

Communications and engagement strategy



2024-2028

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1 Introduction

1.1 Why are good communications important?

Effective communication is at the heart of every successful organisation.

Successful engagement with communities, our employees, and other stakeholders begins with making useful information easy to obtain, use and respond to. But communication is more than one-way.

Understanding what the people of Orkney are saying, and having them understand us in return, helps us to guide Orkney Islands Council to prioritise the delivery of services and work with our local communities, our teams, and our partners.

Effective communication ensures that the right messages are received at the right time, by the right people and for the right reason.

1.2 What is the purpose of this strategy?

Whilst the Council has teams who support communications and engagement, by providing advice, support and guidance, effective communication is everybody's responsibility and everyone in the organisation has a role to play.

This strategy is designed to be a useful tool for Elected Members and council officers. It sets out a framework for our communication and engagement activities and outlines our strategic priorities; areas that we want to build on and improve.

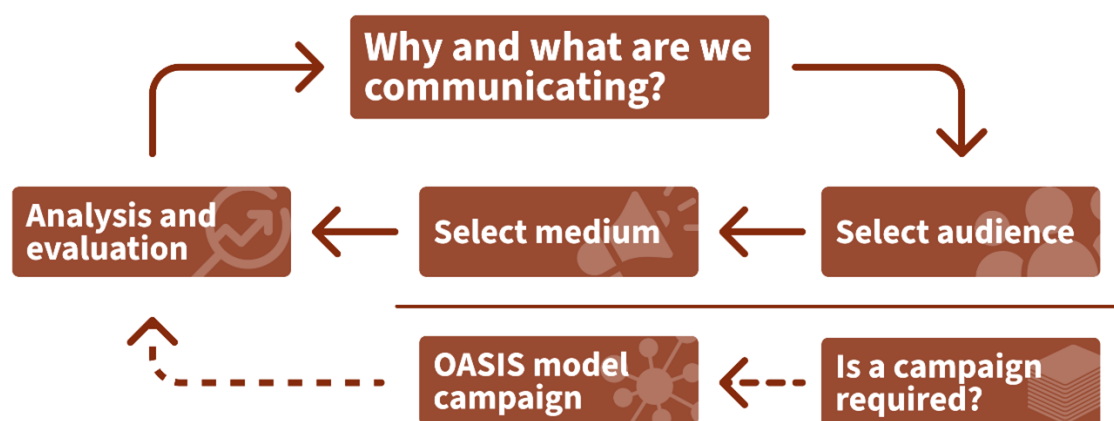


1.3 Strategy on a page

The aims of our communication and engagement activities are to:

- Keep employees and stakeholders well informed: raising awareness of the Council's priorities, activities and local government issues.
- Consult effectively with stakeholders to inform policy development and decision making.
- Maintain effective relationships with our communities, employees and the media to help us communicate our message to a wider audience.
- Co-ordinate our communications to support the Council in working together towards our shared ambitions and priorities in the Council Plan 2023-2028.

We have a standard model for our communications activities.



Objectives	Audience Insight	Strategy/Idea	Implementation	Scoring/Evaluation
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Our core activities are:

- Social media and digital engagement.
- National political engagement.
- Local democracy.
- Community consultation and engagement.
- Internal communications and employee engagement.
- Campaigns.
- Publications.
- Media relations.
- Civic events.
- Communications in a crisis.

The communications and engagement strategy identifies five strategic priorities:

Priority one Making the most of our digital platforms	2024 => 2026
Priority two Political engagement and democracy	2024 => 2025
Priority three Community consultation and engagement	2024 => 2026
Priority four Internal communication and engagement	2024 => 2026
Priority five Support for services and elected members	2024 => 2025

2 Strategic context

This strategy does not sit on its own. It supports delivery of the Council Plan 2023-2028, Directorate Delivery Plans, and general service delivery. The diagram below shows how this strategy fits into the wider strategic planning context of Orkney Islands Council.



3 Our approach

3.1 Our aims

The aims of our communication and engagement activities are to:

- Keep employees and stakeholders well informed: raising awareness of the Council's priorities, activities and local government issues.
- Consult effectively with stakeholders to inform policy development and decision making.
- Maintain effective relationships with our communities, employees and the media to help us communicate our message to a wider audience.
- Co-ordinate our communications to support the Council in working together towards our shared ambitions and priorities in the Council Plan 2023-2028.

3.2 Our values

It is important that we consider our communication and engagement activities in the context of our values.



People



Unity



Trust



Ownership



Creativity

Our key principles for communication and engagement are:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| People | The tone of our communications is warm, welcoming and we use plain, clear, and straightforward language. They tell stories which are about people and places, not plans and policies. |
| Unity | We communicate as one Council. We are inclusive in our approach and ensuring that we listen to everyone's voice. |
| Trust | Our communications are open, transparent, accessible, accurate and robust. |
| Ownership | We are accountable and responsive in our communications. |
| Creativity | We embrace different tools and approaches and adjust our methods to meet the needs of our communities and stakeholders. |

3.3 Our stakeholders

We have many stakeholders both locally and nationally. While there are too many to list here, we consider our stakeholders to include:

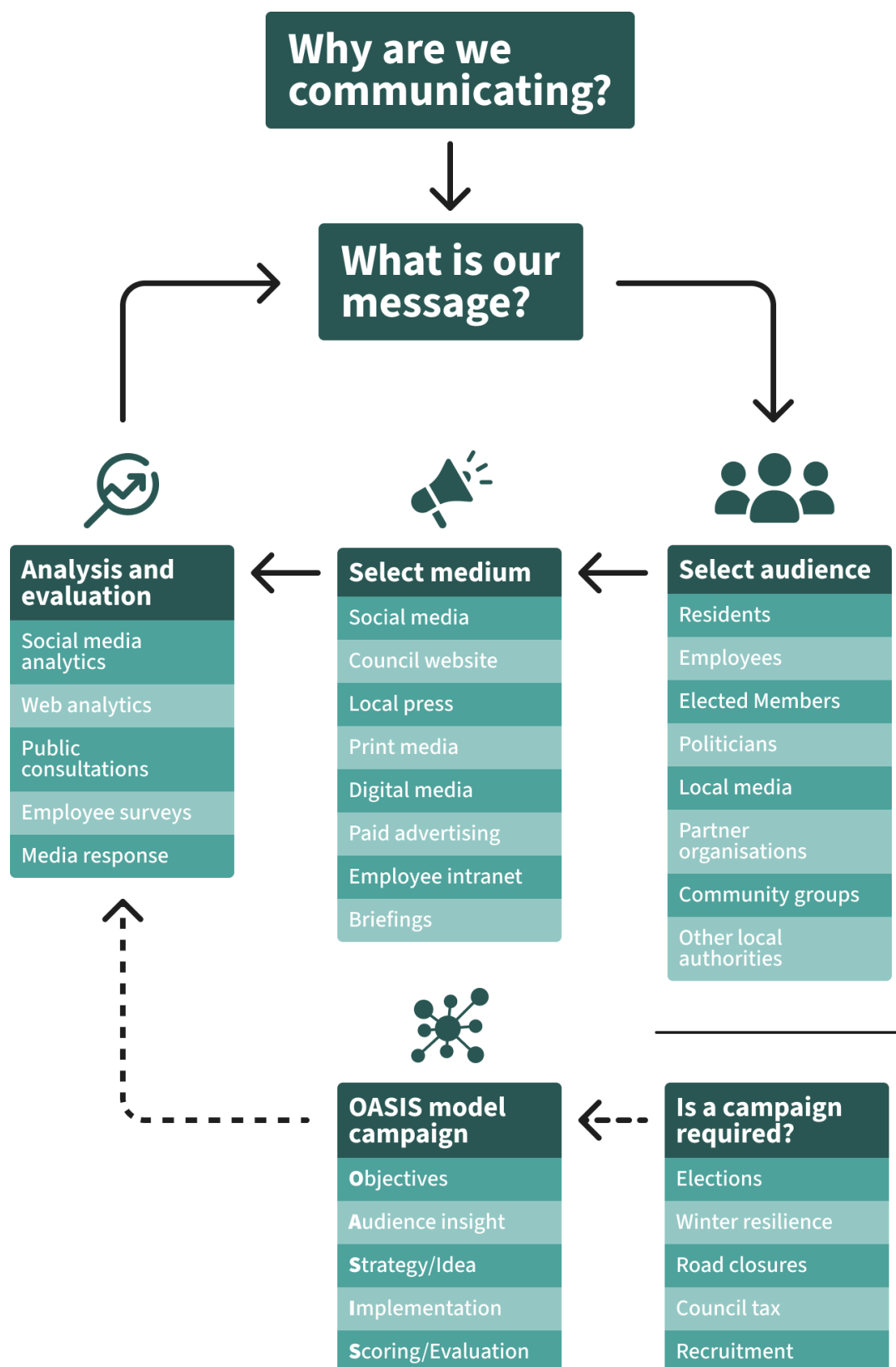
- Our local communities.
- Elected members.
- Our employees.
- People and organisations who use Council services.
- Local businesses and charitable organisations.
- Our community planning partners including:
 - NHS Orkney, Police Scotland, Voluntary Action Orkney, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Orkney Housing Association Limited.
- Community Councils.
- Academic institutions.
- Visitors to Orkney.
- UK and Scottish Governments.
- Local, regional and national media.

3.4 What we mean by engage, consult and inform

It is helpful to have a shared understanding of what we mean by engage, consult and inform as we use these terms within this strategy.

Engage working together	Working in partnership with relevant stakeholders and involving them in service development and the decision-making process.
Consult asking for views	Activities that are designed to listen to our stakeholders where we seek to understand the views, experiences, ideas and priorities of our communities. This is used to inform decision-making.
Inform providing information	Providing stakeholders with suitable details about our services, processes, policies, decisions, changes and other information that may affect them.

3.5 Our communications model

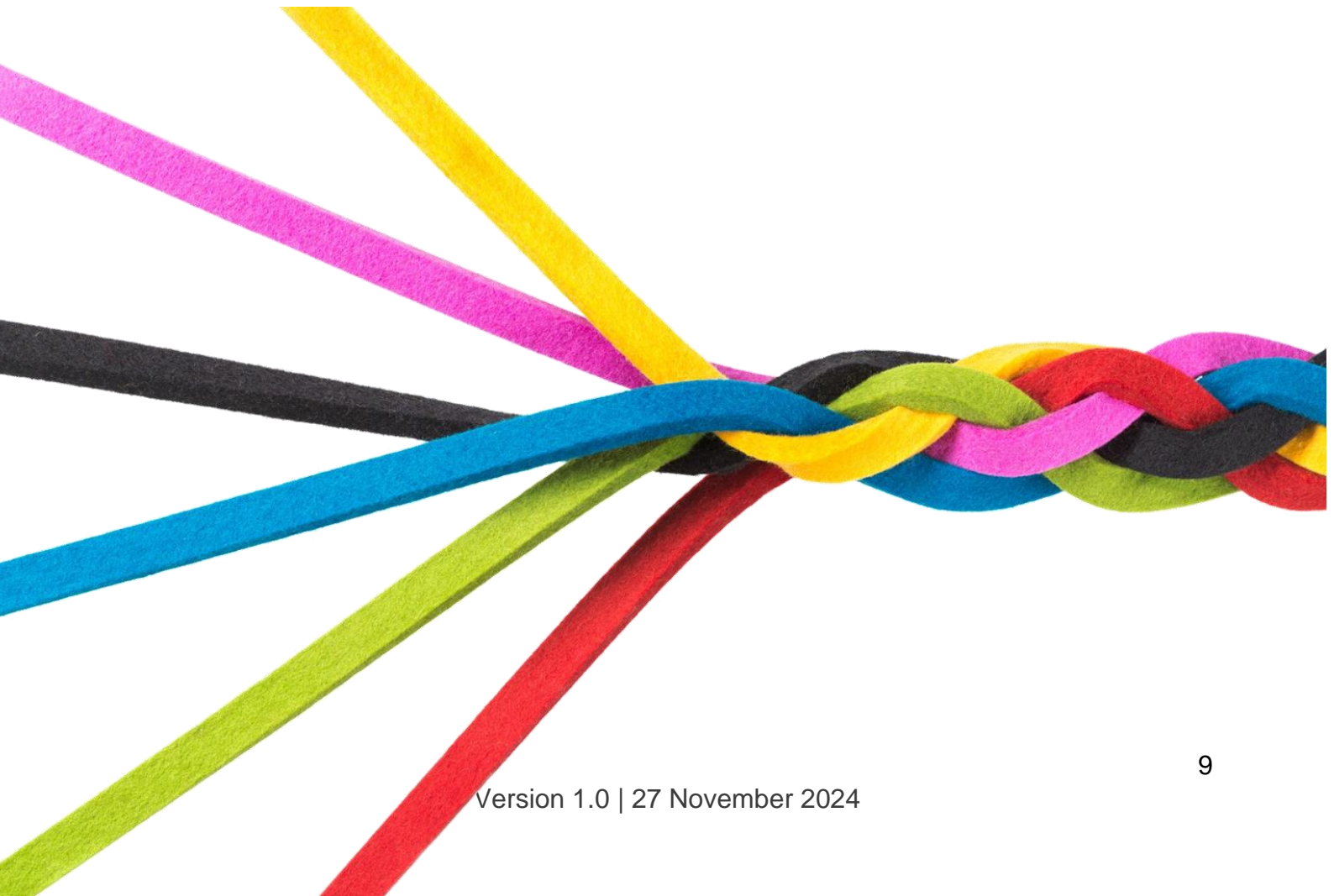


4 Our core activities

The Council provides a range of core communication and engagement activities. This section of the strategy highlights these core activities and identifies strategic priorities for improvement which are detailed further in section 5.

Our core activities are:

Social media and digital engagement.	National political engagement.	Local democracy.	Community consultation and engagement.
Internal communications and employee engagement.	Campaigns.	Publications.	Media relations.
	Civic events.	Communications in a crisis.	



4.1 Social media and digital engagement



Social media is by its nature about communication and rapid information sharing. Social media is fuelling our service users' expectations around the immediacy of information and their ability to interact directly with the Council.

One of the biggest challenges is knowing which channels the public prefer and to communicate and deliver services to them through that channel of choice.

Beyond just acting to share and access information, social media enables the public to communicate with us, spread information within the community, organise civic action and state their views and needs. It allows us to increase transparency in how we interact with them and correct any misunderstandings or misinformation in a timely manner.

The Council operates social media platforms: primarily Facebook, which has a high number of users. Orkney Islands Council has the highest number of Facebook followers per head of population of all 32 Scotland's local authorities. The Orkney Library and Archive Facebook page is particularly well known and has a worldwide following.



In addition to social media a significant number of people living in Orkney will access the Council's website on a regular basis to find out more about Council services, pay bills or read the latest Council news. The Council website is an important tool in communicating and engaging with the public.

As we continue to develop our website the aim is to have greater functionality, for it to be easier to navigate, with more up to date relevant information and to investigate new tools like live chat.



Video content is everywhere in our lives. Social media videos create far more engagement than any other type of media content, meaning they are also more likely to be seen by more people than a non-video post. Video creates the opportunity to present an organisation in a more human way. Alongside photos

and traditional text, videos let the audience see the faces and hear the voice of organisational leaders, as if they were in the room talking with them, explaining why key decisions have been made.

Development of digital platforms is an important priority within this strategy.

Strategic priority one | making the most of our digital platforms | section 5.1.

4.2 National political engagement



With local authority finances under immense strain due to the cost-of-living crisis and other factors, it is more important than ever to be able to successfully lobby the Scottish and UK Governments and work with national bodies like the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to ensure that vital projects can be achieved.

Lobbying efforts are undertaken by the Council's political leadership directly with Ministers, while some lobbying campaigns can be planned internally or outsourced to external companies.

Political engagement takes a co-ordinated approach, supporting the priorities of the Council Plan, and bringing in the voices of communities in Orkney to underline our message and the benefits success would bring to our people. This is underpinned by our political engagement strategy, which will be kept up to date, so it remains effective in a changing political landscape.

Strategic priority two | political engagement and democracy | section 5.5.

4.3 Local democracy



Strong local democracy is a critical part of decision-making in Orkney. Orkney has an engaged group of 21 Councillors who speak for the communities they represent across the six electoral wards, including around 19 inhabited islands depending on the time of year.

It is important that the public are kept up to date with the work of the Council, ensuring they understand how the Council works. Transparency is vital and the public should be able to understand how and why decisions have been made and what these decisions mean for people's lives. Audio-casting of Council meetings is one method we use to provide transparency of our decision-making process.

There are 20 active Community Councils, representing local views which can influence decisions in planning and the provision of local services. Despite the importance of the work of Community Councils, there are still many people in Orkney who do not know what a Community Council is and the benefits of being engaged with them. It is a priority of this strategy to communicate to the public what Community Councils are, why they are important and what the benefits are of becoming involved in one.

Strategic priority two | political engagement and democracy | section 5.5.

4.4 Community consultation and engagement



Consulting and engaging with our communities is at the heart of this strategy. Ensuring that people are involved and informed in the work of the Council is essential in planning, prioritising and improving Council services and to improving our reputation.

We have adopted guidelines and good practice developed by The Orkney Partnership. These are available [here](#).

We need to consider more modern methods of consultation. Whilst face to face consultation has many benefits and is considered the best method of engagement in many cases, our rural and dispersed nature requires us to consider digital platforms too.

We need to improve the way we provide final feedback on the outcome of our consultation and engagement exercises. Taking a “We asked ... you said ... we did” approach will provide clear messages about the Council’s consultation process and how local people’s views will be taken and used to inform decision-making. This helps to manage expectations of local people where there is support for a particular course of action that will not be taken forward.

Each part of Orkney, particularly its individual islands, has their own identity and needs, and best methods of communication and engagement. We must pay attention to Orkney’s communities taking into account protected characteristics, and those people who are typically lesser heard, and ensure these groups are not overlooked in our engagement. We must recognise one approach may not be best suited to reaching everyone.

Further development of our consultation and engagement approaches is a strategic priority within this strategy.

Strategic priority three | community consultation and engagement | section 5.3.

4.5 Internal communications and employee engagement



Our employees are our most valuable asset. It is through our people that we deliver services and build relationships with our communities. We are all ambassadors for the Council, helping our communities to understand what the Council does, why it does it and to carry messages back to help shape services in the future.

There is a direct link between levels of employee satisfaction and advocacy. The more satisfied our teams are, the more likely they are to be an ambassador for the Council. Good communication and engagement is an important part of achieving this.

Communicating and engaging with employees is a lot more than informing them of the latest Council initiative or corporate policy, it’s about genuinely engaging with the people in our organisation, so they feel and know that their voice makes a difference, and their opinions and suggestions are valued. Our leaders, at all levels, have a critical role in achieving this.

The Council achieved Investors in People in January 2023 and will continue to build on that success. Our Values in Practice employee recognition scheme helps us to recognise and celebrate the contribution individuals and teams make and helps employees to ‘live’ our values. We continue to listen to our teams including through employee surveys and engagement events.

We want to demonstrate a clear, strategic approach to delivering effective internal communications and engagement, with a view to ensuring that all employees understand the priorities of the Council and that they feel valued and able to contribute to major changes affecting the services that they provide.

Delivering improved internal communication and engagement is a key strategic priority in this strategy.

Strategic priority four | internal communications and engagement | section 5.4.

4.6 Campaigns



Campaigns are a planned series of communications activities on a specific issue or theme across channels. These campaigns aim to help local people learn more about, or actively take part in, services and events across the Council, such as the opening of a new facility or to encourage people to take part in a survey. Campaigns can also lead to behaviour change, for example an increase in household recycling.

It is important that a planned approach is taken. The UK Government’s campaign planning framework is a core tool for this and further details can be found [here](#). Improving the use of this model and our campaign planning approach is a priority for development within this strategy.

Strategic priority five | support for services | section 5.5.

4.7 Publications



The Council creates many publications throughout the year to inform the public and stakeholders on key issues, events and deadlines. These can be online documents, printed physical copies, or both. These include items such as strategies, plans, annual reports and leaflets.

Our aim is that our communities find the information contained within our publications interesting and engaging, up to date and relevant to them, helps them to access services and informs them of the work of the Council.

Strategic priority five | support for services | section 5.5.

4.8 Media relations



Over the last 10 years the news landscape has changed dramatically. With the increase in digital communications and ‘citizen journalism’ much more emphasis is placed now on the speed of responses. Expectation has also increased that organisations should provide more than just press releases; with the drive towards ‘digital first’ it is expected that organisations should be providing much more imagery, video and other interesting online content.

Our local media are very active and an intrinsic part of our community. Their scrutiny of the Council is a valuable tool in communicating with our communities. An effective and trusting relationship between the Council and the local media can allow both these aspects to exist alongside each other.

All interactions with the media, both proactive and reactive, are co-ordinated through the Communications Team.

We aim to strengthen relationships with the media through improved processes around the identification of good news stories, the availability of engaging digital content and better understanding of the media and their requirements across the Council.

4.9 Civic events



The Council organises and participates in civic events throughout the year as part of maintaining our local heritage and culture. From regular fixtures like the annual Tree Lighting Ceremony and Norwegian Constitution Day, as part of our twinning arrangements with Vestland county in Norway, to ministerial or ambassador visits. Our twinning arrangements support our important Nordic cultural links.

4.10 Communications in a crisis



As part of its duty under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Council has a responsibility to communicate with the public prior to, in the event of, and during the recovery from, an emergency.

The Council has shown its commitment to good communications in a crisis in recent times, for example during adverse weather events or the Covid pandemic. During these events the Council demonstrated its ability to provide the public with advice, support and reassurance.

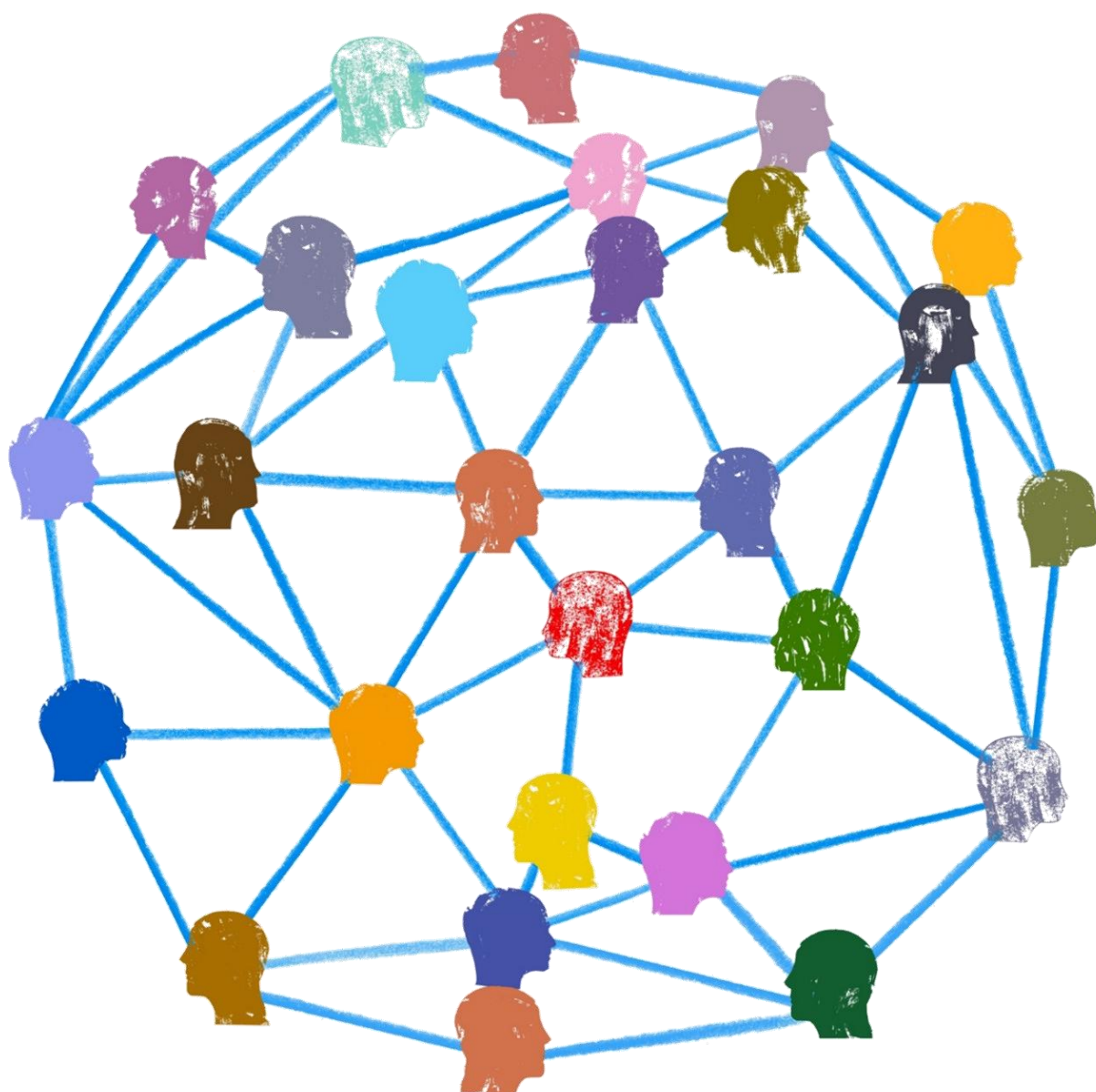
The Council is not complacent in its duty and we are always looking to reflect upon and improve our approach to communicating in a crisis.

5 Strategic priorities

This strategy identifies the priorities that will be delivered over its term. This section outlines these priorities and some of the high-level actions that will be taken. Delivery plans will be developed for each strategic priority where these are not already in place. The delivery plans will include further details on the performance measures we will use to measure success and will include baseline data and targets.

Several priorities have been outlined in the [Strategy, Performance and Business Solutions Directorate Delivery Plan](#).

- SPBS 10 | community consultation and engagement [page 15].
- SPBS 11 | external communication [page 15].
- SPBS 12 | internal communications [page 16].
- SPBS 13 | Council publication scheme [page 16].



5.1 Making the most of our digital platforms

Strategic priority one | desired outcome



Our digital platforms are suitable and used effectively to support the priorities of the Council. They provide clear, engaging and accessible information which the public trust, respect and have confidence in.

What we want to achieve

Supporting outcomes	What does success look like
Our website will have improved usability and structure with easy to find information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased website usage. Improved feedback on usability.
We have a co-ordinated and effective approach to the use of social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased social media audience. Increased social media engagement. Clearly defined channel usage.
We have more engagement with our platforms and the media through the increased use of video.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased website usage. Increased social media engagement.
Our publications are up to date, are well structured on the Council website and meet accessibility and inclusive communication standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Council publications are easy to find. Publications reach a wider audience.

How will we do this

- Review and improve the structure, usability and accessibility of the Council website.
- Review the use of social media channels and identify and deliver areas of improvement including the creation of a social media protocol.
- Increase the use of videos in social media and press releases.
- Improve the structure for publications on the Council website and establish a protocol for the uploading of finalised publications to the relevant section.

Measuring success

We will measure:

- The levels of usage and engagement for our digital platforms.
- The public's satisfaction with our digital communications.

Who will do this and by when

This priority is owned by the Service Manager (Democratic Services and Communications) and will be delivered by the Communications team.

Timescale: staged delivery 2024 => 2026.

5.2 Political engagement and democracy

Strategic priority two | desired outcome



People in Orkney understand local democracy and hear the voices of those involved in it, both Elected Members and Community Councils. Our voice influences national government through effective lobbying.

What we want to achieve

Supporting outcomes	What does success look like
The public hear the voice of Elected Members as the Council's decision makers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Elected Members are visible in the media as the Council's decision makers, including for budget setting.
We have focused and co-ordinated lobbying with clear messaging on the issues affecting Orkney.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orkney influences decision-making by national government. Orkney continues to influence national policy development.
Communities in Orkney support our Community Councils and understand their vital role in local democracy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public understand the role of Community Councils and what is delivered for their communities. More interest in Community Council involvement as Members or Clerks.

How will we do this

Support Councillors to speak with the media as the Council's decision makers.
Update and effectively implement our political engagement strategy.
Develop a communications campaign to promote the work of Community Councils.

Measuring success

We will measure:

- Level of Elected Member engagement with the media.
- Number of people standing for Community Councils and number of Clerk applications.

Who will do this and by when

Work streams in this priority will be owned by:

- Voice of Elected Members | Service Manager (Democratic Services and Communications)
- Political engagement | Service Manager (Strategy and Partnership)
- Community Councils | Service Manager (Democratic Services and Communications)

Timescale: staged delivery 2024 => 2025.

5.3 Community consultation and engagement

Strategic priority three | intended outcome



Our community consultation and engagement practices are effective and clearly influence decisions and improvement.

What we want to achieve

Supporting outcomes	What does success look like
Improved capacity, updated channels and better co-ordination within the Council, and The Orkney Partnership for community consultation and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More options for Council service teams to consult and engage with the public. • A better experience for stakeholders. • Improved public engagement.
It is clear that input from the Orkney public feeds into Council decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better-informed decision-making because of increased public input.
A sustainable model for community consultation and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established support for ongoing delivery of consultation and engagement.

How will we do this

Develop a modernised suite of tools and protocols.
Stage one <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online community engagement platform. • Orkney Matters. • Engagement with young people. • Typically lesser heard voices.
Stage two <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orkney opinions. • Participatory Budgeting / Democracy. • Joint Strategy for community consultation and engagement with the public.

Measuring success

We will measure:

- The public's awareness and trust in the process.
- Participation from under-represented groups.

Who will do this and by when

This priority is owned by the Head of Improvement and Performance and led by the Service Manager (Strategy and Partnership).

Timescale: staged delivery 2024 => 2026.

5.4 Internal communication and engagement

Strategic priority four | desired outcome



Employees and elected members are informed and engaged by high quality internal communication and engagement which they trust, respect and have confidence in.

What we want to achieve

Supporting outcomes	What does success look like
We have a co-ordinated and effective approach to internal communications and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our employees and elected members feel informed and listened to. • Regular updates across the Council. • Clearly defined communications and engagement channels and protocols.
Leaders at all levels across the Council communicate and engage with their teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers are clear on their role in communicating and engaging with their teams.
Our employees can find information, internal resources, and news when they need them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal resources, including templates, are easy find. • Publications reach a wider audience.

How will we do this

- Clearly define our internal communications and engagement channels.
- Develop a protocol, related processes and clear guidance for leaders and managers which includes appropriate governance.
- Using the protocols to embed regular communications and engagement activities.
- Development of our resources, template, staff hub and intranet.
- Improve the use of Elected Member briefings and seminars.

Measuring success

We will measure:

- Employee satisfaction generally and satisfaction with our internal communications and engagement activities.

Who will do this and by when

This priority is owned by the Head of Improvement and Performance and will be delivered by a multi-service working group. The working group will include representatives from:

- Democratic Services and Communications.
- Organisational Development.
- Customer Services and Corporate Administration.

Timescale: staged delivery 2024 => 2026.

5.5 Support for services and elected members

Strategic priority five | desired outcome



Council services and elected members are supported with their external communications and engagement activities, clearly understand our processes, and have access to the resources when they are needed.

What we want to achieve

Supporting outcomes	What does success look like
Communications are co-ordinated providing the public, and other stakeholders, with clear messaging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a clear approach for proactive and reactive communications. • Clear messaging for stakeholders.
Communication campaigns are planned and structured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate use of our campaign planning approach. • A schedule of campaigns available across the organisation.
Publications and communications content have a consistent style and branding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding of corporate branding across the Council. • Consistent and appropriate use of the Council logo by partner organisations.
Council services have access to an image library which supports the production of publications and communications content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a self-service library of approved images available to Council services.

How will we do this

- Develop a communications protocol.
- Develop and provide communications training for officers and elected members.
- Embed our campaign approach and develop a corporate campaign schedule which is available across the business.
- Refresh and embed our corporate branding guide and templates.
- Create an image library which are rights free and have the required consents.

Measuring success

We will measure:

- Service satisfaction in the support available.
- The public's satisfaction with our communications activities.

Who will do this and by when

This priority is owned by the Service Manager (Democratic Services and Communications) and delivered by the Communications team.

Timescale: staged delivery 2024 => 2025.

6 Version control

Version	Status	Date	Amended by	Reason / overview
0.0.A	Draft	19 April 2024	AJR	First draft for initial review.
0.0.B	Draft	02 May 2024	AJR	Second draft for Strategy, Performance and Business Solutions review and input.
0.0.C	Draft	01 October 2024	AJR	Third draft for Extended Corporate Leadership Team review and input.
0.0.D	Draft	23 October 2024	AJR	Fourth draft for Communications and Engagement Consultative Group and Corporate Leadership Team review and input.
0.0.E	Draft	14 November 2024	AJR	Draft for presentation at Policy and Resources Committee.
1.0	Live	27 November 2024	AJR	Updated as approved at Policy and Resources Committee.