

Meeting:	Combined Executive Member Decision Session
Meeting date:	27 January 2026
Report of:	Garry Taylor, Director of City Development
Portfolio of:	Councillor Douglas, Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Strategy, Policy and Partnerships

Decision Report: Communications and Engagement Strategy

Subject of Report

1. The corporate communications and engagement strategy outlines how the council will communicate effectively with its core audiences. This includes residents, businesses, partners community groups and stakeholders.
2. The aim of the strategy is to support the delivery of the council's core commitments, corporate priorities and to ensure inclusivity, accessibility and to build confidence in the council's delivery.
3. The strategy seeks to ensure a clear focus for how communications and engagement supports the council's work and priorities, drawing on successes and lessons learned.

Benefits and Challenges

4. Effective communication and engagement supports the council to undertake its functions in a number of key ways.
 - a) **Policy development** – by giving people opportunities to contribute and for the council to listen, learn and act.
 - b) **Delivery of services** – by ensuring people have the information they need about how to access services.
 - c) **Community cohesion and our civic society** – by helping to build trust and positive relationships with residents, businesses, partners and stakeholders.
 - d) **Responding to emergencies** – as part of the council's duty to warn and inform under the Civil Contingencies Act and lead or support incident communications, with a 24/7 service.
 - e) **Long-term ambitions for the city** – through an effective story of our place as somewhere to invest, work and live.
 - f) **Supports 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.
 - g) **Innovation, productivity and long-term transformation** – helping the organisation to continue to meet its financial challenges by prompting efficient and effective service delivery.

Not having a strategy in place means the council does not design and deliver communications and engagement activity to have the best impact for the organisation and the city it serves.

Policy Basis for Decision

5. The strategy aligns communications and engagement activity with the council plan, the long-term strategy for the city (known as York 2032 and covering the ten-year strategies and the ten-year city plan), and the council's core commitments.
6. Details of how it supports each of these are set out within the strategy document.

Financial Strategy Implications

7. There are no direct financial implications of the strategy. Expenditure on communications or engagement activity – beyond core funded posts within the service – is funded through individual service budgets, where this activity can have a demonstrable benefit on supporting a particular service outcome, a saving or efficiency, or to support access to that service.
8. Some communications activity is directly linked to services seeking greater efficiencies, e.g. encouraging residents to take particular actions where this has a financial saving for the council.

Recommendation and Reasons

9. The Leader of the Council is asked to adopt the communications and engagement strategy, to ensure:
 - a) The council can use its communications resources in the most effective way to support the organisation's priorities and ambitions; and
 - b) To ensure the council focuses on relevant communication and engagement with all communities across the city in a fair and equitable way.

Background

10. In the early part of 2025 an audit review was carried out of the communications function, reporting at the end of May. This outlined key recommendations, including the need for a clear and coherent strategy to shape the authority's communications activity. The audit report and action plan was discussed at Corporate Scrutiny in October 2025.
11. During summer 2025 a new strategic approach to communications delivery has been designed and trialled, linking to industry best practice and with due regard to existing priorities and policies of the council. The communications and engagement strategy seeks to embed these approaches to continue this work.
12. The strategy sets out an approach to deliver consistency for how communications and engagement is applied and delivered, covering issues such as the use of the City of York Council brand,

and the application of government communications industry standards. It is designed to deliver the following.

- a) Ensuring communications content is aligned to the council's priorities.
- b) An overview of how the service will deliver this work during the period of the strategy, with an indicative timeline.
- c) Appendices to cover issues such as the media protocol and our approaches to managing council-owned digital channels.

Consultation Analysis

13. The strategy was presented to Corporate Scrutiny in October 2025. A number of amendments were made to the draft strategy in response. These included the following.
- a) A greater recognition of non-digital audiences – during the period of the strategy the council will explore options for the reinstatement of some form of printed news and services update; albeit funding would need to be confirmed. Other options include consideration of printed channels provided by others and making the best use of advocates through the work set out in the strategy on seldom heard voices.
 - b) A focus on content that directly supports customer services priorities through the development of a joint annual plan that now forms part of the strategy.
 - c) Channel mapping to include a focus on channels specifically to reach younger audiences.

Organisational Impact and Implications

14. A review of key implications is as follows.

Financial

There are no direct financial implications. A coordinated programme of communications will support the activity linked to service transformation, designed to help deliver long-term savings. It also includes work to support long-term investment in the city, in partnership with other key organisations.

Human Resources

Alongside the remit of the strategy, a coordinated approach for workforce communications is also underway. This focuses on how to use communications to directly support the outcomes of the Workforce Development Plan and long-term transformation work.

Legal

There are no direct legal implications. The strategy does, however, include reference to the management of our social media channels where content posted by others may bring risks around legal issues such as defamation or contempt of court. Legal services had been consulted on the minor amendments to the social media policy.

Procurement

There are no direct procurement implications.

Health and wellbeing

The communications service directly support the organisation's delivery of targeted health support, through its work with Public Health. This strategy seeks to further support this work, through the development of more effective community advocates and ensuring we are engaging with seldom heard voices.

Environment and climate action

The strategy sets out a clear focus on climate as one of the key narratives running through our communications and engagement activity. It seeks to raise awareness of the work being undertaken around this priority, and to support residents and businesses to deal with the impact of climate change on the city.

Affordability

The strategy includes a focus on developing better community advocates, more effective mapping of seldom heard voices and close work between the communications team, communities and customer colleagues. This will directly help to support those in communities for whom affordability and access to services is an issue.

Equalities and human rights

An equalities impact assessment has been completed and demonstrates the overall positive contribution this strategy makes to how the organisation communicates with – and listens to – a range of different audience groups across the city.

Data protection and privacy

The data protection impact assessment (DPIAs) screening questions were completed for the recommendations and options in this report and as there is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed to set these out, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed following the approved recommendations and options from this report and a DPIA completed if required.

Economy

Effective communications and engagement directly supports the work of the council to help business and sustainable housing growth. The strategy focuses on transport and growth as key areas of focus for the work of the communications and engagement team during the period of the strategy. This supports the local economy directly (through the provision of information about transport services) and indirectly (through an ongoing narrative of the opportunities available in the city for new business investment).

Risks and Mitigations

15. Political – there are risks around the role of corporate communications operating within a political landscape: the communications strategy, including the approach for the media protocol, ensures the organisation can work within the Local Government Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity and to national standards for communications, evaluation and issues such as behaviour change.
16. Economic – there are risks around the economic landscape impacting on residents and businesses within the city: the strategy includes a focus on transport and growth, alongside work to develop better partnerships with key organisation's communications teams across the city, to ensure a coordinated approach to using communications to support the local economy.
17. Social – there are growing risks around mis- and dis-information, and community cohesion: the service supports a 24/7 response for emergency incidents, and the strategy is designed to support effective community cohesion through engagement helping to ensure effective policy decisions. Further work is needed around the issue of dis- and mis-information, in line with emerging best practice from organisations such as the Local Government Association.

18. Technological – there are risks around ensuring we can respond to a changing media landscape, leaving the organisation unable to respond to issues in a timely and effective way. The strategy includes a focus on channel mapping – an ongoing process – and building more effective advocates to help navigate these challenges.
19. Legal: there are risks around media law, such as defamatory comments on our social media channels. The strategy includes a specific section around the management of social media channels. Mis- and dis-information remains an ongoing challenge and we will seek to work with others - through local and national partnerships - to meet this challenge.

Wards Impacted

20. All.

Contact details

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Background papers

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 01/10/2025:

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1117&MIId=15433>

Annexes

Annex A: Communications and Engagement Strategy

Appendices

Appendix A: A note on channel mapping

Appendix B: A note on service risks

Appendix C: News desk and media protocol

Appendix D: Social media guidance