

Communications Strategy

2017 - 2020

Policy, Insight and
Communications



Communications Strategy 2017-2020

Why have a Communications Strategy?

Communication plays an important role in everything we do at Wealden District Council. This includes both internal and external communications. Our commitment is to use a multi-channel approach to communications including press releases, email alerts, our corporate and associated websites, printed material, social media and internal platforms such as Wealdnet.

Communications should be two-way and is essential in giving information, engaging, consulting, gaining feedback, developing insight, etc. from people (residents, employees and visitors), businesses and other stakeholders. A good standard of communications is **the responsibility of everyone** involved in the Council's work including councillors, staff and partners. This Strategy sets a framework for our communications.

Our Aims

This Council has adopted **Five Principles** which follow the requirements of the [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) and guide the Council in its communications. Our communications ultimately deliver the aims of the [Corporate Plan](#) and ensure residents and businesses are aware of the wide range of services the Council and its partners offer.

- 1. Clear & Concise** - The Council's communications should be **clear**, **concise** and **trustworthy**. They should therefore be written in plain English and jargon-free.
- 2. Consistent** - We communicate through many different channels to a wide range of people, including residents, businesses, visitors, our own employees and Councillors, our partners, parishes and central government. It is therefore essential that communications are co-

ordinated and give **consistent messages** which are promoted through the most cost-effective formats available to the Council.

3. Accessible - A range of media will be used to communicate to ensure the messages are **accessible to everyone**.

4. Relevant and timely - The messages should help **customers get the best** out of the many services provided by the Council. This includes encouraging **dialogue** with customers as to how we can further improve services and **clarifying information** where necessary. We should ensure information is up-to-date and communicated regularly, including feedback of any changes made following consultation/dialogue with customers.

5. Accountable - All services should be clearly **branded** so the public understands what we do. This will ensure that the Council is **accountable** to its customers and the wider community.

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity requires that our publicity (communications) 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

THE CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON
LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY

Introduction

1. This code applies to all local authorities in England specified in section 6 of the Local Government Act 1986 and to other authorities in England which have that provision applied to them by other legislation. Where the term "local authorities" is used in this code it should be taken as referring to both those categories of authority. References to "the Act" are to the Local Government Act 1986.
2. Local authorities are required by section 4(1) of the Act to have regard to the contents of this code in coming to any decision on publicity. Section 6 of the Act defines publicity as "any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public". The code therefore applies in relation to all decisions by local authorities relating to paid advertising and leaflet campaigns, publication of free newspapers and newsheets and maintenance of websites – including the hosting of material which is created by third parties.

Vision

The ultimate aim of our communications is that everyone who deals with the Council will have a clear understanding and a positive perception of our aims, as outlined in our current Corporate Plan, the delivery of our statutory obligations, our services and achievements, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and engagement.



Delivering our Five Principles

Our communications strategy and supporting policies will reflect the ambitions of the Council's adopted Corporate Plan which states that we 'will listen, learn and lead so that Wealden people, businesses and visitors can thrive and prosper'.

Where possible, we will use insights from the behavioural sciences to ensure that any communication is as successful as possible, and adopt the elements outlined in the mnemonic EAST (Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely) to guide this endeavour.



Specific communications plans will be produced for clearly-defined initiatives in the Corporate Plan. The range of print, social and electronic media used by the Council will vary depending upon the target audience (e.g. residents, businesses as well as relevant stakeholders) to which the communication applies and will be those which best reach them.



Media Releases

Co-ordinated and consistent messages are produced by officers responsible for communication in the Council through the current [Protocol on Media Relations](#) which ensures that through the media release process, messages are approved by Cabinet members and senior officers, and made available to all Members and staff. These messages are published on the Council's website, made available to the relevant media organisations and broadcast more widely via the range of print, social and electronic media used by the Council. The messages are also shared with the Customer Contact Centre so it is fully briefed to handle public enquiries.

The decision as to which messages are given a media release is based on a range of factors that include the importance of the information and the desire to promote the strategic objectives of the Council.



Website

A clearly-branded, up-to-date, simply organised website provides the most reliable way to ensure all the Council's messages, policies and information are held centrally and freely available to all. Any associated websites will also have to meet a range of criteria to ensure that they are clearly branded and meet an appropriate accessibility criteria.



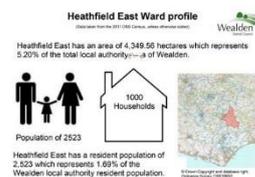
Direct Communications with residents and businesses

Using email services like MyAlerts and E-Business we will seek to communicate regularly with households and businesses, and through relevant and interesting content, maintain and improve engagement and ensure the Council is seen as an authentic and trusted source of information.



Social Media

The Council will use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In and any other forms) in line with its current Social Media Protocol.



Supporting Members

The Council will support Members with communications in their role as community leaders. It will provide assistance and encourage them to use social media and other channels to listen and respond to the concerns of ward residents and help them explain the Council's policies and aims.



Supporting Staff

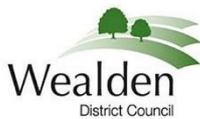
All employees of Wealden District Council are its ambassadors. The Council will seek to keep them informed through a range different media about Council initiatives in line with

the five principles, and review these for time-to-time to ensure they remain effective.



Reputation

Criticism of the Council can adversely affect the Council's reputation. We will monitor the growing range of media channels so we can be alert to cases as they arise and act promptly to clarify and explain our position.



Design and Branding

It is important the Council is clearly identified as responsible for delivering a wide range of public services. This can only be achieved through strong and consistent branding. Print and digital material, web sites and video content must be clearly branded and meet the five principles. The Council role will also be clearly visible in partnership work and shared services.



Face-to-Face

The principles outlined in this Strategy are relevant to all forms communications carried out by this Council including face-to-face, email and telephone.



Accessibility

We take our responsibilities towards equality and diversity seriously and will ensure information about our services is available to residents and their carers in a language and format they can understand and access.

We recognise the need to provide both printed and digital material in order to remain accessible to all.



This strategy is underpinned by the following policy documents, which may be updated from time-to-time.

[Quickguide to producing Wealden Publications](#)

[Protocol on Media Relations](#)

[Quick Guide to our Corporate identity](#) (Style Guide)

[Publication Schedule](#)

[Photo Consent Form](#)

[Writing Media Release - a quick Guide](#)

[Some useful Media Contacts](#)

[Answering media enquiries](#)

[Submit a story for Wealdnet](#)

[Social Media Protocol](#)