



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Communications &

Engagement Strategy

2024-2027



Introduction

As a young Council formed less than three years ago, a bright new start for public services in West Northamptonshire, the way we communicate and engage with our communities, colleagues and partners has never been so important on our journey to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

In our first two years, whilst working hard towards improving and transforming the many services we have inherited from the legacy councils, we have also made good progress to develop and establish a bold and progressive new communications and engagement service, with the key aim of delivering a proactive, shared voice between residents, partners and the Council.

Effective communications and engagement must be at the heart of everything we do, underpinning our work, services and strategies so that all residents,

businesses and partners understand and are clear on the commitments we are making to them and our area. Not only must we inform and engage with them on how we're working hard to meet their needs but also involve them in this work, build public trust and increase transparency over what we do, enhancing and protecting our reputation.



Having now shaped our new service, this strategy sets out how we plan to develop our communications activities and channels over the next three years, to ensure we bring our communities on our journey with us by listening, engaging and informing them along the way.



Cllr Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council



Our Vision

Our vision for communication and engagement is to:

- Increase awareness and improve understanding about our work, services and activities to help our residents, colleagues and partners feel better informed, engaged and involved in what we do.
- Tell the story of everything our Council is doing and working to achieve for West Northamptonshire, why it matters, and the difference it makes to the lives of our residents and communities.
- Build public trust and increase transparency of public services as well as enhancing and protecting the Council's reputation.
- Be inclusive and accessible to everyone, reflecting the diversity and needs of our communities.
- Create opportunities for our residents, stakeholders and colleagues to get involved and engaged in local decision-making.
- Be proactive with compelling narrative, prioritising campaigns with impact that are tailored to our residents' needs.
- Give people reasons to feel proud about living, working in and visiting West Northants and help our communities and businesses shout about the many great things happening here.
- Be embedded in our organisational culture and service planning, supporting all teams in developing and improving services and delivering our corporate strategic objectives.
- Be innovative and evolving with the changing digital landscape and our residents' needs.



Our Principles

We will be:

- Open, honest and accountable, focusing on the decisions we make and the outcomes that matter to our residents
- Accessible, clear, easy to understand and consistent, not confusing
- Meaningful and inclusive, using and developing those channels that work best for our audiences
- Timely and relevant, responding to the news agenda quickly and effectively
- Two-way and engaging, creating a shared voice between our public, our people and our partners where we listen and act to build trust, improve awareness and change behaviours.



Our Journey So Far

Since our journey as a Council began less than three years ago, we have already made good progress towards achieving our vision for better, effective communications and engagement.

During 2022/23 we restructured our communications service and appointed a highly-motivated and talented team, switching our focus from a reactive comms legacy to a progressive and proactive new service model that puts compelling campaigns and narrative at the heart of our activities.

We introduced Communications and Engagement Business Partners to foster trusted partnerships between the service and other teams council-wide, working with them so that communications is at the heart of planning and decision-making.

This, coupled with the development of specialist roles in digital media, marketing, internal communications, consultation and engagement have reinforced our ability to deliver the right messages, to the right people, and in the right ways.

We have also developed our channels and reach to audiences, from expanding and strengthening our internal communications methods to starting from

scratch then significantly growing our social media presence and digital content. This has included introducing additional channels, such as fortnightly e-news updates, regular proactive briefings for councillors and parishes and a twice-yearly printed magazine delivered to all households, which are helping engage some of our harder-to-reach audiences.

We have delivered high quality and proactive campaigns, dealing with issues ranging from the cost of living to the resettlement of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, whilst also delivering an outstanding response to a series of important national occasions including the Queen's Jubilee, Operation London Bridge and King's Coronation.

In the past year we have worked hard to encourage more people to have their say and get involved in local decision-making and increase our consultation and engagement activities to help shape services. This has led to a 133% increase in public participation, receiving 12,685 responses from residents compared to 5,441 during the previous year. We also increased our consultation and engagement activities by over a third, with 70 campaigns this year.

A year in figures

In the past year, WNC's Communications Service:

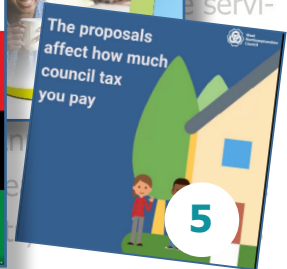
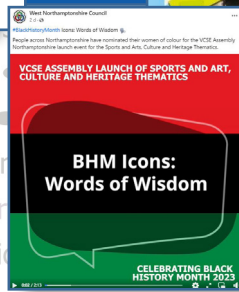
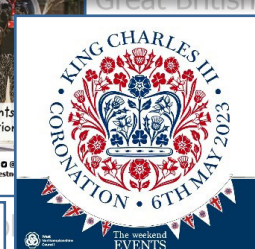
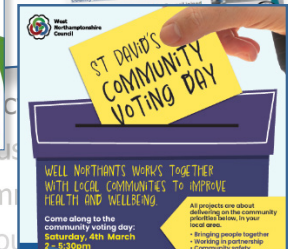
- ✓ Produced and shared **362** news releases and updates about a range of services, projects and activities across West Northants
- ✓ Planned and delivered **204** proactive communications campaigns and projects throughout the year
- ✓ Dealt with **740** queries and requests from local and national media
- ✓ Posted **3,258** updates on social media, reaching on average 640,000 people every month
- ✓ Continued to increase its social media presence, with followers across its main corporate channels increasing by 20% to over **28,000**
- ✓ Produced **186** videos, which have been viewed over 236,000 times
- ✓ Kept colleagues informed and engaged with over **1,380** internal comms messages
- ✓ Enabled residents to have their say in **70** consultation and engagement campaigns on services, projects and activities across West Northants.



For advice on cost of living support

Visit: westnorthants.gov.uk/cost-of-living or call: **0300 126 7000***

*Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm



Our Corporate Narrative

As a young Council with bold and bright ambitions for the future, it's important our residents, colleagues and partners know the story of our past, present and future – a consistent and compelling narrative that will help everyone understand and recognise our purpose, our goals and ambitions, our challenges and where we have come from as an organisation.

Using this narrative at the heart of all our communications enables everyone to understand the same story and tell it anyone who asks, helping to build consensus about why we are here and what we are trying to achieve.

Our narrative underpins our principles of being honest and open, supporting us in our work to create a shared voice between our public, our people and our partners.

A brighter, better future for public services

Formed in 2021, West Northamptonshire Council is one of the newest local authorities in the UK, a young unitary council with big ambitions to create better opportunities for everyone, no matter their background or ability, so they can thrive and live their best lives.

Serving over 425,000 people, we're the 13th largest local authority area in the country and also one of the fastest-growing – seeing a 13.5 per cent population rise in the past decade.

Born out of Northamptonshire's largest local government reorganisation for nearly four decades, our Council is an opportunity to bring together and shape better services for our residents and businesses. And only a couple of years into our journey we've made a great start on this, in the face of many challenges for both our organisation and our residents during ongoing cost of living struggles and financial and economic obstacles.

We want to reflect the times we live in and play our part to create a more sustainable and inclusive environment, supporting our communities through their daily lives in a way that makes a real difference to them.

Facing our challenges

Like all local authorities, we are facing financially challenging times, with increased pressures emerging from an uncertain economic climate, rising inflation and cost of living struggles.

Despite these new and unpredictable pressures, we are building on our strong start and acting now to tackle these head on, managing our finances robustly and prudently.

But we recognise we need to do things differently to address our challenges, and look at new ways of working and innovation, as well as increasing our focus on prevention and intervention to reduce reactive, costly service delivery.

We have learnt lessons from the challenges faced by Northamptonshire's legacy councils and will not repeat them. We will always take strong, bold and swift action to face our challenges to ensure we continue to deliver our ambitions and meet our duty to provide vital services to local communities.

Our Corporate Narrative

Helping our people to Thrive

We want to make West Northamptonshire a great place to live, work, visit and thrive, where people can be supported to 'Live Their Best Life', which has become our mantra.

We aim to build a place where there is opportunity for all, where people are proud to live and are supported to live independent, self-sufficient lives, in a thriving, prosperous and sustainable place.

Our young Council is building strong foundations that make us future-proof and cost-effective, the facilities to make us modern, efficient and sustainable, the support services that our residents want and need in case there is a problem, and the infrastructure that connects to the area, community and work.

We know that to deliver better outcomes for residents, we need a well-supported and empowered workforce that puts the customer at the heart of everything they do and how they behave, and we must harness opportunities to work smarter by delivering modern, quality services that also offer the best value for money for our residents. We need to connect to our customers and communities in the ways that they want us to and that meets their needs.

We care – not just in the context of providing services that support and protect our most vulnerable, but in all aspects of the work we do. Putting people first is our priority, whether it's the needs of our residents and businesses, or our workforce.

Enabling people to THRIVE is at the heart of our organisation's cultural values.

We want everyone working at our Council to live and breathe these values every day.

As a new employer, we recognise our greatest asset is our people, and our ability to succeed is driven by a well-equipped and highly-motivated workforce that can work flexibly in the heart of our communities – our West Way of Working.

Our Council is where potential is unlocked and where talent thrives – we want to retain and nurture our colleagues to thrive whilst also attracting fresh talent to join us on our journey.

We are a new Council in the first chapter of our story and will develop our narrative in line with the everyday needs, challenges and priorities of our residents and businesses.

THRIVE Our Core Values

TRUST

We are honest, fair, transparent and accountable. We can be trusted to do what we say we will.



HIGH PERFORMANCE

We get the basics right and what we do, we do well. We manage our business efficiently.



RESPECT

We respect each other and our customers in a diverse, professional and supportive environment.



INNOVATE

We encourage curiosity, we are creative and seize opportunities to grow individually as an organisation and as an area.



VALUE

We continually strive for best practice and ways of improving existing procedures, practices and systems and thereby promoting efficiency and cost effectiveness.



EMPOWER

We believe in people, will listen, learn and trust them to make decisions. We help people to realise their ambitions.



Our Place Narrative

A place to be proud of

West Northamptonshire is right at the heart of the UK – geographically, historically, and economically.

We are home to over 400,000 residents and over 21,000 businesses, including the thriving towns of Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley which offer unique and independent character, sitting alongside scenic rolling countryside with over 160 picturesque parishes. West Northamptonshire provides the highly sought-after balance of urban and rural lifestyles.

Both London and Birmingham are just an hour from here, as are Oxford and Cambridge, and we have five major airports within 90 minutes travel.

Our area is a flourishing hub of industry and we pride ourselves on world-class quality and innovation, from our globally-renowned shoe trade and outstanding track record in motorsport to our shining reputation as the UK's 'Logistics Golden Triangle'.

As well as playing host to many large international corporations, we are also proud of the number of small, independent businesses found in our high streets, and hidden gems and attractions found throughout our market towns, which all help make West Northants a vibrant and prosperous place to be.

Innovation is one of the area's greatest strengths. As a result of this entrepreneurial spirit,

we regularly feature in top ten lists for business start-ups and are home to hundreds of independent and niche businesses.

Silverstone has helped turn West Northamptonshire into a hub for high-performance automotive. At the centre of the UK transport network, it is also an ideal spot for the burgeoning distribution industry.

Our largest town – Northampton – is undergoing a radical transformation with £33m contributed by Government so far, unlocking hundreds of millions more in private sector investment. It's home to a new, £330m state-of-the-art university campus which helps feed the local talent pool. This is supported by top-notch schools and further education including the Silverstone University Technical College which helps supply our growing high-performance engineering industry.

We're in the process of bringing all sectors together – from business to non-profit, health to education, arts and cultural – to create a place where everyone has the tools and opportunities to thrive, professionally and personally.

We've made incredible progress in our first few years and have even more in the pipeline.

As a totally new area formed through Northamptonshire's local government reform in 2021, it's vital we have a consistent and compelling narrative that will help us build upon our work to create a sense of place, belonging and civic pride among our communities.

Our narrative provides all local partners with a consistent and shared story to tell about our history and our future, supporting us in developing a shared sense of ambition and direction, building confidence among our communities and partners, helping potential investors and businesses to find out more about how they might benefit from our area, and building credibility with Government and stakeholders.

As a young Council shaping a new journey with fresh ambitions, our place narrative will continue to evolve in the years ahead, but this is where our story for West Northamptonshire starts....

Our rich heritage

West Northants looms large throughout British history, as early as the Iron Age – from Towcester (or Lactodorum) as an important Roman settlement to Northampton's role as royal residence through medieval times, our heritage is rich.

We've been the backdrop for many decisive battles, with Northampton and Edgecote the sites of key clashes in the Wars of the Roses, and when Cromwell's forces all but crushed the Royalists at Naseby in the first English Civil War. Catesby and Guy Fawkes even conspired the Gunpowder Plot here at Ashby St Ledgers.

Since Victorian times, our area has been renowned for making the highest quality footwear in the world – something we can still lay claim to, with Trickers, Church's, Crockett and Jones, and Edward Green now exporting shoes across the globe.

We are home to an impressive number of stately homes and historic landmarks, from Sulgrave Manor and Canons Ashby to the BBC's wartime radio mast at Daventry's Borough Hill. We've been at the forefront of evolving science and technology, from the birth of radar by Watson-Watt and Wilkins in a field near Daventry to the discovery of DNA by Northampton's Francis Crick in 1953.

Let's not forget our excellent sporting connections – the world-famous UK home of motorsport, Silverstone, is part of our unique offer, and we are also home to Northampton Saints Rugby club, Northamptonshire County Cricket Club and Northampton Town Football Club.

Our Place Narrative

Our people make a difference

Over the centuries, West Northants has welcomed people from across the globe, resulting in an inclusive community with a cosmopolitan feel and strong community bonds

We are proud of our community spirit and resilience, with residents and businesses banding together in times of need and a large number of community groups and volunteers who make a real difference in all aspects of life, whether they are running food larders or welcoming spaces, or providing much-needed leisure time and wellbeing support.

Our residents have opened their homes to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, and our communities have supported the resettlement of Afghan families facing persecution in their homeland.

We mix a true sense of diversity with unity - it's a constant cause for celebration here, with communities staging numerous events and festivals, from Black History Month and Pride, to International Women's Day and Diwali.

Everyone has access to quality education and training to inspire them to succeed in their chosen careers. We are home to more than 180 schools – 89.2 per cent of which are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, and around 90,000 of our population are under 18s.

Our best place ambitions

Our people make our place – and everything we do is about West Northants being a great and sustainable place for everyone who calls it home to live their best life. The best place to grow up, live, work, grow old and thrive.

Partners and communities across West Northants are working together on improving outcomes for everyone so that in 2030:

We will be a healthier and caring place for everyone young and old. A place where people are living healthier lives for longer, thriving from an early age and into their later years. A place where people feel safe and have access to decent homes, green space and the means to live their best life.

We will have an economy that works for everyone with great skills and good quality jobs and where people and business are connected so that our economic success benefits everyone across West Northants and we are seen as the best place to visit and do business.

We will have delivered on our environmental commitments, with the council achieving Net zero for its own emissions, with bold new initiatives in place that protect the environmental, economic and social sustainability of West Northamptonshire for all residents, businesses, communities and wider society.

Place Branding

Separate to our Council's corporate identity, yet aligned with our key objectives and priorities, a strong place brand is crucial to promoting West Northamptonshire as a leading destination at regional, national and international level – to support existing businesses and tourism, economic development, encourage inward investment, attract visitors and instil civic pride among existing residents.

Developing our place brand will also help local communities feel an increased sense of place and belonging to the new local authority area of West Northamptonshire, whilst recognising and celebrating the individuality and unique features of Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley and the many surrounding villages.



What we will do:

- Create a new, consistent place brand for West Northamptonshire which underpins the Place Vision, investment, tourism and growth priorities and celebrates our area's unique identity and its diverse make-up of towns and villages
- Work with our partners to develop distinct and unique brand identities for our towns of Northampton, Daventry, Brackley and Towcester which reflect their character and make-up and support economic growth, tourism and inward investment.
- Review our existing place promotions and channels inherited from the previous authorities to support our new approach
- Work with our partners to develop fresh marketing strategies identifying fresh opportunities and improvements to raise the profile of West Northants on a national and international platform (for example a prime location for big business, major events and the film industry)

What success will look like:

- Strong place branding for West Northamptonshire that promotes and builds upon its reputation as key UK destination, attracting more investment, business growth and tourism
- Existing residents and businesses will have an increased sense of identity and pride in the area where they live and work.



Corporate Branding

Our Council is aspiring to build a corporate brand with inspiring, thoughtful and transparent values that reflect our social objectives and responsibilities towards helping our communities and our planet.

Our visual identity

Our visual identity is key to building recognition, awareness and trust of our organisation and services.

To achieve a strong corporate brand, all our materials, from signage and uniforms to letters and leaflets, must show our visual identity clearly and consistently across all our services.

As a young Council our visual identity is established yet still in its infancy, so work must continue to roll it out across all service areas to replace the previous legacy council brands.

Our new in-house design service plays a key role in improving brand consistency of corporate materials and advising and supporting teams in their marketing activities, and this work will be developed further.

Our internal brand

Our staff and members are our brand ambassadors who can build trust and social advocacy among our communities. Believing in our brand culture - our corporate vision, objectives and organisational values - is key to this success.

It is important that colleagues who transferred from the previous local authorities fully identify with and relate to our new organisation, with positive experiences that reflect how we work and serve our local communities.

Progress continues on this, with the widespread internal use of 'Thrive' as a visual identity, linking to the Council's organisational values and resonating with colleagues and members. This has been strengthened further by the introduction of the annual Thrive employee awards and the Thrive Ambassadors network.

Employer brand

It is also important for the Council to develop an effective employer brand, to signify what working for our organisation will feel, look and sound like, to not only support and retain our existing workforce but to attract the best talent we can to deliver excellent services.

A successful employer brand has been developed and established - 'When potential is unlocked, talent thrives' - which now underpins all communications and marketing activities relating to recruitment and retention initiatives. Work will now focus on further embedding the brand across the organisation and externally via corporate communications channels and content.



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**



What we will do:

- Take a 'stock-check' of where the organisation currently is with its visual rebranding activities and develop a new branding implementation plan with further and updated guidance to support all teams and service areas
- Work with teams to continue the roll-out of the visual identity across all service areas, in line with transformation activities and opportunities
- Use our in-house graphic design service to further improve brand consistency of corporate materials across all service areas and advise and support teams in their branding and marketing activities
- Use internal communications to increase employees' familiarity of the Council's vision and behaviours of our Thrive cultural values
- Further develop the use and rollout of the 'Thrive' brand in all internal/employer identity communications

What success will look like:

- All our services, assets and activities will be branded consistently, improving recognition, awareness and trust among our residents of what we are doing within their communities
- Our employees feel an increased sense of belonging to West Northamptonshire Council and no longer refer to their legacy authorities; they know the Thrive vision and how these values personally relate to them, both at home and at work
- An effective employer brand will increase our organisational reputation as a great place to work among current employees and attract the best fresh talent.

Our tone of voice

Tone of voice is crucial to our brand success. In all our communications our tone will be:

- Honest, open, friendly and helpful
- Professional without jargon
- Relatable to our audiences – sometimes serious, sometimes fun, but never inappropriate.

Our Audiences and Channels

Who we will communicate and engage with and the methods we will use

Our Public

Residents
Businesses
Other service users
Visitors and tourists
Future residents & businesses
Community & voluntary organisations
Media

Our Partners

Town and parish councils
Neighbouring councils
Other public agencies (NHS, police, housing associations)
Government
Representative bodies
Regeneration partners
Investors and developers

Our People

WNC colleagues
Councillors
Trade unions
Our contractors

External Channels

Media - local, regional, national and trade
WNC website
E-news updates
West Northants Life Magazine
WNC social media – X, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube
Community social media channels
Email news updates
Printed materials – posters, leaflets, flyers
Outdoor marketing – billboards, digital signs, banners, bus advertising
Public events, displays, roadshows
Partner websites and social media pages
Reports and briefings
Letters and service emails
Customer Contact Centre

Internal Channels

Intranet
Teams news feeds
Chief executive weekly update
All-staff briefings
Manager briefings
Team meetings
All staff emails & Mid-week updates
Office screens & desktop wallpaper
Noticeboards
Pop-up banners and signage
Weekly members' briefing
Mod.gov
Email updates and briefings
Senior Leadership Coffe & Chats

Consultation channels

Have Your Say - our online consultation hub
Surveys (online, face-to-face, printed)
Focus groups
Residents Panel
Consultation Register
Customer and user groups
Surveys (face to face, printed)
Social media polls
Community events and roadshows
Our elected members and WNC colleagues

Planning our Campaigns

Effective campaign planning is key to achieving our objectives of ensuring our communications and engagement focus is proactive, not reactive, and we reach, inform and engage the right audiences in the right ways at the right time.

Each communications and consultation campaign should be strategically planned with clear outcomes and evaluation to make sure that we use our people and money in the best way possible and continuously improve what we do.

It is important that all teams council-wide integrate communications and engagement into their planning and decision-making from the outset when developing their services and activities.

To aid this approach, we will continue to develop our new Business Partner model to forward plan and develop and deliver multi-channel, targeted campaigns supporting their service priorities and objectives. Business Partners will also assist teams in exploring future opportunities for communications improvements and addressing reputational challenges.

As part of our wider marketing and campaign planning, it is also important that we research our audiences, their needs and behaviours better so we are communicating the right things to them and gauging their feedback using the right channels at the right times.



What we will do

- Provide compelling narrative about our work, activities and services, based around key messages that are specific to each resident and their varying needs
- Develop clear forward plans of strategic campaigns, forthcoming marketing and media activities, continuing to change our focus from reactive to proactive communications
- Encourage and apply communications and consultation resource planning within all future campaigns, growth and funding bids
- Make better use of audience research, data, insight and segmentation as part of our marketing activities and campaign planning so we are targeting the right people with the right messages and channels
- Ensure all our campaigns follow the same planning framework with clear goals that are measured and evaluated

What success will look like

- Reactive, ad-hoc communications and engagement activity are minimised and replaced by proactive, planned campaigns that help to support and deliver our work, objectives and priorities
- Our organisation's communications and consultation activities will be better aligned to our services, and we continue to identify reputational risks and opportunities at an earlier stage
- Communications and consultation will be embedded in our organisation's service planning and teams will make more effective use of resources to inform and engage their audiences
- We know our audiences better and our communications are more specific and targeted to their needs
- Our audiences will have an improved understanding of our council and the wide range of services available to them and feel better informed and engaged in our work.

Digital and Social Media

The fast-changing digital landscape and increasing use of the internet in all aspects of daily lives presents both opportunities and challenges for our Council as we strive to connect our communities and improve their life chances.

Our communications approach must reflect the continuing shift to online channels by residents seeking news and information and accessing our services.

Developing how we use and target social media to reach, engage and interact with our audiences is a priority, to increase accessibility and convenience of our information and services. It will also build trust in what our council is doing to achieve better outcomes for our local communities.

Improving our digital channels will also provide us with greener, more cost-effective ways of communicating our messages.

Underpinning all our efforts must be compelling content, which reflects the growing demand from our audiences for dynamic, visual storytelling in the form of video, images and graphics.

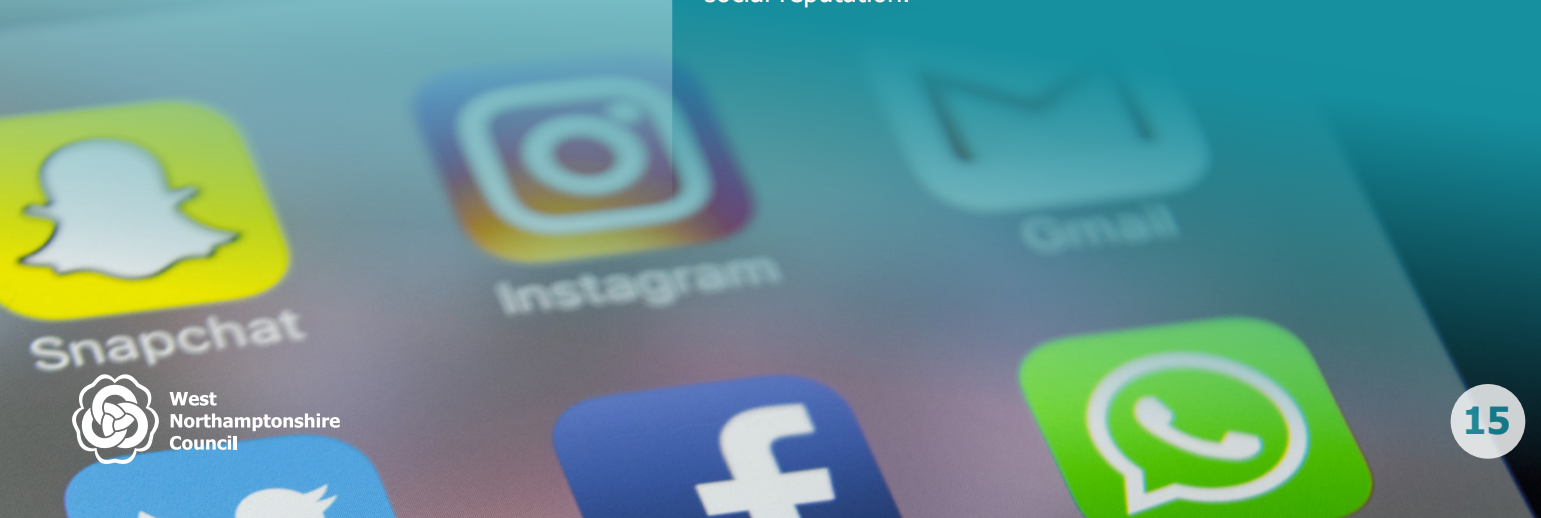


What we will do:

- Create a social media strategy focusing on channel and content development, increasing our reach and engagement with online communities
- Increase our use of video and digital graphics to provide engaging and compelling storytelling, reflecting the growing demand for online visual content by our audiences
- Increase the take-up of our fortnightly corporate e-news updates and explore further opportunities for developing reach and content
- Build and strengthen relationships with local online communities and identify and engage advocates within these to help champion causes and widen awareness of our work and services we provide
- Ensure all our published digital content is relevant and timely to residents, in Plain English and accessible to all
- Increase trust and advocacy by encouraging, sharing and engaging with more content generated by our own audiences
- Use signposting content on our social media channels to drive traffic to our website to increase awareness, engagement and access of services and information available online
- Keep up to date with the changing digital media landscape and continuously review our digital approach in line with the evolving needs of our audiences.

What success will look like:

- Our audiences have a better understanding of what we do and the services available to them through our increased online engagement and interaction
- Better, more targeted online communications that improve awareness and advocacy of the Council's activities, objectives and decision-making, helping to strengthen trust and build social reputation.



Media Relations



Despite the continued rise in popularity of digital channels in how our residents seek their news and information, traditional media outlets continue to play an important, objective role as part of the wider communications mix in keeping them informed and updated about the Council's services, activities and decision-making.

Newspapers, TV and radio have gradually shifted their content online to websites and social media, resulting in major changes to their operational processes, including an increased demand and faster pace for publishing content.

Set weekly and daily deadlines have disappeared, with the media requiring more frequent, quicker responses from the council to queries and requests. Some media outlets have also adopted new models encouraging the online publication of self-submitted community content such as articles and videos.

In response to this, we must adapt our communications processes to meet the changing needs of our media partners, whilst recognising the increasingly broadening, alternative channels our audiences are now using to seek their news and information.

Our news focus should be wide-ranging, building and strengthening relationships with national, regional, local and specialist media outlets and working with teams to identify and target the key news and information.

What we will do:

- Be more proactive and less reactive in producing and providing news content for use on our own channels and for updating the media
- Involve and engage the media as part of our campaign and forward planning process to reduce reactive queries and increase proactive content, and build and strengthen key relationships
- Where we need to react to the news agenda and media enquiries, we will do so quickly and effectively
- Develop our digital media office, with the possibility of providing a one-stop shop platform of news releases, images and video content for use by journalists
- Build and strengthen relationships with the media, with regular catch-ups providing honest and open dialogue, context to our decision-making, and ongoing story opportunities

What success will look like:

- Strong, productive relations with our media partners and mutual understanding of needs and objectives to keep our audiences informed
- Increased proactive and positive media coverage about the work of the council at national, regional and local level.

Consultation &

Engagement

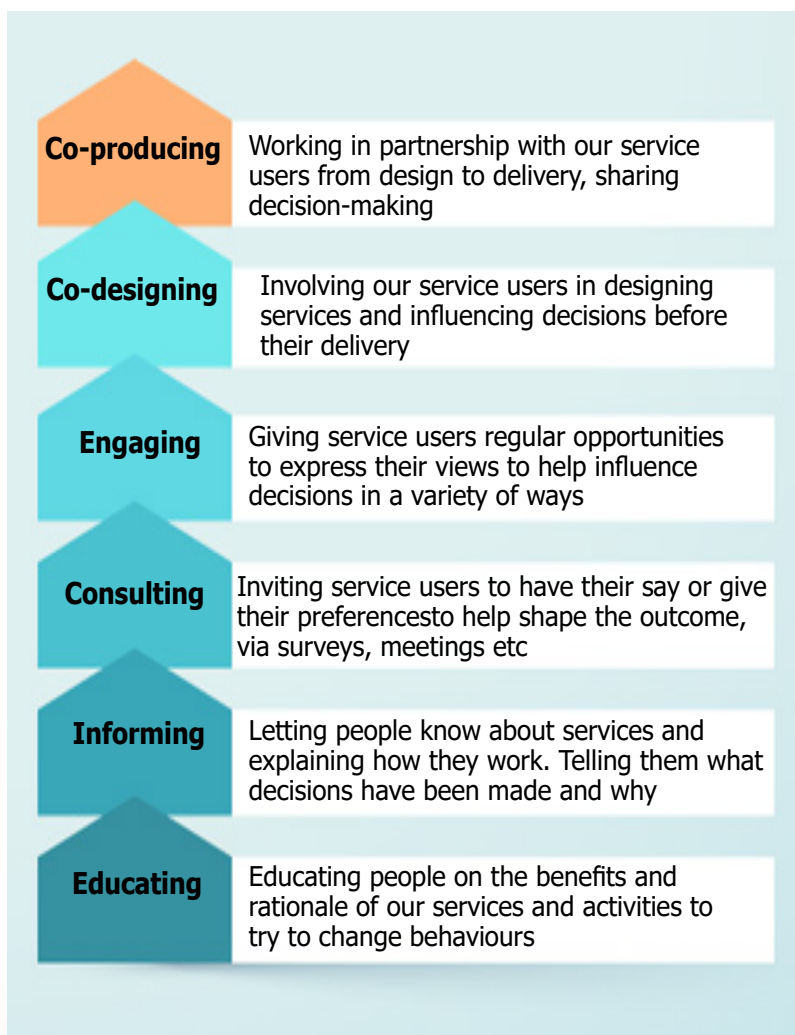


Our Council recognises we can only make real, positive change and improvement by ensuring we listen, engage and consult our communities in the decision-making process.

This includes empowering our residents where possible in designing and shaping the services we deliver.

Working hand-in-hand with our communications activities, effective consultation and engagement will:

- Inform the way we shape and deliver our services, priorities and strategies to ensure we are meeting the needs of our residents and communities
- Help to build and increase trust, awareness and understanding of the Council and the role it plays within our local community
- Give us a better understanding of our residents and communities and be more in tune with the issues they face and the challenges as they arise
- Improve local democracy by encouraging the public to become more involved in the decision-making process
- Increase satisfaction with services by enabling our communities and residents to have greater involvement in shaping them
- Remove physical, language or social barriers to our communities getting access to information or voicing their needs or opinions.



Consultation & Engagement



Our Principles

- Ensure the public and communities have an active role in our governance and decision-making
- Involve our residents and communities at every stage and feed back to them how their views have influenced activities and decisions
- Build open, honest and accountable relationships with our residents and communities, including marginalised groups and those affected by inequalities
- Use co-production, insight and engagement methods so that people can actively participate in shaping services
- Work with our public, voluntary and community partners, establishing and strengthening networks, relationships and activities locally to deliver effective outcomes

Our activities will be:

- Meaningful with a clear purpose – we will always be clear about why we are undertaking consultation and engagement activities and how people can take part.
 - Timely, with ample opportunity for people to respond and influence the decision-making process
- Considered, alongside opportunities for the co-design and co-production of services to increase community empowerment and involvement in local decision-making
- Accessible, easy to understand and targeted to those people we need to reach

Effective analysis of data to inform decision-making, with participants receiving feedback of the outcomes and the results shared as widely as possible to our communities.

What we will do:

- Encourage an 'ask, listen, act' culture across council teams so that consultation, engagement and opportunities for co designing and co-producing services are identified at, and integral to, the planning stages of service change and development
- Review our existing frameworks and develop a new corporate strategy for consultation, engagement and co-production, with processes and practical toolkits that support our staff, partners and communities in delivering these activities
- Explore the role and use of social media channels and other digital methods to increase opportunities for people to give their views and feedback
- Tailor our activities and increase reach and participation through better use of audience research, data, insight and segmentation.

What success will look like:

- Our residents and other stakeholders will have more opportunities to have their say on issues that are important to them and their local community
- Increased public feedback on our decision-making will help us shape better services that meet customer needs
- Improved perception and trust by residents that the council listens and responds to their needs.



Internal

Communications

We want all our employees and councillors to thrive in our young organisation, so it is important we ensure they are regularly informed, engaged, and listened to as we work together on shaping better services.

As we settle into new ways of working, we will adapt to new procedures, develop our services and build new relationships – how we communicate as colleagues is crucial to our success.

We want to:

- Create a culture of openness and transparency where employees feel empowered, trusted and respected
- Use our communications to embed the THRIVE organisational values across the organisation and create an open environment where colleagues feel valued, well informed, listened to and motivated
- Ensure all our communications are inclusive and accessible to everyone working at WNC
- Provide and maintain a strong and effective two-way flow of information between leadership, teams and colleagues, up, down and across the organisation
- Communicate change openly, honestly and effectively to all our colleagues using the right channels
- Promote a culture of engagement and wellbeing across the organisation and ensure that all employees are working collaboratively towards common goals.



What we will do:

- Create a new internal communications strategy focusing on channel and content development to improve the way we inform and engage all our employees
- Promote open and honest communication among colleagues with regular surveys, staff briefings and feedback sessions that will give a voice to individual employees and be listened to by our leadership team
- Take a personal, human approach towards developing two-way communication, building on existing channels to help us do this
- Support teams in developing the way they communicate with their customers, with a particular focus around ensuring customer needs and inclusivity are at the heart of these activities
- Develop our intranet as the daily go-to place where all colleagues are kept well-informed and updated and can easily access the information and internal support tools they need to do their jobs effectively
- Be proactive in all our internal communications, ensuring we share the correct messages with our colleagues at the right times, using the right channels
- Ensure our internal communications activities underpin and promote the goals of our West Way of Working approach, People Strategy and Connected Council programmes
- Produce more engaging and interactive content and encourage staff to share their stories and experiences with others.

What success will look like:

- Well informed and engaged colleagues who are loyal, motivated, productive and happy
- Everyone who works and represents the Council are our advocates who communicate openly and effectively with all customers and colleagues
- All colleagues feel empowered, trusted and respected – we want all our staff and councillors to THRIVE in our new organisation, so it is important that we ensure they are regularly informed, engaged, and listened to as we work together on shaping our Council.
- A culture of openness and transparency where colleagues feel empowered, trusted and respected
- A strong and effective two-way flow of information between leadership, teams and colleagues, both up and down the organisation
- All colleagues are working collaboratively towards a common goal
- Communications embed the THRIVE organisational values across the organisation to create an environment where colleagues feel valued, well informed and motivated

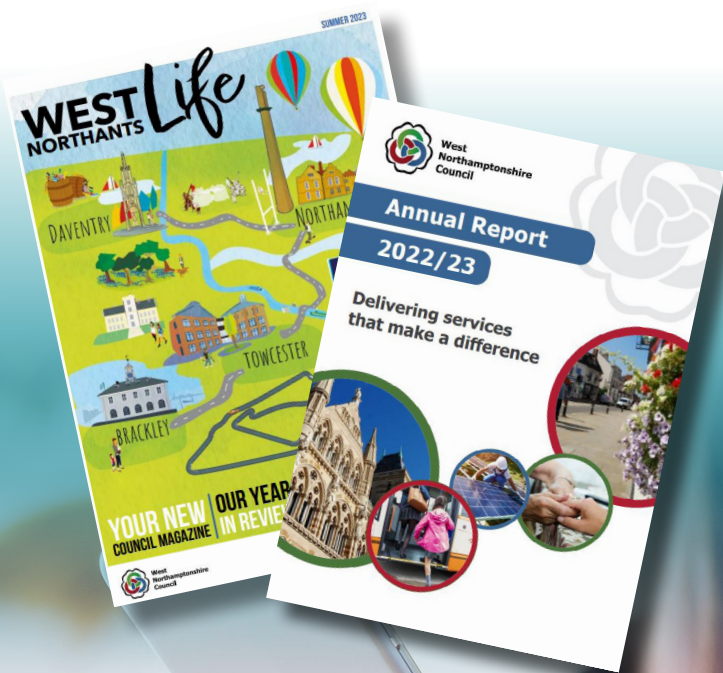
Publications

Publications can play a key role within the wider communications mix, by providing regularity and familiarity that strengthens our news and information offer.

We want to develop the use of digital and print publications alongside our other communications channels to keep our residents and stakeholders informed and engaged about our work, activities and the services available to them.

We must also ensure all our published content, including reports, correspondence and publications, is relevant and timely to residents, in Plain English and accessible to everyone.

As we move forward, we will deliver value for money and aim to reduce costs wherever possible, as well as continually review the effectiveness and relevance of publications to our target audiences.



What we will do:

- Develop the reach and content of our regular e-newsletters and email bulletins for residents to enhance our news and information offer and increase user interaction with our other digital channels (including website and social media)
- Supplement and support our regular news output with the ongoing development of our bi-annual printed residents magazine West Northants Life, focusing on key need-to-know information about the Council, its services and activities
- Develop and produce regular, tailored e-publications and bulletins for key stakeholders including parish councils and partner organisations, to ensure they are kept regularly informed and engaged
- Provide guidance and training for employees in 'writing in plain English' to ensure consistency of language and tone in our reports and publications
- Explore alternative presentation methods, such as use of video and infographics etc
- Work alongside the Customer Service and web Teams to ensure online information is understandable and engaging.

What success will look like:

- Our residents and other stakeholders will feel more regularly informed, engaged and updated on the work of the Council and issues that are important to them
- Increased public awareness and understanding of the services we provide and how the Council operates

Measuring progress and next steps

A three-year delivery plan is being developed to underpin this strategy and implement all the actions we have set out to do – this will be led operationally by the Communications Service with the support of various teams across the organisation and form the basis of their annual service improvement plan.

We will also regularly review, measure and evaluate the progress and effectiveness of our communications and engagement activities to ensure that continuous improvement can be made.

This will include:

- Setting and agreeing annual baseline targets for outputs and outcomes in our service plan
- Monthly performance dashboards analysing key channels and activities (such as social media and media coverage)
- Providing Cabinet with regular communications and engagement reviews and progress updates
- Preparing evaluation reports for communications campaigns to review and measure the success of activities against objectives and resource.



What success will look like:

- Increase in social followers, reach and impressions
- Rise or sustained high levels of social media content engagement (likes/shares/comments)
- Improved positive coverage sentiment, wider shares and mentions on social media
- More user-generated content is shared with us
- Increase in e-news subscribers
- Improved customer interaction with website and social media channels
- Wider engagement and interaction from online communities
- Increase in number of proactive news items produced and issued
- Reduction in number of reactive media enquiries and statements issued
- Improved sentiment of media coverage.

