

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Personnel Policy

Communications And Engagement Strategy 2026-281. Purpose of Report

To seek approval for the proposed Communications and Engagement Strategy 2026-28.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to RESOLVE that the Communications and Engagement Strategy be approved.

3. Detail

Over the last three years, communications and engagement activity has played an increasingly important role in supporting the Council's priorities, strengthening relationships with residents, partners, employees and elected members, and ensuring that communities are informed, involved and able to influence decisions that affect them. The highlights include:

- Improved employee engagement and understanding of Council priorities through enhanced internal communications, GMT Question Time sessions, roadshows and manager toolkits. Survey results show employees feeling informed increased from 62% to 72%, while confidence in change management increased from 46% to 67%. Awareness of the Council's values, vision and understanding of the role individuals play in achieving them also increased across all measures.
- Expanded the Council's digital reach and engagement, growing audiences across all major social media channels, increasing Email Me subscribers to over 30,000, and regularly achieving more than 10,000 video views.
- Increased resident and stakeholder engagement through consultations, events and targeted campaigns, with budget consultation responses rising from approximately 600 to over 1,200.
- Strengthened engagement with communities and underrepresented groups through a stakeholder network of 350 community, voluntary and partner organisations.
- Delivered communications and engagement for major Council priorities, including the Corporate Plan 2024-28, investment and regeneration programmes, climate change initiatives and housing delivery.
- Supported successful behaviour change campaigns, including a recycling campaign reaching 95,000+ views and contributing to a reduction in contamination rates from 18.5% to 14.1%.

- Enhanced marketing and promotional activity, contributing to a 27% increase in event attendance and a 59% increase in visitors to the D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum.
- Strengthened the Council's reputation through positive local and national media coverage and effective promotion of key initiatives.
- Provided strategic communications support during major incidents and events of national significance, including Storm Babet and Operation London Bridge.

The Communications and Engagement Strategy 2026-2028 builds on these strong foundations, ensuring that effective communication and meaningful engagement remain central to delivering excellent local government services and positive outcomes for our communities.

The strategy will support the Council's engagement with a wide range of stakeholders including residents, employees, Elected Members, community and voluntary groups, partners and other stakeholders. The existing strategic objectives have been retained, reflecting their continued alignment with the Council's corporate priorities, while introducing a refreshed action plan that responds to the evolving communications landscape and emerging opportunities and challenges.

While Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has been paused, the need for effective communications and engagement remains. Retaining LGR within this strategy is not about progressing a programme of change during the pause period, but about ensuring the Council is prepared to communicate clearly, consistently and transparently should the position change in the future. Taking this proactive approach will enable the Council to respond quickly and effectively to future developments, while remaining focused on current priorities and business-as-usual activity.

If approved, a programme of launch communications will be delivered across the key stakeholder groups to raise awareness of the strategy and demonstrate how they can use it to inform their work, stay involved, share feedback and engage with the Council on its implementation.

4. Key Decision

This report is not key decision as defined under Regulation 8 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

5. Updates from Scrutiny

Not applicable.

6. Financial Implications

The comments from the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer were as follows:

There are no additional costs beyond the existing budgets agreed for 2026/27. The budget for 2027/28 will be considered as part of the annual budget setting process, although no significant budget changes are anticipated at present.

7. Legal Implications

The comments from the Head of Legal Services were as follows:

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8. Human Resources Implications

The comments from the Human Resources Manager were as follows:

HR support the strategy and activities outlined, particularly in light of LGR uncertainty for employees.

9. Union Comments

The Union comments were as follows:

Unison believes this Strategy is vital in ensuring that employees have a genuine voice within the organisation. Early and meaningful engagement enables staff to understand the rationale behind decisions, share their expertise and concerns, and contribute to successful outcomes. This approach helps reduce uncertainty and improve morale. This is especially important with the upcoming implementation of LGR.

10. Climate Change Implications

Any climate change implications are contained within the report.

11. Data Protection Compliance Implications

This report does not contain any OFFICIAL(SENSITIVE) information and there are no Data Protection issues in relation to this report.

12. Equality Impact Assessment

An equality impact assessment is included in the appendix to this report.

13. Background Papers

Nil.