

The action plan will form part of the Council's Service Delivery Plan and progress will be monitored through Leadership Team.

Communications & Engagement Action Plan – September 2020

- Theme 1. People
- Theme 2. Processes
- Theme 3. Tools & Technology
- Theme 4. Information and Insight
- Theme 5. Campaign Planning
- Theme 6. Training & Development

Theme 1 - People

#	PRIORITY	ACTION	SUCCESS MEASURE	TARGET DATE
1.1	Having the right roles in place to deliver modern, effective Communications & Engagement	Costed structure based on agreed Communications & Engagement strategy and action plan	Agreed structure	October 2020 - January 2021

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Theme 2 - Processes

#	PRIORITY	ACTION	SUCCESS MEASURE	TARGET DATE
2.1	Ensuring that all operating processes for Communications & Engagement are clear and accessible	Agree processes for requesting, approving and evaluating all work. Once agreed by Leadership Team, upload to eHub and used in internal training etc.	Processes agreed and in use	31 March 2021
2.2	Evaluating existing processes to ensure that they increase efficiency and delivery value for money	Agreeing evaluation of processes, delivering evaluation	Evaluation delivered	30 September 2021

Theme 3 - Tools & Technology

#	PRIORITY	ACTION	SUCCESS MEASURE	TARGET DATE
3.1	Ensuring that the Communications & Engagement Team have the right tools and technology to efficiently deliver the service	Identify suitable tools & technology to assist modern, effective Communications & Engagement. Submission of Capital Bids, procurement of agreed tools	Recommendations made and initial capital bids submitted	Completed
3.2	Empowering teams to make use of modern, effective communications tools	Identify internal use cases, develop training plans	Teams identified, training agreed	31 March 2021
3.3	Evaluating effectiveness of tools and technologies	Annual review of tools and technologies in line with procurement/renewal cycles	Evaluation delivered	1 January 2022

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Theme 4 - Information and Insight

#	PRIORITY	ACTION	SUCCESS MEASURE	TARGET DATE
4.1	Ensuring that all council projects incorporate appropriate information & insight	Review strategic information sources & resources required to make most effective use of them. Includes review of Citizen's Panel, Resident Surveys and other appropriate methods of gathering data.	Key sources codified	31 March 2021
4.2	Evaluating Information & Insight practices	Develop specific evaluation within broader Communications & Engagement service evaluation	Evaluation conducted	30 September 2021
4.3	Establish regular meetings with Chairman of Strategy & Resources Committee	Monthly meetings with the Chairman of Strategy and Resources Committee	Meetings held	September 2020
4.4	Establish regular meetings with Chief Executive and Leadership Team	Monthly meetings with Chief Executive and Communications & Engagement Team member(s). Communications to be added to Leadership Team agenda	Meetings held	September 2020
4.5	Establish regular Communications & Engagement team attendance at Committee Call Over meetings	Communications & Engagement Team member(s) to attend Committee Call Over meetings for Strategy & Resources, Community & Wellbeing, Environment and main policy making committees.	Meetings attended	September 2020

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Theme 5 - Campaign Planning

#	PRIORITY	ACTION	SUCCESS MEASURE	TARGET DATE
5.1	Ensuring that the council benefits from a single, agreed, Annual calendar of Communications & Engagement activity based on Service Delivery Plans & Four Year Plan themes	Draft annual Plan, based on Service Delivery Plans, Communications & Engagement operational plan, Four Year Vision	Draft to Leadership Team	31 October 2020
5.2	Building strong relationships with appropriate media and distribution channels	Review current distribution channels, identify new ones as appropriate. Identify key journalists/commentators and start forming relationships	Accurate coverage of council stories in key media/channels	Ongoing
5.3	Evaluation of Campaign Planning activity and outcomes	Ongoing, evidenced, evaluation of all Communications & Engagement activities		Ongoing

Theme 6 - Training & Development (General)

#	PRIORITY	ACTION	SUCCESS MEASURE	TARGET DATE
6.1	Ensuring that Members have the knowledge and tools needed to be effective communicators on behalf of the council	Work with Members to research, draft, iterate and approve Member Training package – topics for consideration include Social Media, Spokesperson training and Crisis Communications.	Signed off package	Research - January 2021 Development February – March 2021 Delivery – April - June 2021

Communications & Engagement Action Plan – September 2020

#	PRIORITY	ACTION	SUCCESS MEASURE	TARGET DATE
6.2	Ensuring that staff understand the value of good communications & engagement practice, and why it is directly relevant to their roles	Research, draft, iterate & approve staff general Communications & Engagement Training packages	Signed off packages	Research - January 2021 Development February – March 2021 Delivery – April - June 2021
6.3	Evaluating Training & Development	Agree evaluation process for first phase of training & development. Use findings to iterate phase two	Positive evaluation of training delivered	November 2021