

Helping
improve the lives
of **everyone** in
South Lanarkshire



South Lanarkshire Council
Communications Strategy

2019–2022

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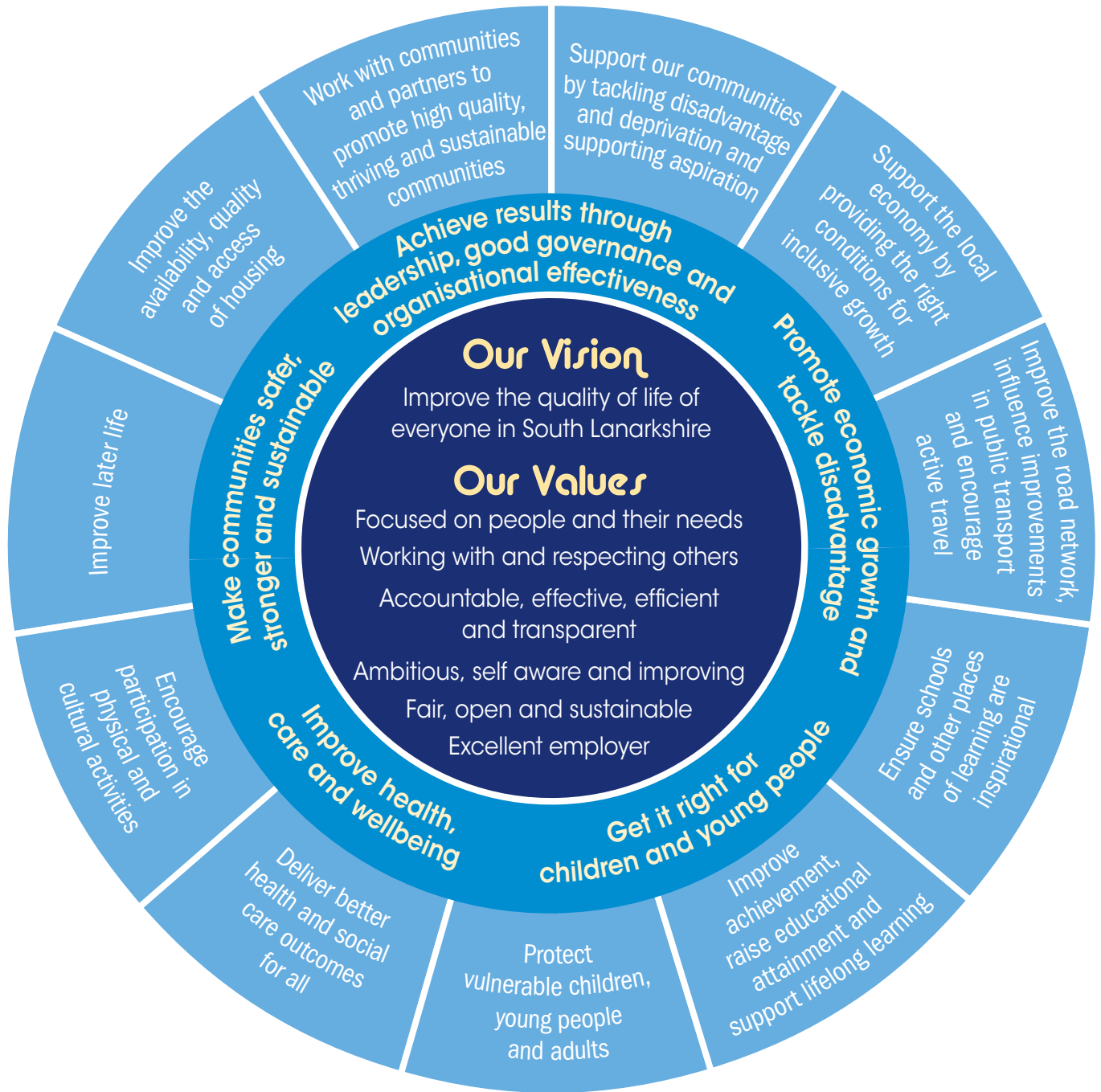
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Introduction

Good communications should be a chief goal of any organisation. This is especially true of those which have an audience with an active and direct interest in that organisation's performance, whether that be customers, shareholders or others. In the case of local authorities there are several such audiences, primary among whom are local residents.

This Communications Strategy sets out how South Lanarkshire Council communicates with our local residents and other audiences. It covers 2019 to 2022, which represents the remainder of the period covered by the current Council Plan, Connect. This is because the principal purpose of the Communications Strategy is to support the Council Plan, which itself sets out the council's Vision, Values and Objectives as it carries out its work on behalf of local residents.

The Communications Strategy is structured around 'Five As': Aims, Audiences, Activities, Assets and Analysis.

Each of these is explained fully in the chapters ahead. They establish how the council's Communications team, working with colleagues across the council, continually strives for meaningful, two-way communications with all of our residents and other audiences in an increasingly digital world.

Paul Manning
Executive Director,
Finance and
Corporate Resources



Supporting the Council's Vision and Objectives

All organisations should aim to have good communications. This means two things. First, they should have in place effective methods of communication which both reach out to their audiences and also hear what they are saying. Secondly, good methods of communication are only worthwhile if they are meaningful - that is, they must support the aspirations and wider objectives of the organisation as a whole.

The prime purpose of this communications strategy, therefore, is to support the Vision, Values and Objectives of South Lanarkshire Council. These are to be found in found in the Council Plan, Connect. To do this, all communications activities will directly align to at least one of the council's 11 Objectives as laid out in the outer ring of the [Connect diagram](#) on page three of this strategy.

These Objectives are designed to drive the council's work towards the fulfilment of the Vision which is central to Connect, which is:

- To improve the quality of life of everyone in South Lanarkshire.

This strategy supports that Vision and those Objectives by ensuring all of the council's communications activities demonstrably explains and promotes work being carried out to pursue at least one Objective.

Promoting the council's continuing importance to our communities

A key element of this strategy's support for the council's Vision is demonstrating how we continue to strive to improve the quality of life in South Lanarkshire despite sometimes difficult economic conditions.

The council does this every day through the delivery of quality services for our local residents, and also to support businesses and assist our visitors.

The council has been delivering on this purpose and vision for more than 20 years, playing a key role at the heart of local communities that continues to develop and grow.

In recent years much has been made of the impact of austerity, and it is a fact that there have been, and continue to be, financial pressures in all areas of the public sector. This includes local authorities, and South Lanarkshire Council has found budget savings every year for the past decade.

However, the council has done this by seeking efficiencies in an intelligent and considered manner that has allowed us to maintain the quality of services, especially in key frontline areas. As one result of this, an increasing proportion of the council's resources are directed towards improving outcomes in schools and social work.

This means that we continue to have a huge positive impact on local lives and communities, and in particular we reach out to help the old, the young, and the vulnerable.

While the Accounts Commission has advised all Scottish local authorities that financial challenges lie ahead, it has concluded that South Lanarkshire Council is well prepared to meet those challenges, using transformational change to continue to improve service delivery and focus on key priorities.

An aim of this strategy therefore is that the council's communications will reassure residents that our services continue to be of high quality and, even although efficiencies are constantly being sought, such as through better use of technology, key frontline services have been protected.

Communications will reinforce the message that South Lanarkshire is a great place to live, visit and do business.

The council's communications may be used to support the Priorities of partner organisations, principally through the Community Planning Partnership but also on occasion individual partners.

This strategy seeks to ensure that the communications service continually seeks improvement and best value. While efficiencies will be pursued through better use of technology, especially digital transformation, the strategy also aims to ensure that a wide range of communications methods are deployed to reach all audiences, including those who have limited or no digital access.



Audiences

There are many potential audiences for the council's communications. Our residents are the principal – and largest – group, and there will be occasions when the council wishes to communicate with them all at the same time, including through direct communication in writing.

However, our residents are not a homogeneous audience. Rather they will include a number of sub-groups which will require specific communications at various times, including:

Householders

Council tenants

Parents of school-age children

Road users

Social work customers

Users of other specific services, including customers of South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture (SLLC)

In addition, there are a number of audiences which will include non-residents as well as residents, notably:

Businesses – both locally-based and those which may wish to invest in the area

Politicians and other opinion formers

The media

Tourists

Residents of other areas who may be interested in living in South Lanarkshire

It is essential that the council has effective communications with all of these groups. This requires targeting specific groups and sub-groups and using appropriate methods of making contact with them, whether by direct communication, press release, use of council websites, social media or other methods.

Tailored communication will also be necessary to make sure that traditionally hard-to-reach groups receive the information they need and are provided with a full opportunity to engage with the council and its services. This is especially true of those who cannot be reached through digital communications.

An underlying principle of all communications, with whichever audience, is that these must be two-way communications, with meaningful opportunities for the audiences to respond and for the council to listen.

This is much more effective than one-way "broadcast" communications, with little or no chance for audience response, or for any meaningful assessment of the impact of the communications issued.



Activities

In line with digital transformation more generally, the council's Communications team have for some time been working to a principle of 'Digital First'.

That is, there is an assumption that digital methods of communication will be utilised, unless there is a clear case to be made for using printed communications. This is more cost-effective and more environmentally friendly than the paper-based communications that were previously relied upon.

The council has operated a corporate Twitter account since 2010 and a corporate Facebook page since 2017. Since then the Communications team has helped a number of individual services establish their own social media outlets, which are monitored by Communications.

While there is still a place for traditional press releases, at South Lanarkshire Council these have been developed to be punchier and "page ready" so that publications, whether print or online, are able to use the content more easily.

A core role of the council's Communications team has always been media relations. This continues to be the case but the media landscape continues to change, with the decline of traditional press and growth in online information outlets. While some of those are associated with traditional media operations there are many entirely new outlets, only some of which are produced by accredited journalists.

At the moment the Communications team's resources are split roughly evenly to handle the volume of "traditional" media enquiries received and to generate the council's social media output.

However, the continual growth of social media is already shaping the future deployment of resources, and Communications staff have increased their digital skills to ensure they are equipped for that direction of travel.



Approximately 40,000 people visit the council website each week.

The council's Twitter account has 41,300 followers.

26,000 people have liked the council's main Facebook page.

The combined weekly circulation of the area's local newspapers is approximately 18,000.

Campaigns

A central platform of the council's communications activity is an annual programme of planned campaigns which highlight specific pieces of work being undertaken by Resources.

It is considered that there is resource available to undertake 10 significant communication campaigns on behalf of the council each year. These 10 campaigns will be set out for each financial year following discussion with Resources and approval by senior management.

These campaigns will be in addition to the daily or weekly communications tasks undertaken by the Communications team. Each will likely run for a number of weeks or even months. All will be supported through a member of the PR or Digital team's acting as the campaign's account manager, liaising with the client and organising support required across Communications and, where appropriate, sourcing support from elsewhere in SLC or externally.

These campaigns will usually involve the full roster of services provided through Communications: press releases and other media activity, including advertisements; social media; web content and website builds (with colleagues from IT); graphics (producing visuals for branding purposes and for use in both traditional and social media, plus printed materials); and print.

These activities will be agreed through a specific Communications Plan which will be prepared by the account manager using the OASIS model (Objectives, Audiences, Strategy, Implementation, Scoring) and agreed with the relevant service lead. The communications plan will be monitored and developed through regular communications and meetings between the account manager and the service lead.

Campaigns will be designed around customer insight and desk research, and evaluation will be set at various periods in the campaign lifecycle to allow for fine tuning. Once any single campaign has finished and the outcomes have been evaluated a report will be produced, along with a toolkit to make future campaigns easier to plan and manage.

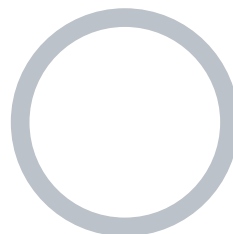
This will also allow us to share best practice with other councils and potentially 'sell' campaigns via the Digital Storefront.

It is anticipated that the 10 campaigns each financial year will include a number which are perennial – those campaigns which the council needs to undertake each year. These include the annual budget setting process and Council Tax arrangements, fostering and adoption, and roads and winter preparedness.

The other campaigns in the annual programme will be agreed by senior management from a shortlist which will be drawn together by Communications and Resources. This will be done at the end of the calendar year, when each Resource will be invited to look ahead to their service needs in the following financial year and identify where they may benefit from a formal campaign. Senior management will be asked to approve the resultant programme.

Some bids are likely to be unsuccessful because it is assessed that they do not require full communications campaigns. However, these activities will still be supported by Communications, through press releases, social media, graphics and print in the same way that other regular activities are which do not require a specific communications plan.

In addition, there will be occasions when a Resource identifies a need for an additional, ie non-programmed, campaign at short notice. There will be capacity for a maximum of two such communication campaigns in any given financial year, and adding these to the programme will be done with approval of senior management.



Committee support

Another key area of Communications work is through support for the council's committees.

This involves promotion of committee reports and decisions through press releases, social media and the posting of news items on the council's information website southlanarkshirereview.scot. On some occasions, rather than proactive publicity of this type, holding statements will be prepared for use if required.

Both these approaches require advance knowledge that relevant reports are going to committee and are therefore about to become public. Good relations with Resources mean Communications are usually aware well in advance that a report will go to committee that may attract public interest or be worthy of promotion. PR officers are allocated to each committee, on a rota basis, and examine reports at the earliest opportunity to ensure all potential communications activities are in hand.

Communications will liaise with relevant Resource officers to draft press releases, social media messages and any statements. This discussion will include reference to Elected Member contributions, and Communications will draft comments for approval by such Members – usually the committee chair or a deputy chair.

Press releases related to committee business will normally be issued immediately after the report has been dealt with by the committee, and all press releases are posted as news items on the council's information website southlanarkshirereview.scot.

However, on occasions Communications will discuss with relevant Resources whether it would be appropriate to start publicity arrangements as soon as reports are available publicly, that is, seven days in advance of a committee meeting. On such occasions the content of all communications will make it clear that the matter is pending committee decision.

Special arrangements are in place to provide support for the Provost as civic head of the council.

Under the PR team rota a PR team member is allocated each job and will liaise with the PA to the Provost to ensure communications support is in place for all Provost events, including arranging photography and drafting speeches, and the issuing of press releases afterwards. The Provost also has a corporate Twitter account which is supported by the Digital team and PR team.

Assets

People

The council's greatest asset is its workforce, and this is equally true of the Communications service. It is made up of four teams: Graphics, Print, Public Relations and Digital.



Graphics: a team of graphic designers who design a wide range of materials for use in digital and print format. These include leaflets, posters, booklets, infographics, social media images, reports and strategies (including this one), and items for our schools, such as diaries, handbooks, worksheets and Christmas cards.



Print: a small team which works closely with Graphics to produce print versions of the above, where required – while the council works to its “digital first” principle, printed products are still necessary for many customers. The print centre is equipped with automated modern equipment and its services are available to internal and external customers (principally partner organisations and community groups) via an online shop.

The Communications team will work closely with the Community Participation and Engagement team and others to maximise engagement opportunities with residents and communities.

The arrangements on this page resulted from a formal service review of what was previously Corporate Communications and Public Affairs (CCPA) in 2014. That review realigned the service in recognition of the changing nature of communications, particularly the growth of digital. It also embedded the Digital First principle.

This principle is applied at the outset of any new communications activity, when discussions are held over the appropriate methods to be used. As a result, Communications have led efforts to reduce the amount of printed materials being produced by the council.



Public Relations (PR): what was essentially once a team of press officers has evolved to meet changing needs. Dealing with the press and broadcasters remains a large part of their work, despite declining circulations and the growth of alternative media outlets. Current arrangements have one PR officer dealing with these mainstream media requests on a weekly rota basis, though other team members are available to help in times of high volume. PR officers research, write and upload material for southlanarkshireview.scot and also lead on campaigns as account managers.

Digital: created in 2014 in response to a shift towards online communications, this team is closely aligned with PR but specifically controls the content of the council's websites and social media channels. This includes overseeing the release of information on Facebook and Twitter, and acting as the initial responder to any queries received via those channels. At least two Digital officers are available during office hours and the Digital Team Leader and Head of Communications generally provide out of hours cover. Digital officers also upload material to southlanarkshireview.scot and can lead on campaigns as account managers.

Publications

In line with the Digital First approach, there has been a move away from printed publications. The monthly staff newsletter, The Works ceased being printed as part of efficiencies agreed as part of the 2016/17 council budget.

The council magazine The Reporter, which was printed and delivered to all South Lanarkshire households, ceased publication as part of the same efficiencies package. The South Lanarkshire View, which initially was a monthly insert in four local newspapers, also ceased as part of the 2018/19 efficiencies package.

Under Digital First, these have all been replaced with digital communications which are more responsive, have greater reach and are more cost-efficient.

Staff news is now delivered via the council's intranet, myWorks. The Reporter and print edition of the View were replaced in March 2019 by the launch of a new website, southlanarkshirereview.scot, which provides news about council services.

News items are posted every day, with notification and links sent out via Twitter and Facebook. To make it easier for users to navigate to areas of interest, articles are categorised under the four localities – East Kilbride, Rutherglen/Cambuslang, Hamilton and Clydesdale – and subject matter, e.g. education, housing and roads.

Because southlanarkshirereview.scot is updated at least daily it means there is no delay in making information available to residents and others. It also means the council has been able to increase the volume of information being shared with audiences, rather than having to rely on articles being included in local newspapers.

southlanarkshirereview.scot provides links to the council's main website, where customers still find all the information they need about council services, and where they can carry out transactions using online forms. As part of future phases of development southlanarkshirereview.scot will carry more video and there will be improvements to the way that residents and others can correspond with the council.

As part of the commitment to two-way communications, southlanarkshirereview.scot includes a feedback button for users to share views with the Communications team.

The number of residents who do not have digital access is declining (see below), but a digital inclusion strategy is being developed which will ensure the council helps residents use the internet, whether to access council services or for other means, such as job applications. PCs are already available for public use in SLLC libraries and wi-fi is available at a number of council and SLLC facilities. The digital inclusion strategy will also ensure traditional means are retained for residents to interact with the council, by correspondence, telephone and in person, e.g. Q and As.

This Communications Strategy aligns with the digital inclusion strategy and a number of proposals are being considered in this area, such as providing important information to service users via tablets and other devices which staff carry with them when they meet residents as part of their duties.

The Scottish Household Survey 2017 said 85% of homes had internet connection, compared to 42% in 2003, and 58% of Scots use mobile phones or tablets to connect to the internet. The survey also showed that while older adults continue to be less likely to use the internet than younger adults, the gap continues to narrow. It further reported that internet use among adults in social-rented accommodation had improved considerably.



Analysis

An assessment of the success of any communications strategy should be carried out at an agreed period during a campaign of activity, or after its conclusion.

Measurements of “success” will be agreed with senior management but are expected to include:

- Number of visitors logged to council website and southlanarkshirereview.scot
- Number of digital tasks carried out
- Number of media enquiries and responses
- Number of other media jobs logged
- Analysis of positive/negative sentiment online
- Feedback from resident engagement
- Outcomes of the campaigns – these will often be measured by the Service for which the campaign was run. (For example, did a fostering campaign result in more foster care enquiries or did a recycling campaign result in less contamination in recycling bins?)

Once measurements have been agreed reports will be supplied quarterly to Finance and Corporate Resources management, and annually to senior management across the council.

Next steps

This Communications Strategy has been created to support the current Council Plan, Connect, which is scheduled to be replaced in 2022. It is intended that this Communications Strategy will therefore be refreshed in 2022 to reflect any changes in the Council Plan, Connect.

The strategy will not be set in stone until then, however. Rather, it will evolve to take account of any changes in the way the council delivers on its Vision and Objectives. It will also change as needed to ensure that any developments in communications methods are fully exploited to ensure we provide the best possible communications with all of our audiences. The most obvious of these is further developments in digital technology that will enable further digital transformation.

If you would like to comment on this Strategy,
or if you require more information about the services
provided by Communications, please contact:

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If you need this information in another language or format,
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