

# Communications Strategy 2021-25



## Our vision and values

How Lancashire County Council communicates is key to realising our vision for Lancashire as the best place to live, work, visit and prosper.

Good quality internal and external communications brings our story to life. A coherent narrative and clear voice ensure that our people, elected members, stakeholders, customers, and the people of Lancashire understand our purpose and are part of our journey.

Underpinned by our values of supportive, innovative, respectful and collaborative, our communications strategy, planning and delivery contribute to the success of our organisation.

Ambition lies at the heart of this strategy – we want our communications to be the best so that our elected members, workforce, public and partners feel informed, engaged and involved in our work to drive forward the success of Lancashire.



## Our priorities

Effective communications requires a razor-sharp focus on our organisational priorities. Set by our Cabinet, everyone in Lancashire County Council has a part to play in their delivery. Supporting our corporate strategy, our corporate priorities 2021-2025 are:

- **Delivering better services**
- **Protecting our environment**
- **Supporting economic growth**
- **Caring for the vulnerable**

All communications activity we carry out, from a major campaign to a routine staff notice, must link back to one or more of these organisational priorities. They set our direction, define our purpose, and inform our delivery.

## Our objectives

The objectives define the role of communications in our operating environment, which is hugely complex – with 1.2 million residents we are accountable to, hundreds of thousands of people who access our services, an array of partnerships to support and the dynamics of the political environment to manage and demonstrate leadership to as the lead voice of our county.

The role of corporate communications is to lead the organisation in its communication priorities and ensure that the experience for the customer is straightforward and easy to navigate.

A fundamental role of communications is to cut through the complexity of an organisation providing a clear picture of where the council is going and what difference it is making.

The following objectives will help to achieve this:

- 1** We will **promote confidence** in Lancashire County Council as a **high-quality organisation**, focusing on our key priorities to help make **Lancashire the best place to live, work, visit and prosper**
- 2** We will use the **best communications tools** to **proactively and positively** tell the story of Lancashire County Council
- 3** We will respond **promptly, effectively and efficiently** to inquiries from the media, stakeholders and the people of Lancashire.
- 4** We will help ensure the council is **transparent** and able to be **held to account** through the provision of a range of information about its activities
- 5** We will support an **informed and engaged workforce** through the very best internal communications channels we have available
- 6** We will ensure our website and digital channels **enhance customer experience and service delivery**

The communications service will ensure it is proactive in improving its own knowledge and capability and continues to measure the effectiveness of the work being delivered.

# Our voice

**How we come across to our colleagues, stakeholders and the public is a critical component of Lancashire County Council's success.**

To drive forward the continuous improvement of how we interact with people, we have identified three characteristics of what we say and how we say it to ensure the organisation has a clear personality.

These characteristics, which were developed as part of a listening exercise with the public, are: **quality, straightforward** and **listening**. Here's what we mean by that:

## Quality

We should offer a great service whether it is fixing the roads, looking after older people or nurturing young people. Integral to this promise of quality is value for money. We shouldn't just look for the cheapest option at the most competitive rates. We should always spend Lancashire's money wisely while maintaining quality. We need to be progressive and always looking at the most effective way to do things.

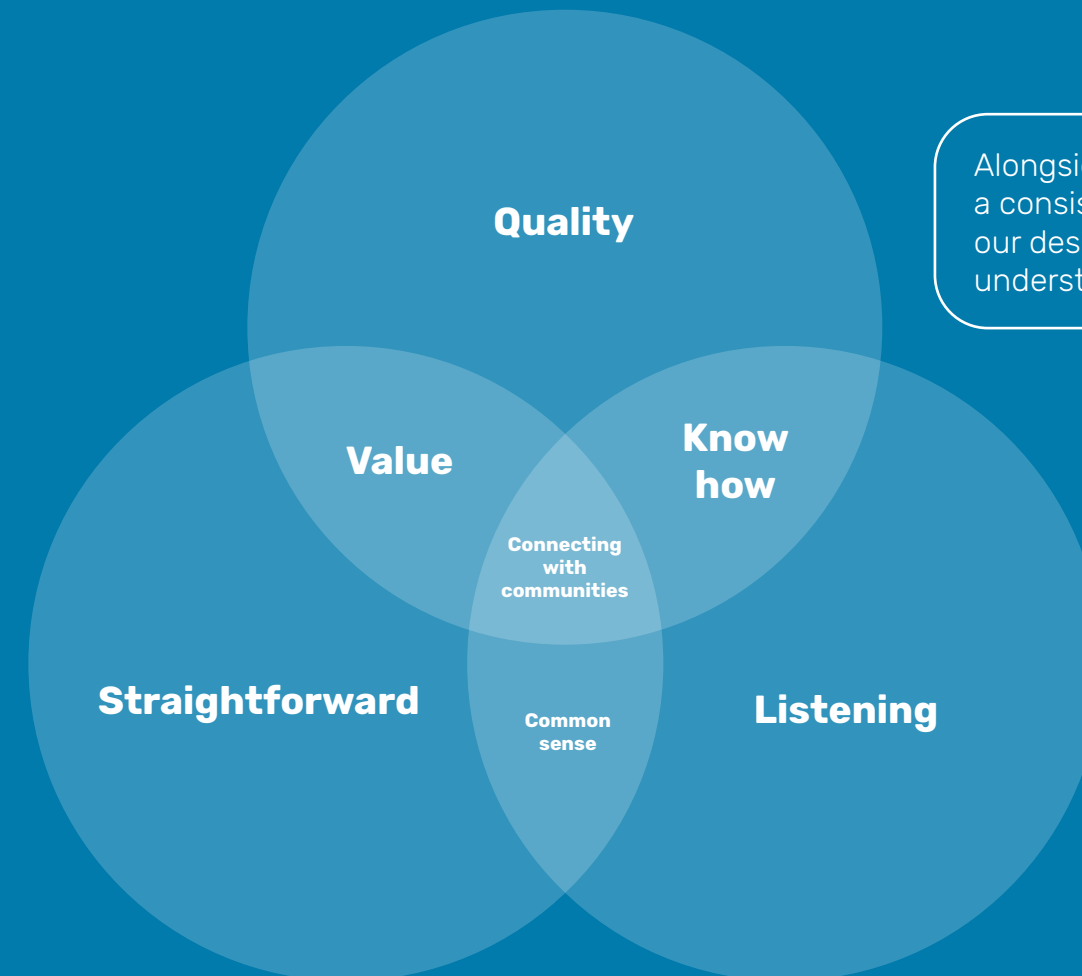
## Straightforward

We need to keep things simple and easy for our residents to understand. We should be straight talking and honest and we will let the public know in advance of any problems or changes affecting them and explain the reasons why. We will remove jargon and 'council' or 'report speak', cut through bureaucracy and communicate in a way that is easy and straightforward to understand.

## Listening

We should always be listening to what our residents say and want their feedback. We should be friendly and make every effort to help as far as possible. We are collaborative in our thinking and want to work with others to achieve the best results possible.

**These three characteristics interact with each other to create a voice that places our communities at its heart:**



Alongside this tone of voice, we will use a consistent visual identity and make our designed communications easy to understand, accessible and meaningful.

# Our audiences and stakeholders

We communicate with a wide range of people and partners who all have a different understanding of our role and work. It is important to segment our audiences in such a way as to ensure that we are getting the right messages to the right people at the right time in the right way. This will be different for every communications project we do, but is shaped with a high-level understanding of our who our stakeholders are.

Our core audience are our staff, elected members, residents and customers with others flowing from those flagship stakeholders:



## Our approach

Our approach to communications is based on where we can make the biggest difference and therefore all of our activity will be based on the following criteria:

- Is the service/issue in question a **strategic priority** for the county council?
- Can communications activity make a **positive and measurable difference** to the outcome?
- Is communications activity required to manage **significant reputational risks**?
- Is communications activity required to give out **important information**?

Those work areas that are less important to the council's priorities, or where communications input is unlikely to contribute significantly to achieving the outcome, will receive more limited support from the communications service by comparison to others, or potentially none at all. Larger projects that take additional planning time will need to be scheduled at an early stage to ensure capacity for delivery.



Projects that come with external funding and have communications or marketing requirements should firstly be agreed in advance with the team and come with additional budget to aid delivery if in-house capacity does not allow.

We will also produce a forward plan and rolling comms grid to ensure that we are plotting out our communications activity to ensure that we do not compete with ourselves.

The table below shows how we will go about this to engage with residents, staff and stakeholders so that we can ultimately change behaviours and make a difference.

## Engaging with Lancashire people

### What we want to achieve:

Ensure Lancashire people understand the services we deliver, the decisions we make and why, and can interact with us easily.

### How we will do this:

#### Media

- Our proactive and reactive media relations will explain in simple terms the decisions we have taken and why to ensure we are accountable and transparent.
- We will deliver a calendar of monthly proactive media stories to highlight to local and regional media the successful services we deliver and decisions we take.
- For general communications we will use a digital first approach to ensure that the bulk of our proactive communications get to the widest audience in the quickest time.
- We will work with targeted media on bespoke communications to generate high quality positive publicity.

#### Digital

- We will accelerate our use of rich content such as short videos to drive engagement on social media with all of our activities.
- We will continually review our websites to ensure customers can easily navigate and understand our information and that content is accurate, up to date and appropriate.
- We will work with the digital team to enhance the customer journey for web interfaces that require an end to end digital solution. We will prioritise this work based on return on investment and customer satisfaction.

#### Stakeholders

- We will work with services to ensure stakeholders are informed in a timely way if changes are being made and ensure the cascade of the message is well managed to ensure 'no surprises'.

#### Brand

- We will ensure our designed and printed resources are easy to understand, have a clear message and call to action. The brand identity and personality will be consistent and flow through our creative designs.



## Engaging with our elected members

### What we want to achieve:

Ensure our elected members, who represent our population and to whom we are democratically accountable, are kept informed about and engaged with our activities.

### How we will do this:

#### We will work closely with democratic services to:

- Share weekly key messages with councillors
- Produce a monthly bulletin for councillors featuring the latest news about Lancashire County Council

- Share our news releases with all members
- Host bite-sized briefings on key issues
- Follow all councillors' social media profiles on our official channels
- Promote an internal "Think Councillor" approach, to encourage staff to engage and communicate with councillors in their area of work.
- Encourage our councillors to be ambassadors for Lancashire County Council's work and activities.
- Carry out a full review of the C-First system and look at other mechanisms to improve information flow between members and the organisation

## Engaging with our staff

### What we want to achieve:

Ensure our staff are fully engaged, understand how their job fits into what the organisation is trying to achieve, know what is going on in the council, and feel listened to.

### How we will do this:

#### Internal Communications

- We will facilitate a weekly cascade of core brief messages to all staff.
- We will ensure the intranet is engaging using imagery and regular news content to promote corporate messages to help staff engender a clear sense of purpose.
- We will recognise the good work of staff through the staff shout-outs, news articles, blogs and the annual staff excellence awards to build positivity and celebrate success.
- We will ensure that senior staff have members are visible through a range of activity including blogs, Q&A sessions on major issues and annual staff listening sessions.
- We will aim to make sure our staff are the first to know of our decisions and not hear about it in the media first.

#### Brand

- We will promote good news stories of how colleagues have lived the values through their work.
- We will provide staff with tools to help them communicate well with their customers and promote and support the correct use of our brand.

#### Digital

- We will conduct a full review our intranet to continue to make improvements making it more accessible to more staff whilst at the same time making it easier to use.
- We will curate intranet content to ensure it remains accurate, current and useful to staff
- We will use webcasts and video to engage with staff in a more interactive way.

#### Media

- We will encourage colleagues to be ambassadors for the services they deliver and help tell the stories in the media of what they do day to day.
- We will work with colleagues to showcase their expertise and thinking on a national stage by working with specialist trade and technical journals to highlight progress and innovation.

## Engaging with our stakeholders

### What we want to achieve:

Ensure our local and national stakeholders see us as open, transparent and ambitious.

### How we will do this:

#### Strategic communications

- We will keep stakeholders regularly updated and ensure timely communications especially during times of change.
- We will focus our efforts on communicating with stakeholders around service changes to ensure 'no surprises' and we will listen to their feedback.

#### Marketing

- We will promote Lancashire as an area of growth, innovation and tourism, to encourage and support new businesses to locate and start up here.
- We will work closely with the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership and Marketing Lancashire to sell the county as a destination of choice for business and growth.
- We will work with our economic development team to run events to tell our economic growth story and enable face to face conversations with the business sector.

#### Media

- We will target trade and technical journals to promote our work on a national stage

#### Public affairs

- We will develop an advocacy strategy to help amplify Lancashire's voice in Westminster.
- Working with Corporate Management Team and Cabinet we will apply this strategy to help drive change for the benefits of Lancashire residents.



## Changing behaviours

### What we want to achieve:

Ensuring we can influence the behaviour of Lancashire people to help us collectively improve the county.

### How we will do this:

#### Strategic communications and marketing

- We will use evidence and insight to understand an issue before embarking on marketing campaigns.
- We will advise services and senior managers on the appropriate level of advertising spend to ensure 'we are famous for' our highest priority messages.
- We will use targeted communication channels appropriate to the audience and ensure value for money.
- We will work with services to help measure outcomes and measure return on investment.
- We will use real voices in all of our campaigns, including the authentic voices of service users, the credible voices of Lancashire people and the authoritative voices of our elected members.

#### Internal Communications

We will support our colleagues to be ambassadors for our campaigns.

#### Digital

- We will use digital solutions to make it easier for customers to interact with us.
- We will advise services on writing effective content for their online audience and oversee all major web content changes.
- We will use social media channels as an advertising route and be innovative with our approach.

#### Media

- We will identify media partnerships to help us campaign for change to get messages out to the right audiences at the right time.





## Our success

### We will measure success by:

- **Evaluating** all of our major campaigns
- **Monitoring and measuring** media coverage
- **Increasing** our social media following
- **Supporting** the annual staff survey and regular pulse surveys
- **Surveying** the media to ensure we are providing an effective service

