

communications strategy

communications strategy 2017-2021

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Our place

Teignbridge is a district in South Devon that covers 260 square miles and serves a population of 131,437 and approximately 60,040 households. It sits between Exeter and Torquay and the south eastern area of Dartmoor. The district has a varied geography and environments ranging from coastal resorts and busy market towns to rural countryside and wild moorland.

Teignbridge is divided into 24 different areas, known as Wards. Every four years 47 local people are elected to represent those living in those communities.

Executive summary

People now have more ways than ever before to communicate, share, interact, complain, inform and transact. Councils, as statutory and non-statutory providers of many services, place-makers and civic leaders, need to adapt and provide relevant information to people in ways they choose and that fit in with their daily lives.

We should continue to explain, promote and discuss our direction for Teignbridge, how we will contribute to civic life and which services public money is focused on. Communication only works when messages are clear and easy to understand, and when it is a two-way process. It's not enough to talk - we also have to be able to listen.

We want people to be satisfied with what we do and how we do it. Having better informed, satisfied customers reduces the cost of answering comments and enquiries, puts taxpayers money where it is most needed and shows we have their best interests at heart.

Our vision

"To build trust through effective two-way communications"

This framework is about explaining how we are making Teignbridge a healthy and desirable place where people want to live, work and visit. Our approach is based on key principles:

1. Putting our customers at the heart of our work, helping them play a meaningful role in community leadership.
2. Building public trust through good communications, enhancing Teignbridge's reputation as an effective, efficient council that's focused on its customers, their needs and aligned to council objectives.
3. Striving to communicate consistently and effectively through a range of channels and in ways that suit people's needs.
4. Building the ability of staff to communicate clearly, understand our priorities and contribute positively to our Vision and Values.

The Communications Strategy underpins the Council Strategy and the 10 'super projects', each of which have a widespread impact on our economy, community wellbeing and environment.

We will:

- Be open and honest: Plain talking, clear, informative, timely and factual.
- Align the various disciplines of communications as a whole, rather than individual elements, so information and messages reach the right audiences at the right time in the right way through the right channel.
- Speak in Style: Our communications will reflect Teignbridge's Vision & Values and Branding style.
- Broaden our digital focus to make it even easier for people to access and conduct business with us.
- Share appropriate information in line with good practice and protocols.

Our Objectives

1. Support the council in achieving its vision and priorities through campaigns, activities or specific plans based around the Teignbridge Ten projects with clear and consistent messages, branding and measurable outcomes.
2. Support the council in delivering key digital projects which will improve customer access and effectively manage demand, and take advantage of new technologies as they emerge.
3. Engage with staff and councillors to ensure consistency of understanding around the priorities.
4. Monitor how we communicate with you, and how you communicate with us, by making sure all channels are being used costeffectively.

Our Core Offer

The responsibility for clear, informed two-way communication sits with every staff member and councillor of Teignbridge. The Communications service provides a professional core function focusing on:

Media relations

We support staff and councillors by acting as a central hub for proactive and reactive media relations relating to the council's corporate activities. It does not offer support to councillors relating to party political activities.

Proactive – identifying stories and news which supports the Teignbridge 10 super projects identified within the Council Strategy, preparing media information/releases including liaison with relevant councillors and officers.

Reactive – responses to media enquiries, requests for interviews, statements and comments.

Media management - corrections and clarifications as appropriate.

Emergency incident response and critical incident communications.

A Media Relations Protocol explains the ways in which we manage our media responsibilities and provides simple guidance for anyone involved in contact with the press. For the Protocol see Appendix 1.

To maximise resources we will work with services to produce Communications plans for key projects that are clearly aligned to service, policy or corporate objectives.

Each campaign will identify audiences based on research and insight and specific targets set. This will inform the most appropriate channels, key messages and content. An evaluation will be included, and communication plans will be linked with relevant Council Strategy super projects. An example of a Communications Plan is shown in Appendix 2.

In case of emergency...

In the event of a major emergency or crisis we follow guidelines set out in Teignbridge District Council's Emergency Plan and the Devon-wide Combined Agency Emergency Response Plan.

Typically the first-line of communication in such an event will be the Police through Strategic/Tactical Command, and we will contribute to the Police-led media response as required while forming a communications plan for district council functions. This will be based on the operational decisions of the appointed Incident Response Manager.

In an emergency situation every effort will be made to keep councillors, senior officers and other stakeholders informed, and the response will be led by the appointed Incident Response Manager. However, in extreme circumstances it may be necessary for the Communications team to respond to the media or the public without direct reference to, or prior approval from, these parties.

All emergency communications activity will be monitored using our online media management system, which is accessible from any internet-enabled computer or device, anywhere in the world.

Review and update our Community Engagement Strategy to refine our approach and ensure all engagement is meaningful and adds value to what we do.

Social media

We use social media platforms as an appropriate and effective way to connect with communities, promote online services and customer 'nudge', gather real-time insights, respond to comments and complaints, and promote and protect the Teignbridge brand and reputation.

Social media represents an opportunity to promote interaction and dialogue with customers, share information fast and promote consultations and campaigns while remaining linked in with traditional communication methods.

This strategy will not only look into the existing channels and tools that we have available, but it will set actions to help us create stand-out content, map our digital landscape, understand audiences, inform our future activity and report back on engagement.

Using these channels is not a success in and of itself, the success of the technology depends on how it is used and what its results are. Because of this, our use of digital channel use will follow our communication aims and principles and our branding and style guidance.

Web development

The web has transformed every aspect of our lives and continues to reshape government through improved customer access, transparency and open data. A key objective is to build on and further improve the value of our website up to 2020 and beyond.

For Teignbridge, the move to more services online can yield savings and provide residents with quicker and easier ways to interact with us. This will help serve people more efficiently and effectively by diverting traffic away from telephone calls and allow for a more focused approach on those with more complex needs or requirements.

This Strategy's action plan sets out to ensure teignbridge.gov.uk remains easy to use and accessible as possible for customers across different devices with the direction of travel aim of making it a 24/7 digital solution for customers and services. This will be, in part, dependent on future technology and council capability, but the overarching aim is to be digitally inclusive, design-led and able to use the right data and content to shape and evaluate what we do.

Corporate communications

A core element focuses on:

- Internal communication (staff newsletters, intranet) and engagement.
- Senior management and member relations – briefings and liaison on key media issues and advice and support on key meetings (Executive, Overview and Scrutiny, management meetings) and weekly digests of enquiries and coverage achieved.
- Corporate brand, identity and reputation management.
- Corporate publications, print and web-based.

Teignbridge wants to build a network of ambassadors that can amplify its messages from the inside, out. Effective communication at all levels, within teams, between teams, and between staff, senior management and partners is crucial in making this happen.

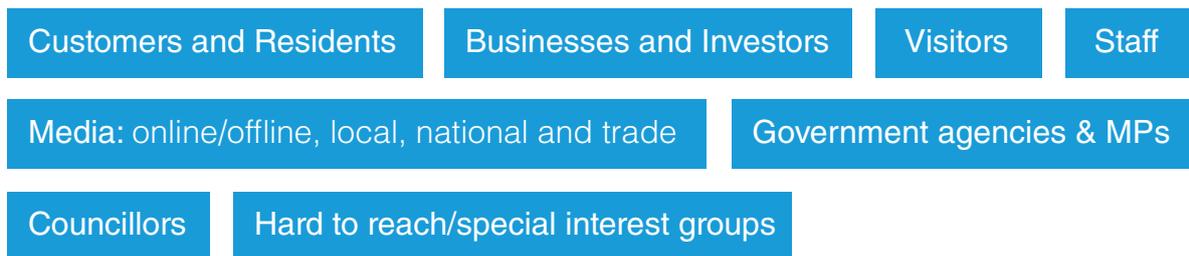
We will do this through:

- Regular liaison and communication with the public, partners, stakeholders and influencers to make sure timely information is given on the Council Strategy's Teignbridge Ten projects.
- Liaise and consult with the public and partners to help people have their say, providing all appropriate opportunities to inform and influence the delivery of the Council's services.

- Work alongside senior managers, councillors and partners to publicise and promote, both nationally and locally, Teignbridge.
- Provide advice to other services and partner organisations on public and media relations where appropriate or requested.

Collaboration is an important and ongoing part of delivering lower-cost, efficient services. The emergence of new channels and upgrading of old, provides us with opportunities to work with like-minded partners on specific marketing campaigns where, by acting together, we can ensure messages don't confuse people with conflicting information but help them understand things better.

Audiences



Putting our customers at the heart of what we do

We want to continue placing our customers at the centre of what we do, but also making sure they know that we are delivering for them.

To help achieve this our communication material will:

- Follow the aspirations set out in the Council Strategy, Customer Charter and Vision and Values.
- Pay regard to the Teignbridge branding.
- Ensure relevant policies and accessibility guidelines are being followed.

Measurement and evaluation

We will continue to use a variety of evaluation methods, based on best practice, recommendations from professional bodies, and local insight including:

Google Analytics

Sitelmpove

Social media insight

Vuelio media logging

External customer surveys

Best 2020 surveys - annual internal surveys which ask services to provide feedback about the service and areas for improvement.

Media - we will continue bi-annual surveys of the media to ensure we are satisfactorily meeting the demands of their services for communications support and acting on feedback where appropriate.

The Code of Conduct on Local Authority publicity

In March 2011 the government issued a new Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

It is based on seven principles that require our publicity to be lawful, cost effective, objective, even handed and appropriate, to show regard for equality and diversity, and to be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

The principles of the code closely reflect our current and proposed practices. In particular value for money is a priority in all our work. As we continue to deliver communications we will do this within the law and with regard to the guidance contained within the Code of Recommended Practice.

For queries relating to the content of this strategy please contact the Communications Team: mediaandcomms@teignbridge.gov.uk.

Appendix 1

Media relations - guidance for staff and councillors

The corporate Communications team is the first port-of-call for mediarelations, and supports staff and councillors by acting as a central hub for proactive and reactive media relations relating to the council's corporate activities. It does not offer support to councillors relating to party political activities.

Our Media Relations Protocol explains the ways in which the Media and Communications team manages both its proactive and reactive media responsibilities and provides simple guidance for anyone involved in publicity.

1. All media enquiries should be referred to the Communications team. The team will manage the enquiry directly or provide advice to officers or councillors.
2. Information for all follow up press releases and statements will come from two sources only: the decision-making system and officers.
3. The Communications team provides professional advice and support across the council with regard to strategic communication issues, proactive and reactive media, public relations and event management, risk management in relation to reputation, crisis communications, interview and writing techniques.
4. All quotes, responses and letters to the media on matters of policy will reflect the approved or developing corporate view of the council, and will be issued in the name of a Portfolio Holder, appropriate senior officer or council spokesperson as appropriate and practical.
5. All Members are advised to refer media queries to the appropriate Director, Business Lead or Business Manager before providing a response in order to confirm facts/figures etc. This is a judgement call for Members which should not stop them from commenting straight away where issues are of a political nature, clear-cut and they are confident they have up-to-date and relevant information available to them. In the case of corporate non-political queries, Members are asked to inform the Communications team about the query and, where available in written format, provide a copy of their response.
6. Those officers involved with major projects or initiatives should develop a Communications plan agreed with the Communications team. This will help ensure actions are reflected in the corporate publicity planner and supported. This should indicate how the product or service will be marketed and show a seamless link with the publicity/communications required for it to succeed. Plans should include clear measures for evaluation to demonstrate successful outcomes or learning.
7. All communication and media-liaison should keep with the protocol on member/officer relations and other relevant codes of practice including the council's Constitution.
8. Where relevant, copies of written responses issued by the Communications team will be sent simultaneously to staff members directly involved in the query, the Leader and/or Portfolio Holder and/or senior officers.
9. A weekly 'at-a-glance' digest of media queries and responses related to corporate

issues will be sent to all elected Members every Thursday so that they have timely and convenient information relevant to stories likely to be published in weekly newspapers. The digest helps protect local newsgathering by preserving 'exclusive' stories while allowing responses to be shared with Members.

10. In the case of locality-specific stories likely to create queries for local Ward Members, responses will be shared with local Ward Members on the morning of publication to help make sure they have timely information. In the case of a highprofile story in a daily newspaper likely to create queries for Members, responses will be shared with all Members on the morning of publication to help make sure they have timely information. Due to the resourcing implications the Communication Team cannot provide broadcast media queries or interview transcripts.
11. All news releases are published on www.teignbridge.gov.uk and social media channels and distributed to all Members and relevant officers at the time they are sent to the media.
12. 'No comment' is never an option.
13. All media activity will promote core messages in support of Teignbridge's priorities, be appropriate to the audience, be planned and sustained in order to ensure delivery of key messages.
14. Policy issues: TV and radio interviews on matters of policy will be undertaken by the Leader, relevant Portfolio Holder, or Committee Chairman in the first instance. Alternatively, or where none are available, the team will work through the 'officer cascade' starting with the Managing Director/Business Manager.
15. Operational issues: TV and radio interviews on operational matters will be undertaken by a media trained officer with appropriate knowledge, subject to the agreement of the Leader, Portfolio Holder or Committee Chairman.

Ward-specific publicity; elections and purdah Members in their ward role

Whenever a public meeting is organised by Teignbridge to consider a local issue, all the Members representing the ward or wards affected should, as a matter of course, be invited to attend the meeting. Similarly, whenever Teignbridge undertakes any form of consultative exercise on a local issue, the Ward Member should be notified at the outset of the exercise.

Officers have a duty to keep Members informed about issues which may be of particular interest to Ward Members and should not rely simply on reporting items to committees. Officers should particularly bear in mind the importance of ensuring Ward councillors, chairmen and vice-chairmen are given early notice of something which is likely to be reported in the media imminently and in which they will probably have an interest. Officers should try to avoid the situation where the first that Members know of a problem is when they are approached by the media for comment.

In a multi-Member ward, any case work raised by an individual Member should not normally be disclosed by officers to other Members in that ward until it requires a Portfolio Holder's decision when it can be communicated to other Members in that ward as part of the consultation, if appropriate.

Where a Portfolio Holder is considering something in a Member's ward they should liaise with the local Member(s). The use of email will be central to the officer delivery of information and there will be an on-going obligation on Members to provide and ensure a fully functioning email link which is checked regularly.

Press releases

Wherever possible, a press release for ward-specific publicity will include the views of the local Member(s) of that Ward. Due to the often very short deadlines available, invitation for local Members to comment will be by email, often with very tight and non-negotiable deadlines.

When a press release concerns more than one Ward it will be treated as a corporate issue and local Ward Members will not be invited to comment. The only exception is where a high-profile issue affects the entirety of a multi-ward town, such as Newton Abbot, Dawlish or Teignmouth, and it is relevant for all local Ward Members to contribute to a press release.

On occasion, explanatory press releases covering a live Executive/Council committee item will be sent to the media. Their purpose will be to set the corporate position in context before member debate, and will so not contain Ward Member quotes.

Press Photo-Opportunities: Civic Occasions

The Chairman of the Council or Vice Chairman will represent the Council at any civic occasion where the District Council is represented. In the event of either being unable to attend, the local member for that Ward will be invited to perform the ceremony. In a multi member ward, this will be by agreement, failing that it will be by alphabetical rotation. Any member with a significant involvement will be notified, as will the Portfolio Holder, Review Group, Chairman and Members.

Non-civic photo opportunities will include the relevant Portfolio Holder wherever possible, and where a story meets the Ward-specific criteria detailed in 'Press releases' (above), all local Ward Members will be invited to the photo-opportunity though not required to attend if they would prefer not to or are unavailable at the pre-arranged time.

Elections & Purdah

From Notice of Election, Teignbridge abides by the Central Government Code of Publicity governing media relations. This precludes any proactive publicity involving candidates unless the Member holds an official, representative position of the Council body, e.g. Council Leader or Chairman, and the publicity is part of the normal calendar of the Council year. This general ban on publicity is called 'purdah'. For further advice about the application of purdah contact a member of the Communications Team.

Effective use of this protocol will reduce the risk of:

- Negative publicity – resulting from slow or lack of response to enquiries or inaccurate responses. Also, lost opportunity for good news stories resulting from a

lack of press release and other proactive work.

- Lack of understanding about the Teignbridge's role and work resulting from poorly briefed journalists.
- Concerns among staff about comments they have made to the press as a result of well-intentioned but poorly briefed reactions to difficult media enquiries.
- Perception of Teignbridge as lots of different service departments, instead of one corporate entity.
- Disillusioned staff resulting from negative stories appearing in the media before internal knowledge.
- Concerns from our customers about the quality of the services we provide.
- Complaints from the public that they are not informed about the progress made by Teignbridge in achieving the corporate goals and objectives.

This protocol does not apply to any non-corporate activities of individual councillors or political groups.

Appendix 2 Teignbridge Ten – MarComms Plan

Background

Overview of activity being promoted.

Objective

What do you want to achieve? (SMART). Demonstrate how it links into the Council Strategy.

Audiences

Who do you want to talk and listen to?

Key messages

The key points you want to make, supported with secondary messages where appropriate.

Activities and channels

What's the best way to reach them (online promotion, outreach, social media, website, posters, banners).

Roles and responsibilities

Who else needs to be involved or know?

Resources

Staff and budget.

Risks/opportunities

What are the risks and what can we do to mitigate against it?

Evaluation

How are we going to know if it's been a success?

Analytics (Social insights, Google, SiteImprove, Spar, calls/transactions, service-specific performance indicators).

