

# City of York Council

## Communications and Engagement Strategy 2025-2027

### 1. Introduction

City of York Council is committed to delivering clear, transparent, and engaging communication that align with its four core commitments set out in the Council Plan, 2023-2027, One City for All:

- Equalities and Human Rights
- Affordability
- Climate
- Health

This strategy outlines how the council will communicate effectively with residents, businesses, partners, community groups and stakeholders to support its core commitments, corporate priorities and ensure inclusivity, accessibility, and trust. It sets out how we embed principles of engagement into the corporate communications service and how we use communications to support the organisation's workforce priorities.

### 2. Vision and ambition

By 2027 we want the council's communications and engagement function to be seen as good practice nationally, and to be trusted locally by residents, business, key partners and the workforce. To do this we need to continue the focus on storytelling and audience insight to drive our proactive work, directly linked to the delivery of the council's strategic ambitions.

### 3. The role of the communications service within the council

Meaningful communication and engagement is central to the work of the council. It supports the following.

- **Policy development** by giving people opportunities to contribute and for the council to listen, act and learn.
- **Delivery of services** by ensuring people have the information they need about how to access services.
- **Community cohesion and our civic society** by helping to build trust and positive relationships with residents, businesses, partners and stakeholders.

- **Long-term ambitions for the city** through an effective story of our place as somewhere to invest, work and live.
- **Support behaviour change** – to prompt residents or businesses to think or act differently to support the long-term goals of the city, as set out in the council plan and city-wide long-term strategy.
- **Innovation, productivity and long-term transformation** through strategic workforce communications, helping the organisation to continue to meet its financial challenges. This also supports our external communications by creating advocates for external messages from within our own workforce. Over 70% of colleagues live within the city.

#### 4. Public service communications standards

The way we approach our communications and engagement should be driven by industry standards for government communications. This means we should use Government Communication Service (GCS) frameworks for campaign planning, evaluation and to support behaviour change. A programme of supporting training and learning for the team, based on these standards, will be delivered during the period of this strategy.

- [OASIS campaign planning framework](#) (objectives, audience insight, strategy, implementation, scoring)
- [GCS evaluation life cycle](#) (measuring of outputs, outtakes and outcomes)
- [EAST behaviour change framework](#) (easy, attractive, social and timely communications)

To deliver effective engagement campaigns, the council will follow the [LGA Future Conversations model](#). This encourages a two-way conversation with different audience groups to shape services that respond to residents' needs.

The communications and engagement function will support the wider corporate objective around our proposed neighbourhood model (due for consideration in autumn 2025). For example, the communications and communities teams should work in partnership to understand key advocates and ways of engaging within individual communities.

#### 5. A consistent approach to our council's brand

Over recent years, the council has developed different logos or brands for individual services or partnerships. This makes it difficult for residents to know what the council is responsible for, and what it isn't. The approach doesn't support public understanding of the range of services and support delivered by the council.

It risks proactive and innovative work being seen as separate from the council, whilst leaving core activities – such as the payment of council tax – with the authority's brand.

City of York Council should aim to build a clear, consistent and recognisable visual identity across all the services it delivers, in line with best practice seen by organisations such as the NHS and Transport for London.

There may be exceptions, however. For services that operate within an environment where there is commercial competition, a strong identity outside the core council brand is an important part of the business model. This includes services such as fostering and registrars.

As a general rule, however, we will avoid creating any new separate logos or brands for services run directly by City of York Council. For key partnerships we may wish to consider a joint visual identity. This will be a decision of the head of communications and engagement, in discussion with the relevant head of service or director.

During the period of this plan we will refresh the council's style guide – with an emphasis of accessibility – with the aim of starting the process of a roll-out of updated guidance throughout the organisation.

## **6. A consistent approach to our tone of voice**

In our public-facing communications and engagement we should have due regard for the council's existing managing customer relations policy. This sets out how we will be respectful, friendly, honest and responsive. This includes when responding to social media posts, even those that can be challenging or confrontational.

In council-owned communication channels – including our social media and e-newsletters - we should strive for a plain English approach:

- Writing for nine-year olds (as per gov.uk guidance).
- Talking 'to' people, not 'about' people.
- One thought, one sentence.
- Confident in what we're saying.

## 7. What we need to deliver: supporting council objectives

During the period of this plan, the corporate story should focus on the key narratives that bring together the council plan priorities and areas of focus. We will group these together as follows.

For each, we will develop an over-arching core narrative. This core narrative will be supported by a range of case studies demonstrating the impact of the things we're doing with our people, places, community groups, businesses, and partners, together with how we operate. These should be human-interest led where possible, focusing on the impacts of our actions in our communities.

Within these communications, we should be clear as to why the action or decision has taken place – ultimately linked to the council supporting a more affordable, sustainable, accessible and healthier place.

<b>Core narrative theme – i.e. a single coherent story about...</b>	<b>Core commitments to reference</b>	<b>Council plan delivery priorities</b>	<b>Key work to be included in human interest case studies</b>
Neighbourhoods	Equalities Affordability Health	Ensure every primary school child gets a free school meal  New team of Neighbourhood Caretakers  Build 100% affordable housing on council-owned land	Fostering  Adoption  York Hungry Minds  Neighbourhood Caretakers  £500k investment in parks and open spaces  Delivery of key front-line services such as street cleaning, road maintenance.

			Affordable homes
Transport and growth	Equalities Affordability Climate Health	Bring well-paid jobs to York  Accessible and sustainable city	Healthy places engagement  Local Transport Strategy  Bus Service Improvement plan  Station Gateway  Reimagining York Streets  Movement and Place schemes
Net zero ambition, health and housing	Climate Health	Pledge: insulate 1000s of homes to cut bills and reduce carbon	Public health  Ousewem  Climate priority delivery plan outcomes

## 8. How we need to deliver: moving to a strategic model of communications

In delivering this work we should think of communications as a strategic support to the work of the council, rather than more traditional models of communications and engagement. These principles are set out here.

Traditional communications	Strategic communications
Reactive	Planned
Information	Narrative
Elite	Grounded
One dimensional	Audience specific

Tactical	Coordinated
Broadcast	Relationship building
Brand anarchy	Brand discipline
Repetitive	Consistent
Siloed	Corporate
Press focus	Multi-platform
Linear	Evaluating, changing, improving
Unresponsive to feedback	Listening and learning

To achieve this, for the period 2025-27 the communications and engagement service will focus on three core strategic objectives as our first priorities.

### **Priority one – enhancing engagement**

<b>What we're aiming for</b>	<b>Actions we'll take to get there</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Ensure residents feel heard and valued in service and policy development and the democratic decision-making process and involved in shaping the city's future.	<p>A map of seldom-heard voices to broaden inclusive engagement, linked to the council's proposed integrated neighbourhood model.</p> <p>A tiered (gold, silver, bronze) approach for engagement consultations.</p> <p>Mapping digital advocates to support online community 'trusted voices'.</p>	<p>Ensure at least 80% of identified seldom heard voice groups engaged, as relevant to individual pieces of work.</p> <p>Identify at least 15 key digital advocates across the city and secure increased online audience reach compared to 2024-25 baseline.</p>

### **Priority two – harness partner commitment to the city to support effective and accessible communications and engagement**

<b>What we're aiming for</b>	<b>Actions we'll take to get there</b>	<b>Measure</b>
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<p>Ensure the council's story is part of wider city narratives.</p> <p>Maximise engagement through an effective network of trusted voices in our community.</p> <p>The council leads the way in joined-up public service communications in the city.</p>	<p>Make strategic use of the existing York heads of communication group, to support city-wide communications and engagement work.</p> <p>Ensure workforce communications supports our colleagues being able to advocate for the council and the city.</p> <p>Deliver on emergency planning priorities.</p>	<p>Convene regular heads of comms meetings with a view to developing city-wide narrative and case studies linked to this.</p> <p>Test x2 emergency planning exercises annually.</p>
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### **Priority three - strategic use of the channels the council has direct control over**

<b>What we're aiming for</b>	<b>Actions we'll take to get there</b>	<b>Measure</b>
<p>Focusing on telling stories from a residents' and businesses' perspective where possible, with real people explaining the impact or benefit of actions taken in their own lives.</p> <p>Prioritising video content for digital channels where possible, as we know this maximises engagement.</p>	<p>Channel mapping, to focus our resources on the channels that have the largest audience reach.</p> <p>Make more use of online and community advocates, expanding messaging reach.</p> <p>A workforce communications approach that directly supports the delivery of the council's workforce plan and transformation ambitions.</p>	<p>Update channels for different types of activity and align 100% of communications activity to the relevant channels.</p> <p>Identify at least 20 community advocates to support an ongoing uplift in engagement rates against the 2024-25 baseline.</p>

## 9. When we need to deliver: implementation plan

This is a two-year plan. As such, the delivery of the work above will be structured as follows. We will share outcomes and key performance metrics through regular feedback to senior officers and the council's Executive. This helps to build a culture of continuous learning and development. It's also supported by the introduction of a structured learning and development programme within the team.

### Our 2025-26 team priorities

Strategic objective	Focus of work	What success looks like
Engagement  Partnerships	<b>Effective communication partnerships (stage 1)</b>	Create working arrangements that facilitate effective day-to-day partnership working within comms to deal with emerging issues and emergency planning.  Build strong working relationship with city partners, via heads of comms group, and build workplan that has mutual benefit for all partners' communications activity.
Engagement  Partnerships  Owned channels	<b>Updated digital communications approach</b>	Channel mapping work to understand audiences and the best routes to engage.  Make best possible use of advocates in online spaces.  Primarily focus on video or image



		content as this drives biggest engagement.
Engagement  Owned channels	<b>Effective direct resident and media engagement</b>	<p>Review media protocols to ensure this still reflects the needs of the organisation, the team and the media.</p> <p>A focus on story telling.</p> <p>Structured engagement with key media and community contacts, to support long-term relationship building.</p> <p>Develop a coordinated content plan for e-newsletters.</p> <p>Updated brand guidelines to link with section 5, above.</p>

### Our 2026-27 team priorities

<b>Strategic objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Ambition</b>
Engagement  Partnerships	Effective communication partnerships (stage 2)	Lead on the creation of a multi-agency joint communication strategy around the ten-year city strategy priorities.
Engagement  Partnerships  Owned channels	<b>Applying consistent standards to community engagement</b>	Develop an effective map of 'seldom heard voices' for the city, in partnership with Communities team.

		<p>Create a tiered approach to council consultations to make best use of resources.</p> <p>Channel mapping to give proper analysis of audience engagement with owned and paid for media.</p> <p>Working with others, create a map of digital advocates and trusted voices based on geographic, demographic or special interest issues.</p>
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## 10. **Evaluation and continuous improvement**

- Apply Government Communication Service (GCS) evaluation cycle principles across campaigns.
- Work closely with services to establish final outcome measures, incorporating outtakes and outputs as core evaluation principles.
- Explore sentiment analysis tools for improved assessment of communication effectiveness.
- Link team targets, training, learning and development to the strategic communications plan.

## 11. **Conclusion**

This strategy positions City of York Council to deliver impactful, transparent, and resident-centred communication and engagement that aligns with key council priorities. Through strengthened partnerships, effective engagement, and structured workforce communications, this plan will enable the service to deliver an effective long-term approach for

how to use communications and engagement to support the delivery of core services and long-term ambitions for the council.

We want City of York Council communications to be seen as an example of industry best practice. This helps to raise the profile of the organisation within the local and regional government sector and with national government. This will directly support recruitment and retention of the best talent across the organisation, helping us to further improve for the people and the city we serve.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A – a note of channel mapping

We will segment our audiences to improve targeting and relevance. This may include:

- Core engaged residents - active users of digital channels and newsletters
- Passive recipients - broadly informed but less likely to act
- Seldom-heard voices - including marginalised or underrepresented groups
- Strategic stakeholders - key partners, delivery partners, and policy influencers

Channel mapping work is underway to align audience groups with the most effective ways to reach them. The initial framework, supported by baseline recommendations, a storytelling guide and a draft channel-audience matrix, will provide a foundation for a more consistent and targeted communication across the organisation.

Development will continue on:

- Refining the channel-audience matrix, including ownership and guidance for use across the organisation
- Embedding storytelling and template tools across the organisation
- Defining frequency and balance of communication types.

This approach will support a more systematic use of channels while leaving space for ongoing refinement and adaptation.

## **Appendix B – a note on service risks**

Service risks have been reviewed as part of the development of this plan. A separate risk document is held by the service, to be reviewed every six months.

At the time of writing, the risks are organised into themes around the following.

- Systems and processes
- Resources and 'single points of failure'
- Financial
- External factors

These will be updated during each review point.

Some examples of actions taken in response to the latest service risk review include the following.

- An updated approach to social media management, with a single team member to act as the social media lead each week.
- A thorough review of access to our systems and accounts, with the removal of any individuals not directly linked to the team or specific campaign activities.
- All account passwords have been updated (August 2025)

## **Appendix C – newsdesk and media protocol**

### **City of York Council Media protocol, October 2019; updated for current political arrangements September 2025**

Amendments in the version below relate only to references to the previous political arrangements in 2019. These changes are highlighted.

#### **Introduction**

The Local Government Act places tight restrictions on what and who the council can legally publicise. This particularly applies to information about the activities of individual councillors, where the council is required by law to avoid any implication that it is spending public money on promoting a single political party or individual. The rules and legal restrictions governing official council publicity are many, complex and difficult to understand. Therefore, this protocol seeks to provide a more straightforward guide on the key aspects of the rules and how they impact upon our communications activity and publicity. It also sets out and defines the roles and responsibilities for officers and councillors.

This guidance relates primarily to council communications or publicity through the media. While the (traditional) media is a key channel for us, there are others which we can use. The principles outlined in this protocol will be similarly applied to all other channels such as social media, unless otherwise stated.

Official council publicity will only relate to the functions and activities of the city council, not individual political groups. This means we are largely restricted to using an officer or executive members who have an official position and/or area of responsibility within the organisation.

This protocol is divided into five parts as follows:

Part 1 - Those holding 'official positions'

Part 2 - Legal restrictions

Part 3 - Application of the rules (speaking on behalf of the council)

Part 4 - Special rules covering pre-election periods

Part 5 - The clearance process

#### **Part 1 - Those holding 'official positions'**

City of York Council's decision-making executive group is made up of councillors who each have responsibility for an area of council policy/business. These areas of responsibility are referred to as

executive 'portfolios'. City of York Council currently has a joint administration and executive responsibilities are shared across two leadership groups. This arrangement is reflected in these protocols.

Chairs of Committees should consult with the communications team on any matters relating to the work of their committees. In particular chairs must make it clear when they speak to the media if they are speaking on behalf of the Council.

The Lord Mayor, in respect of his/her civic responsibilities, may also speak on behalf of the council in publicity relating to his/her civic responsibilities.

Officers who are directly approached by a member of the media should not answer questions themselves. The journalist should be referred to the communications team, which will manage the response.

Councillors who are directly approached by a member of the media may make use of the guidance contained in this protocol.

Officers and councillors who have contact with the media in a personal capacity or as members of non-council related organisations must not refer to their council posts and must make it clear to the journalist concerned that they are speaking in a personal capacity or on behalf of the non-council related organisation.

Trades union officers or political assistants, who are employees of the council and who have contact with the media in their trades union or political capacity, must make clear that they are speaking as a union or political group representative. If trades union officers have contact with the media in their capacity as a council employee, then the relevant provisions of this protocol relating to council officers will apply.

## **Part 2 - Legal restrictions**

The Local Government Act 1986 says the council must not publish anything, (including issuing news releases) which appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. The Act also says we must have regard to codes of practice about publicity as issued by the government. We will follow the code where publicity is addressed to the public at large, or a section of it, although different rules may apply where the council is consulting with the users of specific services. Other areas of legislation require that the council does not act incompatibly with individuals' right to respect for their private and family life, home and

correspondence, under the Human Rights Act 1998, and must only disclose personal data in line with the Data Protection Act.

Key legal points to note:

- Publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation of both.
- Publicity used to comment on, or respond to, the policies or proposals of the government, or other public authorities, should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate, and not prejudiced, unreasoning or party political.
- Publicity relating to the provision of a service should concentrate on providing factual information about the service.
- Publicity on controversial issues should not over-simplify facts, issues or arguments.
- Publicity should not attack or appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.
- The council must not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns, whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.
- Publicity about the views or activities of individual councillors, is only appropriate where they are representing the council as a whole and usually in an official capacity such as executive portfolio holder.
- Between publishing a notice of an election and polling day, publicity should not be issued which deals with controversial issues, or which reports views or policies in a way that identifies them with individual parties, political groups or groups of councillors.
- Press releases and media interviews generally should not deal with issues about identifiable councillors, groups of councillors or individuals.
- The council's publicity must not criticise other organisations or individuals to the extent that this could be defamatory.

### **Part 3 - Application of the rules (speaking on behalf of the council)**

In general, we will use a named individual to speak on behalf of the authority. However, circumstances or the required response may dictate (particularly when dealing with a reactive query) that a quote provided by the Head of Communications acting as a spokesperson is more



convenient or practical – to be agreed in consultation with the relevant Executive Member.

### **Leader, Deputy Leader and Executive portfolio holders**

The Leader and Deputy Leader will be jointly quoted in circumstances when they are representing the city in a city leader role and in connection with their role(s) as Chair/Vice Chair of the Executive. For example, major policy announcements, launches of high-profile council initiatives or schemes and civic emergencies will require the Leader and Deputy Leader to speak jointly on behalf of the council. On occasion, and when key policy statements or significant and sensitive issues need a comment or quote, both the Leader and Deputy will be consulted so they can agree on who should be quoted and whether joint statements are necessary.

Executive portfolio holders will be quoted in news releases which relate to their portfolio, including overall policy decisions and in response to press enquiries relating to their portfolio. When quoted, the Executive portfolio holder will appear first.

For photographs, the relevant Executive Member will be used and either the Leader or Deputy Leader (dependent on making sure both groups are involved) will be invited.

For videos, the relevant Executive Member, then the Leader and then Deputy Leader, has the right to appear. Quotes used in social media will feature all quotes in the proactive media release and / or the video.

### **Lord Mayor and civic party**

The Lord Mayor will be quoted in appropriate press releases and statements in respect of his/her civic responsibility and function, where the issue is ceremonial and an ambassadorial role to represent the city is required. In his/her absence the deputy Lord Mayor will be quoted.

### **Officers**

Officers will normally speak on behalf of the council in any announcement which relates to operational issues or where an officer has a specific area of responsibility which requires a professional profile or where the involvement of an elected portfolio holder is considered not appropriate (e.g. election matters, legal issues, code of conduct issues etc). All quotes and media activity by Council Officers will be carried out in consultation with the relevant Executive Member.

In radio or TV interviews, where a detailed knowledge of the subject material is more important than broad policy, it may be more appropriate to put forward a suitably qualified officer to speak on behalf of the council.

Where a pre-prepared statement (already approved by an officer and/or Executive portfolio holder) needs to be read aloud for the benefit of a broadcast organisation, say, for instance in the event of a reactive query, a member of the communications team can speak on the authority's behalf. Council officers speaking on behalf of the authority will always be named.

There are no hard and fast rules about the level of seniority of officers who can be used in council publicity. Generally, it is best to identify someone with the correct balance of authority and subject knowledge for that specific issue. The communications team will advise on this.

### **Individual councillors and group support officers**

The Act and Code relating to publicity places tight restrictions on what and who the council can legally publicise. This applies particularly to individual councillors, where official publicity is restricted to using an officer with an official position and area of responsibility within the council to speak on behalf of the authority. The political assistant will provide professional communication support to elected members, to provide an explanation of the views of the relevant political group on matters facing the council or which relates to local ward matters of a non-political issue, which cannot be provided by the council communications team under its protocols.

Media statements which relate to ward specific issues will, as normal, be drafted in liaison with the relevant department and cleared by the Executive portfolio holder.

All proactive media statements will be shared with the Political Assistant. Partnerships Where the council is involved in issuing communication as part of a partnership arrangement, the partnership's arrangements should be followed. This would normally be the chair of the lead organisation. In the case of a communication being prepared on behalf of a number of partners it may be appropriate to offer each partner an opportunity to be quoted. All partners should be given an opportunity to approve the release within a set timeframe. Where partnerships are complex, or may last some time, a separate partnerships media protocol will be drafted. This will support the principles described in this media protocol, and also include how and when partners might be involved or consulted.

## **Code of Conduct issues**

For code of conduct issues, the Chief Executive will speak on behalf of the council in liaison with the Monitoring Officer. Any proactive statement will be first shared with the members involved with sufficient time provided for them to comment. For reactive lines to take, the Chief Executive will approve the statement and share it with members involved at the same time as distributing to the media. Any proactive statement will be shared with the member involved with sufficient time provided where possible for them to respond.

## **Responding to enquiries and criticism**

We always respond to enquiries through a named council officer or spokesperson depending on who issues the statement or speaks to the journalist. This may be the Head of Communications if appropriate. The relevant Executive Member may need, or wish, to respond to enquiries and they will be provided with the opportunity to do so, noting the restricted clearance times. Where the council is being criticised by a politician, it may not be appropriate to quote a council officer in response or put forward an officer for a radio or TV interview. This could easily give the false impression that council officers were politically partisan. In these cases, the communications team will seek to draft a factual response or briefing, and then it will be decided whether the Council can respond factually, or if the Leader or Deputy Leader, relevant Executive Member or another councillor(s) who has an official position can respond.

However, on rare occasions, officers may need to respond to specific criticisms when there is a need to correct factual information. Where an enquiry relates to a party-political issue, then such matters will be referred to the appropriate party's political assistant for consideration. However, a political assistant can only provide a press statement which expresses the group's view on the matter as it affects the council.

## **Responding to enquiries during emergencies/out of office hours**

The communications team provides an out-of-hours service for emergency media enquiries during times when the office is closed (between 5.30pm and 8.30am Monday to Friday, at weekends and on bank holidays). The on-duty officer from the communications team may be required to respond to an incident as it unfolds. Under these circumstances, he/she will follow the incident communications plan, establish the facts of the incident with the senior officers involved and provide a factual statement/public information response to the media.

Circumstances may dictate that it is difficult or impossible to arrange clearance with the relevant Executive Member before release to the media. If the media require a council officer for interview, the duty communications officer will, at first, try to contact the Leader and Deputy Leader or relevant Executive Member in the first instance to agree the appropriate response. If this cannot be achieved, the communications officer will contact a senior officer. A copy of any media statement will be sent to the relevant executive portfolio holder and political assistants. Regular updates on an emergency incident/situation will be provided to the party group offices.

#### **Part 4 - Special rules covering pre-election periods**

The period between the notice of an election and the election itself is particularly sensitive and publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual councillors or groups of councillors.

This means that during this period:

Proactive publicity:

- Caution must be exercised in the use of proactive publicity especially on contentious topics
- We must avoid proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election
- Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election
- Publicity must be factual not party political

Reactive publicity:

- We may continue to quote appropriate councillors (including the Lord Mayor) in response to events or external enquiries, but only where the nature of the event or enquiry properly calls for such a response.
- Such responses must also be factual, so as not to allow people to infer we are promoting the views of a single political party. It is important to note that the above restrictions apply to council funded publicity.

This does not affect the ability of individual candidates to use their own resources to publicise themselves prior to any election, subject of course to the rules regarding election expenses and their declaration. The council's Deputy Returning (Monitoring) Officer will provide written

guidelines at the time of any relevant elections and should be consulted for advice for the appropriate approach on a case-by-case basis.

## **Part 5 - The clearance process**

One of the most important aspects of dealing with and managing the media is being able to provide a prompt response to a query, question or interview request. The sooner we can respond and involve ourselves in the story, the greater the chance we have to influence it. This is especially important where the council's reputation might be affected.

We also wish to influence the news agenda proactively by offering people for interview or providing case studies to illustrate topical issues.

We will use our forward planning process to identify opportunities in advance, but may still want/have to exploit on-the-day stories particularly when there is breaking news or developing stories. Many news organisations will have made most of their routine editorial decisions by mid-morning. It is therefore important we make prompt decisions in terms of our own proactive communications or when we are dealing with a reactive query; especially when we are working to tight deadlines.

A streamlined and simple clearance process is essential to the council's ability to influence or exploit the news agenda.

- The communications team will work with heads of service, assistant directors and directors to identify the most appropriate officer to provide the information required to respond to a query. A timely and efficient response to requests for information or comment is vital.
- For proactive media statements – we will aim to provide executive members with a two-day turnaround.
- For reactive media statements – we will respond to media deadlines, in consultation with the relevant Executive Member (usually within a couple of hours)

This protocol applies to office hours (8.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday). Out-of-hours, or in the case of an emergency incident, it may be necessary to depart from this agreed approach.

The communications team will have responsibility for the council's policies and practices which reflect the style, tone and language to be used in written communications (described in the style guide). Any

communications material that does not reflect the council's policies may be amended.

The Political Assistant will share information, where appropriate, relating to interviews (print or broadcast) involving portfolio holders that have been arranged directly.

Responses, statements or comments which have been cleared previously may be re-used if appropriate.

The Chief Executive may speak on behalf of, and/or clear communication materials relating to the corporate business of, the council. A copy of any communication will be sent to The Political Assistant.

Proactive media activity should be planned as far in advance as possible to allow all enough time for officers and councillors to respond and clearance to be approved.

### **Clearing materials**

Reactive queries from the media relating to matters of fact or information concerning the council's routine business may be answered by a member of the communications team without automatic referral to a portfolio holder or the joint administration group political assistants.

Information may be provided to the journalist verbally, or, if requested, in a written statement. If requested in a written statement, the portfolio holder and/or political assistant will always be invited to clear.

Time restrictions will be shared at the time and should the time pass, the relevant Director or AD will be invited to clear. However, the communications team will copy the portfolio holder/political assistant into the email to officers regarding an enquiry, and ensure a quote is provided at the earliest opportunity (if appropriate).

The relevant Executive Member (including the Leader/**Deputy Leader** as appropriate) will always be involved in the response to reactive queries relating to policy, political issues, priority areas detailed in the council plan or matters of controversy, even if it is decided an officer-only response is appropriate.

In these cases, the communications team will:

- Work with the most appropriate officer(s) to establish the facts and source the information required for the response.
- Draft a proposed response and share this with the relevant officer(s), the relevant Executive Member/Leader/**Deputy Leader**

and the political assistant at the earliest opportunity for feedback. Any deadlines should be made clear at this stage.

- Liaise with the relevant Executive Member/Leader/Deputy Leader and the political assistant and make any amends as necessary and once clearance has been agreed by both offices, the response will be published.
- Forward a copy of the final response to officers and/or portfolio holders as appropriate.
- If there is any doubt to the correct approach to a response, advice will be sought from the Head of Communications and/or the political assistant. The Executive Members and their areas of responsibility are listed on the council website:

[www.york.gov.uk/Executive](http://www.york.gov.uk/Executive)

## **Appendix D – social media guidance**

We monitor engagement across our digital ‘owned’ channels each month, to understand what works and where adjustments are needed. This learning, alongside the channel mapping work (see appendix A), will shape how we use social media in the future.

In general terms, the following applies.

- Facebook – strongest reach, particularly for community events, services and activities. Audience is highly engaged with family, neighbourhood and day-to-day service content.
- Instagram – performs best with visual-led content. Topics such as city aesthetics, infrastructure projects and sustainability resonate strongly.
- LinkedIn – effective for professional content, including jobs, business initiatives and economic development.
- NextDoor – enables hyper-local targeting by wards. Reach is positive, but audience engagement tends to be lower.
- X (formerly Twitter) – corporate account remains dormant, retained only for emergency planning duties around warning and informing.

The Council does not currently operate other channels such as TikTok. Instead, our approach is to identify and work with advocates already active in those spaces.

### **Working principles of our approach to social media**

- Apply the audience segmentation learning from the channel mapping work to both content and the channel selection.
- Timing and frequency should follow audience engagement patterns identified through ongoing monitoring.
- When content is likely to generate significant interactions, scheduling should ensure the comms team is able to monitor and response effectively.

### **Direction of travel**

This guidance will continue to evolve as the channel-audience work is refined (see appendix A). Future development will focus on:

- Shifting from prescriptive posting schedules to evidence-led practice
- Integrating resource considerations into a wider engagement strategy
- Embedding flexibility so channels are used where they add the most value, not simply to maintain volume



## Frequency of content

Currently, the following is a guide for when posts perform best in terms of audience engagement. This will be updated during the period for this strategy as part of the channel mapping work.

- Facebook - no more than six times per day – 7am, 9am, midday, 3pm, 5pm, 7pm
- Instagram - no more than three times per day – 8am, 1pm, 6pm [using stories where possible, and instead of posts]
- LinkedIn - no more than four times per day – 7am, midday, 5pm, 9pm

## Dealing with social media comments

We want our online spaces to be safe places for community discussion. We need some rules to ensure this is the case. Our existing [social media policy](#) sets out the organisation's management of these channels.

During the period of this strategy, we will review our approach to responding to social media comments. This will be done in line with the council's managing customer relations policy and the social media policy. Currently, a decision on whether or not to comment is taken by a communication manager and/or Head of Communications, based on the potential impact of the comment. For example, as a rebuttal to untrue information about the issue on which we're posted. The decision seeks to consider resources versus impact of taking this action.

All posts on our social media channels should be posted with comments open, as part of our commitment to listening to the community. There are, however, exceptions. In the following cases we will close down the ability of people to comment. This is in line with the existing categories within the social media policy, but adds a consideration around resources.

- When posts attract abusive or harmful content
  - Comments that include hate speech, discrimination, threats or harassment.
  - Comments that may provoke personal attacks on colleagues, councillors or other platform users
- To prevent misinformation or trolling
  - Comments that attract repeated false claims
  - When users post off-topic comments that derails constructive discussions
- For sensitive topics

- Posts relating to tragic events or legal matters, such as defamation or contempt of court.
  - Where protection needs to be given for individuals involved
- When moderation resources are limited
  - Posts where we believe the risk of harmful content in the comments or responses is high, but we do not have the resources to be able to effectively moderate
- Careful consideration should be given to posts during the pre-election period if these attract political comments and narrative.

DRAFT

## **Appendix**

### **Appendix E – resources to deliver**

This communications strategy is designed to be delivered within existing team resources.

The service has five FTE core budget funded positions. This is line with the requirement to be able to support the statutory civil contingencies act, and the ability for the local authority to deliver a 24/7 warning and informing function over a sustained period. Other roles within the service are project-funded.

The activity set out within the strategy is a more holistic approach to how we deliver corporate communication and engagement support, alongside the individual services, projects and campaigns currently funding individual posts. The whole team resource, therefore, should be focused on delivering the strategy. Services, projects and campaign communications support will be drawn from resources across the team, rather than individual posts.

Working in this way will enable us to prioritise against the objectives set out within the strategy and deliver effectively for the whole organisation within the resources that we have.