



## **Communications Strategy 2019 to 2021**

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## Introduction



**Councillor Neil Bannister**  
**Leader of the Council**

This Communications Strategy has been developed following a strategic review of communications across the authority in 2018 and in line with the Council's Corporate Plan to cover the period 2019 to 2020/21.

The document covers principal service priorities, associated communications messages, audiences and actions for Harborough District Council. In addition, it sets out the purpose of the communications function and how the authority will engage with the local community and other stakeholders to deliver efficient, innovative and sustainable services, in line with corporate priorities.

## Local context

Harborough District has a population of around 85,000 and around 37,000 homes. The main settlements are Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Broughton Astley. There are more than 90 villages – many with populations of less than 200. The size and position of the district means there is no single media outlet covering the whole area. In 2018, statistics show over a quarter of residents (27%) do not have access to/or use the internet and it is therefore important that HDC takes a holistic approach to communications activity, using a range of tools and channels to share information with residents and businesses.

In a survey of local residents and businesses, undertaken in 2017, 90% of residents said they were satisfied with their local area as a place to live. Nearly three quarters (73%) of residents were satisfied with the way Harborough District Council runs things, compared with the LGA English population score of 66%. Almost 80% per cent of businesses were satisfied with Harborough District as a place to do business, with over 60% satisfied with the way HDC runs things (62%).

Just over one half of residents agreed with the statement that HDC provides value for money (56%) compared with 40% of businesses. Around six out of ten (61%) residents felt informed (either very or fairly) about the services and benefits that the Council provides, and 40% speak positively about the Council. By contrast, just under half of businesses (48%) felt well informed, and just over a quarter speak positively about the Council, with this in mind the Council has continued to improve and strengthen its communications with the business community through monthly newsletters, breakfast meetings on specific items to support businesses, introduced a dedicated website and facilitating training.

## The Council's Priorities for 2019 to 2021

Our vision is to secure a prosperous future for the people of Harborough District.

- We aim to improve the quality of life for those who live and work in Harborough District. That lies at the heart of our plan
- The area already features in national surveys among the best place to live, with low crime rates, low unemployment, high owner-occupancy, high skill levels and above average earnings

### **Priority 1: PLACE: An enterprising, vibrant place**

We are planning:

- To encourage and support small and growing businesses through the successful Harborough Innovation Centre, Grow On Space and other mechanisms
- The adoption of the Local Plan, will further strengthen the Council's function to manage the growth of housing and other development, and the protection of the environment through an effective and accessible planning service
- To keep our public places and air clean, and reduce carbon emissions

### **Priority 2: PEOPLE: A healthy, inclusive and engaged community**

We are planning:

- To help keep vulnerable people independent in their own homes, through our effective 'Lightbulb' scheme and supporting homeless people
- To upgrade and develop leisure centres in Market Harborough and Lutterworth
- To give people beyond these towns new local facilities for sport and physical activity

### **Priority 3: YOUR COUNCIL: Innovative, proactive and efficient**

We are planning:

- To make more Council services available online, so that people can contact us at whatever time of the day or week they want
- To ensure that the Council gets more things right first time, through the better use of digital information and improved promotion of these services
- To invest in and make better use of Council property to raise money

## Communications objectives

- To communicate in an open, accessible and transparent way, using plain English and a range of communications channels
- Inline with the Council's digital objectives, where possible, encourage a move to online communication channels such as websites and social media
- To present Harborough district as an enterprising, inclusive and innovative local authority (in line with corporate priorities) among its main target audiences
- To engage residents, businesses, partners and other stakeholders in the development of services
- To respond swiftly and appropriately to requests for information
- To support service teams in sharing timely and accurate information, including service provision, disruption and consultation
- To support the successful implementation of local, regional and national campaigns, in accordance with Council policy

## Audiences

- Residents
- Businesses
- Those working in or visiting Harborough District
- Neighbouring authorities (town, parish, county and neighbouring districts)
- Housing associations and the wider voluntary sector
- Central and regional government/agencies

Particular care will be taken to accommodate the particular needs of minority and ethnic communities, people with disabilities and those who do not have English as their first language, as well as those who are unable to access information electronically.

## Approach

The Council's Communications Team will work with the Corporate Management Team and Service Teams to develop and implement communications programmes to support the service priorities outlined in Appendix A.

## Communications Strategy 2019-21

The Communications Team will be responsible for:

- setting the objectives for each campaign/consultation
- developing key messages (in line with corporate priorities)
- brainstorming creative ideas
- overseeing principal activities
- providing risk management support
- setting evaluation criteria (covering outputs and outcomes).

The Communications Team will also ensure that agreed activities are scheduled appropriately, taking into consideration other activities and events organised by HDC.

Service Managers are responsible for engaging with the Communications Team and ensuring the team is informed in advance of communications opportunities and risks.

Strategic communications priorities will be managed by the Corporate Management Team. The Communication Team will report to CMT on a monthly basis. Strategic service priorities will be reviewed by the Corporate Management Team and the Communications Team and updated at least twice a year.

## Communications tools

The following communications tools will be used to raise awareness of the Council's services, campaigns and consultations, as appropriate.

- HDC website
- Residents' newsletter
- Business newsletter
- Member newsletter
- HDC social media platforms
- Core brief/all staff briefings
- Parish network (including parish social media)

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- Local press, radio, business press, TV and online media
- Community noticeboards in central hubs (business centres, village halls etc)
- Partner communications outlets including neighbouring authorities, voluntary sector and economic partners

In line with recommendations from the 2018 strategic communications review, work will continue to improve the reach and impact of communications tools to enable them fully to:

- convey HDC's corporate priorities and key messages
- create shareable news stories and encourage sign ups to the residents' newsletter
- give a face to the organisation through effective use of video
- promote use of digital services in line with the Council's Digital Transformation Strategy
- provide information for Members in a timely and easily accessible format to ensure they are well informed

## Continually Embedding Communications:

Following the success of the Strategic Communications review undertaken during 2018, to enable continuous improvement and to ensure communications continues to remain a focus of the organisation, the Communications Manager will work with the Corporate Management Team to:

- continually monitor and review processes so that the Communications Team is continually briefed
- ensure communications continues to be integrated into business planning
- redeploy communications resource, as necessary, so that time is switched from lower- to higher-value added activity
- continue development within the Communications Team, among services, senior management and Members, so that there is a better mutual understanding of the potential, and limitations, of what communications can achieve
- regularly monitor, and where needed, implement improvements to communications channels and tools to achieve greater reach for the Council's narrative, internally and externally

## Measurement and evaluation

Monitoring the impact of communications activity is essential to ensure the Council is able to make confident choices in the future. While specific evaluation criteria should be considered for specific campaigns, some measures should be applied to communications overall.

Informing residents - Increase in the annual number of social media followers	+10% year on year
Engagement with residents - increase in the annual number of views / readership of the monthly Harborough District News online newsletter	+15% year on year
Proactive communications - Achieving internal communication deadlines to ensure they meet media deadlines	98% achieved
Responsive - Meeting external media requests within one working day of receipt (or before)	95% achieved
Increase the annual number of visitors to the website	+15% year on year



## Strategic service priorities: key messages and actions

The table below outlines the key service priorities for HDC, together with messages, audiences, timings and potential risks. Each service priority has been linked to the appropriate corporate priority/priorities to demonstrate the links that need to be made to ensure clear and consistent corporate messages are conveyed across all activity, albeit tailored for each situation.

**Priority 1: PLACE: An enterprising, vibrant place** ■

**Priority 2: PEOPLE: A healthy, inclusive and engaged community** ■

**Priority 3: YOUR COUNCIL: Innovative, proactive and efficient** ■

Activity	Key messages	External Audiences	Risks	Key actions	Timing	Responsibility
Local Plan (incorporating affordable housing) ■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our approach aims to deliver sustainable improvement in Harborough, supported with appropriate infrastructure</li> <li>Adopting and implementing a new Local Plan will put us in a strong position to secure the right infrastructure while limiting the impact of development on local villages</li> <li>We're developing more quality and affordable housing to meet local needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents</li> <li>Local businesses</li> <li>Members</li> <li>Parishes</li> <li>Staff</li> <li>Partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perception that major development is unfairly focused in a couple of areas rather than spread fairly across the district</li> <li>Misperceptions regarding affordable housing</li> <li>Potential challenges/delays affecting adoption of the plan</li> </ul>	Submission to Inspector	Ongoing (adoption expected April 2019)	Strategic Planning  Development Management  Economic Development Team

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Activity	Key messages	External Audiences	Risks	Key actions	Timing	Responsibility
Economic Development Strategy ■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harborough is open for business</li> <li>Harborough is a lovely area to visit</li> <li>HDC can help your business develop and grow through access to funding and office space (innovation centre)</li> <li>We're your first port of call for local business and grant funding advice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local businesses</li> <li>Tourists</li> <li>Residents</li> <li>Members</li> <li>Staff</li> <li>Partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delay in opening the Grow On Space</li> <li>Magna Park development outcome could impact economic growth positioning</li> </ul>	Grow On Space opening	Scheduled for Sept/Oct 2019	Economic Development Team
Clean environment ■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will promote a clean environment through campaigns and enforcement</li> <li>We will secure high quality waste management services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents</li> <li>Local businesses</li> <li>Parishes</li> <li>Partners</li> <li>Visitors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued national increase in fly-tipping</li> <li>Changes at household waste sites may have a impact</li> <li>Risks over procurement of new Environmental Services Contract</li> <li>Implications resulting from the Government Waste Strategy</li> </ul>	Procurement of new Environmental Services Contract	Scheduled for 2019/20	Joint Chief Executives, with CMT, Waste Services and Commissioning
Physical activity strategy: Incorporating Leisure Centre refurbishment/re build and outreach services ■■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We're working in partnership to bring sports facilities to local communities</li> <li>We've listened to what you've told us and we're commissioning services across the District to improve access to sports and leisure wherever you live</li> <li>We are upgrading and developing leisure centres in Market Harborough and Lutterworth where demand and investment need is strongest</li> <li>We are also improving facilities and access to leisure activities across</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members</li> <li>Parishes</li> <li>Residents as a whole</li> <li>Those living with long term conditions</li> <li>Partners</li> <li>Staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on new leisure centre overshadows local services</li> <li>New leisure contract does not live up to expectations</li> <li>Outreach services not clearly badged by HDC – HDC role gets lost</li> </ul>	<p>Continual promotions of leisure activities</p> <p>New contract commences</p> <p>Future Leisure Centre provision across the district</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>April 2019</p> <p>Summer 2019 onwards</p>	<p>Leisure Project Board</p> <p>Assets</p> <p>Active Harborough</p>

Communications Strategy 2019-21

Activity	Key messages	External Audiences	Risks	Key actions	Timing	Responsibility
	the district					
Smarter Services programme ■ ■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are introducing new digital services to enable residents, businesses and everyone who uses Council services to enjoy a better customer experience</li> <li>Manage your Council services from the comfort of your sofa</li> <li>Do more in less time and at lower cost</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents</li> <li>Businesses</li> <li>Partners</li> <li>Voluntary sector</li> <li>Staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The IT does not perform as expected</li> <li>Staff resist change</li> <li>Not all residents can/will access services online</li> </ul>	<p>Planning/ outline the programme</p> <p>Implement- ation</p>	<p>2019</p> <p>From 2020</p>	Joint Chief Executives
Vulnerable people ■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We provide a 24-hour Lifeline Service for people who need it</li> <li>You can live at home safely and independently</li> <li>We provide community grants to voluntary organisations to support vulnerable people</li> <li>Support to homeless people through the implementation of the Strategy for housing and for the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vulnerable residents and their families</li> <li>Voluntary sector</li> <li>Partners</li> <li>Parishes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service becomes unviable commercially</li> </ul>	<p>New strategy implemented</p> <p>Promotion of the grant application process</p>	<p>April 2019</p> <p>Twice a year</p>	<p>Life Line</p> <p>Housing</p> <p>Lightbulb</p> <p>Community Partnerships</p>
Property management ■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are making the best use we can of Council property to deliver good returns</li> <li>We will invest where appropriate to put the Council on a strong financial footing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents</li> <li>Businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benefits turn out to be less than expected</li> </ul>	<p>Approve and implement the Property Strategy approved</p>	<p>June 2019 onwards</p>	<p>Finance Team</p> <p>Assets</p>
Budget/Funding: Budget consultation/ Council Tax ■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We've worked hard to freeze Council Tax for 2019/20</li> <li>We've listened and responded to your priorities</li> <li>We're finding more innovative and efficient ways to deliver services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents</li> <li>Businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Careful budget planning gets lost amid other precept rises by county/police etc</li> </ul>	<p>Undertake consultation 2020/21</p>	<p>March/ April 2019</p> <p>Preparation (Sept) consultation</p>	<p>Finance</p> <p>CMT</p>

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Activity	Key messages	External Audiences	Risks	Key actions	Timing	Responsibility
					(Jan20)	
Council induction ■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are delivering a programme of induction to new Councillors following the May 2019 District Elections to help you understand how the Council works and support you in serving your constituents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Councillors are unable to attend all sessions</li> </ul>	Prepare & deliver induction workshop	May / June 2019	Democratic Services CMT