

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2024 – 2028



WHERE WE ARE

Since the last communications strategy was published in 2019, the communications landscape has changed dramatically, in part due to changes in technology but also as a result of the pandemic which accelerated changes to the way all businesses communicate with their customers.

We've built a large following of customers on our social media platforms in recent years which has been a cost-effective way of communicating with our customers. More and more, social media platforms are pushing organisations to pay for content to reach audiences and making it harder for organisations like ours to reach our customers organically.

We know from the engagement we achieve on our social media accounts that we can buck this trend. We monitor our content carefully and work hard to communicate with customers in ways they will find useful and relevant.

The Office of National Statistics data tells us that in 2020, **96% of households nationally have internet access**. LG Inform data states that **6.2% of our residents don't have access to the internet** or are lapsed users of the internet, so, while a digital-first approach is one we strive towards, there is a need for offline and some print channels if we are to make sure we don't exclude anyone.

At the same time there have been substantial changes in the ways customers choose to receive and consume news, continuing the shift away from traditional and print news sources towards digital and social media platforms.

Ofcom national research published in November 2023 tells us these changes apply to adults of all ages.

- **Two thirds of adults now look for news on the internet regularly.**
- Print is declining as a source of local news with around a fifth of customers using newspapers to find things out.

Our own local newspaper print circulation continues to decline. The ABC latest audited newspaper print data reports a **59% decrease in the Hinckley Times circulation** since 2019 and a **60% decrease in the Leicester Mercury circulation** in the same period.

Ofcom's research tells us:



Newspapers are still important for influence and for online/social presence.



Online is now the preferred source of news for all demographics – even people aged over 75.



For local government data, social media groups are the most popular way for adults aged 25-64 to find information.



People aged 75 and over are much more likely to get their local government news from messaging apps like whatsapps and nextdoor than printed newspapers, even free newspapers.



People aged 65 and over are most likely to turn to the TV as their local news source, with search coming second.



The Borough Council continues to print and distribute The Borough Bulletin to all 51,000 homes in the borough four times a year. However, since the last strategy was produced, we've increasingly used online news formats alongside the Bulletin to keep residents up to date.



We've launched several free email newsletters that residents can subscribe to. These include council news (issued fortnightly) as well as regular email newsletters about planning, business, climate change, consultation, bins and tenant news.

OUR COMMUNICATION PURPOSE:

All communications and engagement activity needs a purpose that helps the council to achieve its vision to create great places to live, work and enjoy. Whenever our services communicate with customers we will use clear language and the most appropriate format to reach them, accepting this won't be the same format for every customer. Our communication activity will help to achieve our Corporate Plan vision of creating great places to live, work and enjoy

Our communications activities will:

Inform

Provide customers with the information they need.

Inspire

Help all customers to make the best use of our services by giving them access to the information they need.

Reassure

Provide reassurance to customers during times of crisis or emergencies.

Change behaviour

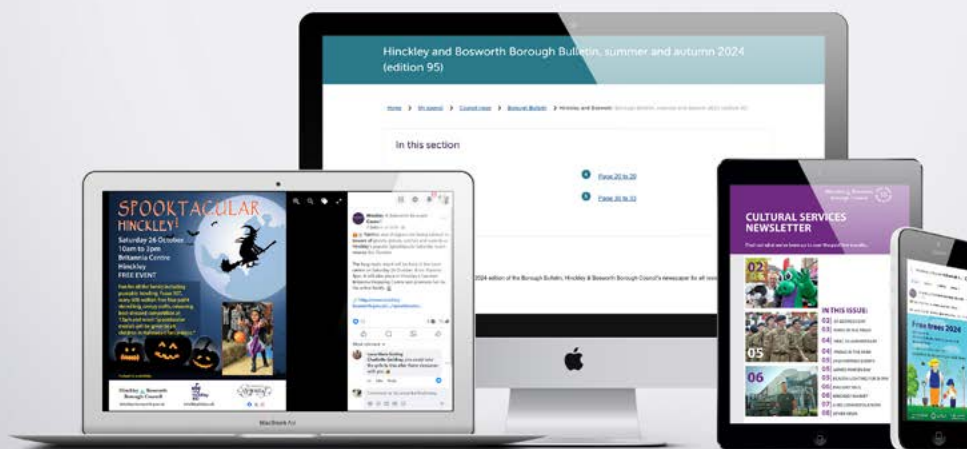
Use techniques to encourage customers to think about changing how they do some things – this might be using our services in a new way or considering changes to their health or wellbeing.

Our main areas of focus for this strategy will be:

1. Accelerating the shift of communication activity online by increasing the use of e-mail marketing, e-newsletters and further developing our presence on social media for customers who prefer this method of communication.
2. Continue to make our communications and promotional campaigns insight-driven
3. Providing a professional media office service to our media partners and to the authority's own service areas.
4. Ensuring that whatever method we use to reach our customers, our communication continues to be timely, informative, engaging, accessible and factual.
5. We will continue to make accessibility the foundation of our communication activity.



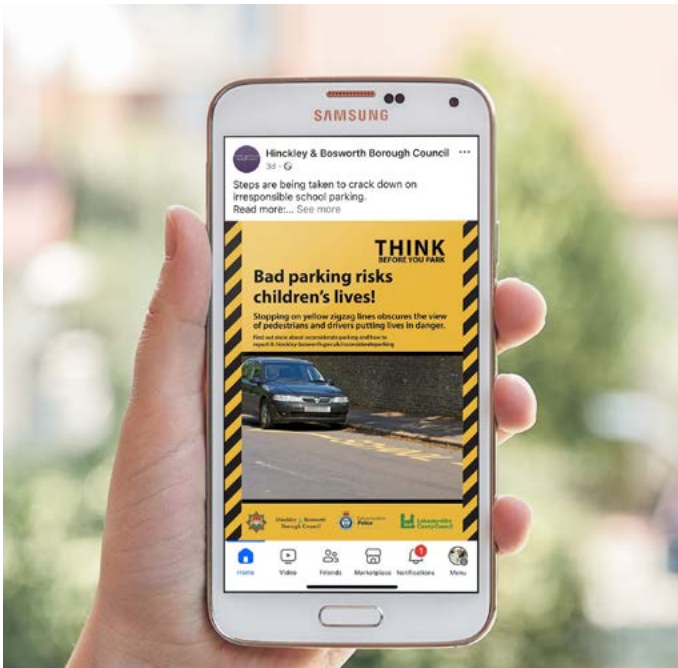
WHAT WE WILL DO:



Focus One:

Accelerating the shift of communication activity online by increasing the use of e-mail marketing, e-newsletters and further developing our presence on social media for customers who prefer this method of communication.

- We will become publishers of our own stories, taking a digital-first approach to news by developing a strong online news function to communicate directly to our customers.
- We will grow our social media audiences across all of the platforms we use to ensure we reach a broad range of customers in locations across the whole borough.
- We will develop and enhance our social media content to increase its reach and boost engagement with our residents.
- Alongside our own social media accounts, we will expand our ability to engage directly with new audiences and diverse groups of people by posting in selected local social media groups, sharing factual updates and correcting inaccuracies.
- We will continue to monitor emerging social media channels and grasp the opportunity to join in important conversations where they are happening locally.
- Our social media editors will continue to work closely to plan content, share best practice, collectively learn, seek and to test new opportunities across all council accounts.
- We will aim for digital by default – ensure online services are so easy to access and view online that it becomes the channel of choice for customers who prefer to connect with us digitally.
- We will work with council services to reduce the reliance on printed materials, working towards our climate change ambitions while making sure that we still provide information in the most appropriate format to reach all customers including those who are digitally excluded.
- Work with council services to accelerate and grow the use of e-newsletters to enable customers to subscribe to and receive regular and engaging news updates from services that interest them.
- We will make the best use of new and emerging technologies such as accessible animation and video to make sure we are reaching all our audiences.
- We will work with partners to offer training and support to customers who do not currently access the internet but are interested in doing so.
- We will explore the opportunities artificial intelligence could bring to communications, keeping up with shifting audience behaviour.



Focus Two:

Continue to make our communications and promotional campaigns insight-driven.

- We will make sure the most affected people know the information first and we will target relevant customers appropriate to what we're talking about.
- We will use the insights provided by our email and social media platforms to ensure we provide more of the information our customers are interested in hearing about in the most appropriate format.
- We will research and identify best practice customer consultation and customer insight arrangements in 'similar' district councils to identify any further potential to use insight to drive communication improvements.
- We will actively seek feedback, evaluate all activity based on outcomes, and share learning with our colleagues and partners.
- We will use feedback, insight, and social media and website analytics to continually improve our communication activities.



Focus Three:

Providing a professional media office service to our media partners and to the authority's own service areas:

- We will continue to provide a regular flow of news releases suitable for local, regional and specialist media outlets. We will supply ready to use images and web links with each news release to help to maximise coverage in print titles and for digital audiences.
- We will maximise media coverage of council events and other key newsworthy activity by supplying ready to use copy and images as soon after the event as possible.
- We will continue to provide a reactive media service, responding to incoming media enquiries to ensure they are answered in a factual and timely fashion.
- We will proactively challenge and rebut misinformed and inaccurate news articles to ensure media coverage properly reflects facts.
- We will continue to produce regular editions of the Borough Bulletin each year, enhancing and tweaking content and style to reflect the views of residents and stakeholders.
- We will work with council services to encourage customers to subscribe to e-newsletters to help us to provide convenient and timely information about our services and events to our customers.



Focus Four: Ensuring that whatever method we use to reach our customers, our communication continues to be timely, informative, engaging, accessible and factual:

Our communication and consultation activity will continue to be guided by the following principles:

- We will ensure all communication is written in plain English so that it is clear, concise and accessible to everyone.
- We will be open and transparent
- We will be clear about what we are consulting on and tell people how their views can influence decisions.
- We will be proactive and transparent – even when we know the news will be unwelcome.



Focus Five: We will continue to make accessibility the foundation of our communication activity:

- This is the right thing to do and it is also the law; The Equality Act 2010 made it law for public sector organisations including local councils to make a 'reasonable adjustment' to support people with disabilities. This includes inviting residents asking for information or communication in an accessible format or use of interpreters.
- The accessibility regulations say we must make our website accessible by making it 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'.
- We will go beyond this by making sure our social media content including images can be accessed by customers with disabilities.
- We will ensure our communication formats are accessible appropriate to the needs of the customer.
- We will aim to make our communication content and design clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without needing to adapt it, while supporting those who do need to adapt things.
- We are mindful that not all customers have access to digital channels and provide information in a range of formats including print to make sure we are not excluding anyone.
- We will continue to work closely with partners to support our customers to become digitally enabled if they wish to do so.

A woman in a blue fairy costume with a floral crown is blowing a large, iridescent rainbow bubble. She is holding a wooden wand. In the foreground, a young girl in a yellow dress with blue braids is looking at the bubble. In the background, a crowd of people is sitting on the grass, and a green tent is visible. The scene is outdoors with trees in the background.

EVALUATION

We will use the following methods to listen to feedback from customers, inform our services, evaluate and measure our success:

- Surveys (including staff surveys)
- Website analytics
- Social media analytics
- Email analytics
- print media monitoring
- Public consultation feedback
- Focus groups
- Compliments received
- Complaints received

We will also seek feedback from colleagues as part of post-campaign and project reviews to continually inform and improve our services.



For more information please contact:
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