

Communications Strategy 2024 to 2027

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Communications Strategy

Our communications strategy sets out how we will communicate to:

- Help the Council achieve its objectives
- Engage effectively with audiences
- Demonstrate the work we do for our communities
- Ensure people understand what we do, and
- Work to change behaviour and perceptions where necessary.

Communication Strategy & Priorities

By providing consistently excellent, innovative, value for money and effective communications our strategy is:

“to increase awareness of the Council’s services and its achievements, build trust and improve the reputation of the Council.”

Our priorities:

1. Promote and uphold the Council’s reputation as a trusted, effective, efficient, innovative organisation that is focused on the public and their needs.
2. Ensure that all communication and engagement activities are consistent and co-ordinated across all channels to maximise the effective use of resources, ensure value for money and give maximum support to the Council’s strategic priorities.
3. Promote the Sevenoaks District as a great place for doing business, to live, work and visit.
4. Increase opportunities for people to engage with the Council on issues and services that affect them by developing existing and new channels of communication.
5. Coordinate internal communications with:
 - Staff – to ensure they feel valued and are engaged on the priorities, activities and messages of the Council, to inspire them to deliver the Council’s objectives.
 - Elected Members – to support them in their role as community leaders, by providing Members with communication skills and up to date information.
6. Ensure our digital communications develop in line with advancing technology, social changes and customer needs, to allow us to engage with our communities in an effective and efficient way.

Delivering our strategy

The day-to-day delivery of the Communications Strategy will be led by the Council's Communications Team, with the support of the Assistant Chief Executive, the Chief Executive and Strategic Management Team, Council Leader and Cabinet, Elected Members, service/department leads, all staff and our partners.

The overall responsibility for the successful implementation must rest with every member of staff and Elected Members, as they are our ambassadors and play a crucial role in delivering information to our communities in accordance with the Council's narrative.

Our approach to delivering effective communications will:

- Focus on delivering successful, proactive, high quality communications plans led by a programme of campaigns
- Ensure we are using the full range of communications tools and channels
- Focus on outcomes not outputs using OASIS campaign methodology
- Put insight, measurement and evaluation first to measure the impact of communications activity
- Target our communications effectively
- Be social on social media and not broadcast messages
- Aim to ensure that 80% of our communications work is proactive and planned.

The Annual Communications Action Plan will be agreed with the Council's Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Communications.

How we communicate

We use a number of communication channels including:

Externally

- In Shape - our quarterly magazine for residents and businesses
- The Council website
- Local, regional, national and trade/industry media
- Our Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn accounts
- Marketing materials
- Public notices
- Advertising – social media, newspapers, magazines, out of home and radio
- Signage and posters
- Events, roadshows and displays
- Door drops
- Reports and policy documents
- Council meetings and minutes
- Email marketing
- Vehicle livery
- Environments (internal and external)
- Via partner organisations channels and sites.

Internally

- Intranet
- grapeVine monthly email newsletter
- Emails
- Staff briefings
- Senior management meetings and Council staff meetings
- Members' updates

Brand Guidelines

Poor branding distances our services, confuses customers and can undermine trust in the Council and affect its reputation.

We aim to ensure that all Council communications are in accordance with the Brand Guidelines.

We aim to always present a strong brand identity, on all communication materials and channels, to clearly and consistently identify the organisation and its key messages to stakeholders.

We will do this by ensuring all parts of the organisation are aware of the brand guidelines and have processes in place to ensure that all materials are designed and written to the agreed brand identity.

Accessibility

We are committed to making our communications accessible to everyone within our communities.

Our Brand Guidelines provide guidance on the use of plain English to help us communicate simply and clearly. This is especially important for people who are neurodivergent and people with learning disabilities or mental impairments, such as dementia.

We will produce our publications in large print on request for people with visual impairments.

We utilise a telephone interpretation service to allow us to communicate with people whose first language is not English.

We follow best practice for accessible digital communications, including our website content and checking documents for accessibility.

Monitoring and evaluating

To ensure that we are achieving our communication priorities, we will monitor and evaluate them through various methods, including:

- Campaign evaluation (using the OASIS methodology)
- Social media metrics
- Residents' surveys
- Members survey on communication
- Staff survey on communication
- Service satisfaction surveys with customers

Appendix 1 – Our Council narrative

Our narrative and key messages, support the Council's ambitions and objectives as set out in **Delivering together, our Council Plan**.

The narrative below is a sample of the top-line messages that can be used for each objective and activity. Further messages will be developed within individual campaign plans.

These ambitions, objectives and narrative are further supported by our Council Brand.

We know Sevenoaks District Council is a great place to work. We're ambitious. We strive for better. We're not satisfied with the status quo, happy to maintain the mediocre and do things the way they've always been done.

Our aim is to provide **excellent services, great value for money and to continually innovate** so we can find even better ways of getting things done.

Unlike other councils, we make sure the **wellbeing** of the community runs through everything we do. Our five priorities set out our focus areas. Each priority has a series of promises to improve the things that are most important to the people we serve. Our priorities are:

- Our Communities
- The Economy
- The Environment
- Housing
- Our Council

Within our diverse organisation, there is one thing we all have in common – our customer focus. Without the people we serve, we wouldn't be here. It's our job to serve those individuals and businesses as best we can, because they help to make the District the great place it is today.

We want everyone who comes into contact with us to have the same, consistently great experience. To do that we need to ensure we're pulling together in the same direction.

Our jobs and services may differ, but we all have the same vision to make the Sevenoaks District a great place to live and work for everyone.

That means empowering our staff to do the best job they possibly can. Just as our community is made up of many individuals, so too is the Council.

It's the individual members of staff who make things happen and we want to do whatever we can to empower our teams to make decisions, solve problems, innovate and improve services.

With this in mind, we can each step up and fulfil our promises to serve those living and working in the Sevenoaks District.

If you have any questions about our Communications Strategy, please email communications@sevenoaks.gov.uk.

www.sevenoaks.gov.uk

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