

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2013- 2018

Confident in our future

The council is committed to delivering great value for Surrey residents in all it does. The effectiveness of any team in delivering this is determined to a significant extent by the quality of its communications and engagement. This strategy outlines the approach we will take to ensure our communications and engagement activity is the best possible and helps to achieve our vision of delivering great value for Surrey residents.

The council is recognised as having good services, strong partnership working and empowered and motivated employees. We have built a strong platform and we are committed to do more for residents.

We look to the future with confidence and are ready to meet the financial challenges we face, along with the rest of the public sector, requiring potentially far-reaching changes to public services.

The plans for how we will achieve our vision of delivering great value are in our corporate strategy. Communications and engagement are integral to the success of this vision and our activity will focus on supporting the priorities in the strategy.

We will be consistently pro-active in our communications and engagement to raise awareness and understanding of Surrey, recruit and retain good staff and engage residents and communities in our services and how they are changing. To help us achieve this, we are putting an emphasis on innovative approaches and more effective ways of doing things in our communications and engagement.

Our aim is to be clear and focused and involve residents and communities in our communications and engagement.

Doing the right thing

Doing the right thing for our residents now and in the longer term – and demonstrating this - is the driver for all communications and engagement activity. It supports the six tasks outlined in the corporate strategy that the county council has to focus on and get right:

Residents	Enable individuals, families and communities to have more influence, control and responsibility
Value	Create public value by improving outcomes for residents
Partnerships	Work with our partners in the interests of Surrey
Quality	Ensure the highest quality and encourage innovation
People	Develop and equip our officers and members to provide excellent service
Stewardship	Look after Surrey's resources responsibly

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Challenges

There are four communications and engagement challenges that we must meet to achieve these tasks.

1. **Be clear about the context** – The scale of financial savings required is unprecedented and sets the context for all our activity. This will mean that we will need to take decisions that could change what services we provide and how we provide them now and in the longer term. We will ensure that we are clear about options and explain the circumstances surrounding these options, the reasons for decisions and why we are responding in the way we are. We will provide opportunities for residents to offer their views and opinions.
2. **Responding to changing life choices** – The way people live their lives is changing, and many people have an expectation about how involved they are in the delivery of the services they use. Where they expect to be able to play a role in how services are designed and delivered, we will recognise and appreciate their involvement and will support and respond to these changing needs as our services change. Communications and engagement will be integral to this.
3. **Earn trust** – In the current context it is even more important than ever that all communications and engagement is honest and trustworthy.
4. **Enable involvement** – We will tailor our communications and engagement to the needs of different groups – residents, officers, members, businesses, communities and other partners - to enable deeper engagement.

Who

We will continue to work hard to improve our communications and engagement with all the people we work with. As part of this, we will place a particular emphasis on getting things right for three audiences.

Residents

Through new and more effective ways of communicating and engaging we will offer residents ways in which they can play a role in shaping services. This will build on the work currently carried out in many services, particularly adults' and children's services. We will strengthen our approach by improving how we feed back to residents.

We will use a variety of ways to reach people suited to their needs – for example, through digital and social media as well as paper-based communications. We will ensure that we reach as many people as possible by tailoring approaches for residents whom we have found it harder to engage with in the past or have particular needs.

As the ways in which services are provided change, we will make sure it is easy for residents to know who is providing their services and we will encourage people to help others understand services.

Businesses

To support the council's priority of supporting strong economic growth for Surrey we will improve our communications and engagement with businesses.

To do this we will develop tailored communications and engagement activity by working with businesses and make it as easy as possible for them to engage with us.

Officers and members

We will assist colleagues in services to improve the ways in which members are provided with up-to- date, local information.

Communications and engagement will work with members to improve ways in which they bring feedback and information into the organisation to help improve services. We will develop opportunities that make this easier. Two primary ways we will do this are through communications and engagement to support Shift in Surrey and the organisation-wide activity to build stronger teams.

We will also review and develop the channels we have, so that they better meet the needs of officers and members, better serve our corporate priorities and support a dialogue across the council.

We will also offer all members training in how to make the most of social media.

How

Improving our digital communications ability

- Improve our website homepage so it is more interactive, people can find information quickly and it is easy to engage with us.
- Being proactive in our use of social and digital media, supporting people to use these channels through clear guidelines and policies.
- Continue to look for new ways of engaging people using digital and social media to make it as easy as possible for them to share their views.
- Increase the take up of electronic version of Surrey Matters.

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Target communications and engagement to maximise impact

- Use data to reach people more effectively, including people who have been harder to engage in the past and who will benefit from tailored approaches to communications and engagement.

Maintaining a strategic approach

- We will focus relentlessly on communications and engagement related to the difference we will make for Surrey residents in 2018 defined by the priorities in the corporate strategy. Clear action plans, measurement and evaluation will underpin all activity. For 2013/14 these include:
 - Improving our roads
 - Providing children with additional school places
 - Support young people and the local economy, highlighting apprenticeships and skills development
 - Strengthening support for vulnerable children and adults
 - Supporting more vulnerable people to live independent lives
 - Demonstrating how we are delivering savings
 - Campaign to reduce litter in our county

Ensuring Surrey has an influential voice regionally and nationally

- We will support the organisation's work to represent Surrey's views nationally and regionally on our priorities.

Providing the best communications and engagement by working as one team

- Maintain our work to build effective, co-ordinated communications and engagement that is consistently high quality and provides value for money.

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Measuring our success

We have clear measures to define our success, especially for residents, officers, members and businesses. These are a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures that will demonstrate the difference effective communications and engagement make year on year and cumulatively by 2018. We will regularly review our progress in implementing this strategy and will share updates with residents from September 2013.

What difference will this make by 2018?

Communications and engagement will:

- Increase numbers of residents, officers, members and partners who feel engaged and know how they can, and do, play a role in public services in Surrey.
- Increase the number of businesses who are aware of our support for growing Surrey's economy and have a productive relationship with us.
- Improve the digital channels for communications and engagement.
- Ensure Surrey's residents and communities have a voice through improved engagement locally, regionally and nationally
- Increase understanding of our priorities and what we have done about them.

Our priorities for 2013/14

- Provide opportunities for residents and communities to be more involved and offer views and opinions on services and issues. These will be tailored to the needs of different groups – residents, officers, members, businesses and other partners.
- Carry out communications and engagement to support and promote the priorities outlined in the corporate strategy:
 - Improving our roads
 - Providing children with additional school places
 - Support young people and the local economy, highlighting apprenticeships and skills development
 - Strengthening support for vulnerable children and adults
 - Supporting more vulnerable people to live independent lives
 - Demonstrating how we are delivering savings
 - Campaign to reduce litter in our county
- To address the communications and engagement challenges associated with the tasks identified in the corporate strategy.
- Increase our digital ability, this includes improving our web site and supporting officers and members to communicate with people via social and digital media.

The detailed measures and targets for the priorities will be tracked in our quarterly communications and engagement updates which will start in September 2013.

This document outlines our approach to communications and engagement. If you have any comments please contact Louise Footner, Head of Communications, at louise.footner@surreycc.gov.uk

This strategy is supported by individual strategies and plans that give more detail of our approach for digital communications and engagement, media relations, internal communications and campaigns.