1. **Foreword**

   St Helens Council is committed to ensuring that the whole organisation communicates effectively and efficiently with stakeholders from all sections of our community.

   Effective communication and engagement is critical if we are to deliver quality services and develop a two-way flow of information between the council and our key audiences. We want to ensure that our residents, local businesses, partner organisations, staff, Elected Members and every other interested party is regularly informed, updated and engaged using a wide range of channels.

   We are committed to being open, transparent and accountable in everything we do, and communications plays a key role in promoting this way of working.

   The way we communicate as a society is rapidly changing and we need to ensure that the council is in step with these changes. The media landscape is also dramatically shifting from traditional media to the world of social and digital media, and we want to be at the forefront of these developments.

   Now, more than ever, it is clear that we need to continually review and adapt the way we communicate and ensure that all parts of the organisation are aware of the importance of this dynamic approach.

   St Helens is working to become an adaptive innovative council and this communications strategy outlines our approach to ensure that we provide more direct and proactive communications with local residents and communities over the next three years.

   **Cllr Barrie Grunewald**  
   **Council Leader**

2. **Context**

   This communications strategy is designed to clearly set out the way the council communicates with a wide range of key audiences. It takes us from the reality of where we are now to the aspirations of the future. It is backed up by an action plan, which sets out the activities we need to achieve in order to meet the council's ambitions.

   This strategy reflects the ongoing decline of traditional broadcast media and the steady growth of digital and social media as key channels for communication in the 21st century. We are no longer living in an ‘age of deference’ where the public respond to messages from authority figures. This is being replaced by an ‘age of reference’ where people look to their peer groups for information and are less reliant on established broadcast channels to deliver key messages. Social media has transformed the way people receive and share information. It can also be used effectively to engage with residents and other key stakeholders. This approach reflects the council’s desire to ensure residents can engage with us in new, improved ways, using new technology as a preferred method of communication.

   The three-year strategy runs from 2017 to 2020 and is co-terminus with The Council Plan, but the scale and pace of change means we will need to carry out regular reviews to ensure we are moving in the right direction. This will help us check whether the action plan is on track and work out what corrective action is needed if it is not.
3. Council Plan & Strategic Ambitions

The Council Plan 2017-2020 sets out the council’s key strategic ambitions of;

- Improving people’s lives
- Creating a better place
- Becoming an adaptive Innovative council

Under these ambitions are a series of objectives that define how we will achieve our ambitions. This strategy supports these ambitions and reflects these objectives in its aims, priorities and actions. It also sets a corporate narrative and corresponding brand for each of these ambitions and key objectives.

4. Communication Aim & priorities

4.1. Aim

The overall aim of this strategy is to;

“Develop consistently excellent, innovative and effective communications, to increase awareness of the council’s services and achievements and improve the reputation of the council.”

It underlines the council’s commitment to providing high quality, planned and consistent communications.

This Communication Strategy sets out a number of key changes to the way we will communicate over the next three years. In summary, these include;

- A greater focus on positive and proactive media relations
- More direct and proactive communications with local residents and communities
- Tailoring the council’s communications and engagement to deliver more effective two-way communication
- Moving from a fragmented communication service to a more joined up approach
- Providing more communications support to Elected Members and providing more two-way communication with our staff
- Developing a number of complimentary plans, to further support this communication strategy, in specific areas such as Digital Communications, Consultation & Engagement and Internal Communications
- Producing a Campaigns Delivery Plan, agreed by the Council Leader and Strategic Directors. Detailing communication campaigns and activity for the next six months

4.2. Priorities

In order to bring about the above changes and realise the strategic ambitions set out in The Council Plan, our priorities are;

**Priority 1:** Increase opportunities for people to engage with the council on issues and services that affect them by developing existing and new channels of communication

**Priority 2:** Promote and uphold the council’s reputation and image as an effective, efficient, innovative organisation that is focused on the public and their needs
**Priority 3:** Promote St Helens, nationally and internationally, as a leading place for doing business and a great place to live, work, visit and invest in

**Priority 4:** Ensure that all communication and engagement activities are consistent and co-ordinated across all channels to maximise our resources, ensure value for money and give maximum support to the council’s strategic priorities

**Priority 5:** Improve internal communications with;

a. Staff – by enabling timely two-way communication, to ensure staff feel valued and are engaged on the priorities, activities and messages of the council, to enable them to carry out their roles to the best of their ability

b. Elected Members – to support them in their role as community leaders, by providing Members with up to date information.

**Priority 6:** Ensure our digital communications develop in line with advancing technology, social changes and customer needs, to allow us to engage with our communities in an effective and efficient way

5. **Delivering the strategy**

5.1. **Who will deliver it**

The day to day delivery of the Communications Strategy will be led by the councils Corporate Communications Team, with the support of the Chief Executive and Strategic Directors, Council Leader and Cabinet, Elected Members, service/department leads, all staff and our partners within the Economy and People’s Boards. The overall responsibility for the successful implementation must rest with every member of staff and Elected Members, as they are our ambassadors and play a crucial role in delivering the corporate narrative.

The Corporate Communications Team includes;

**Head of Corporate Communications** – responsible for setting the strategic direction of communications and managing the service which includes;

**Marketing & Communications Team** – responsible for marketing communication campaigns and activity

**Design & Print Team** – responsible for designing all communication materials and outsourcing print

**Media Team** – responsible for the media management of proactive, reactive and crisis communications.

Management of some digital communication channels, including social media and the council’s website currently sits within Customer Services. Public consultation and engagement is facilitated by Customer Services.

5.2. **Communication governance**

Currently work is received and undertaken by the Corporate Communications Team through a number of mechanisms;

- Service leads and managers directly task the Marketing & Communication Team to deliver annual and one off marketing communication campaigns and activity
The Chief Executive and Strategic Directors task the Head of Corporate Communications to deliver marketing communication campaigns and activity.

The Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, service leads and managers task the Media Team in relation to proactive media releases.

Local, regional and national media request reactive statements and responses from the council via the Media Team.

Work of a timely or seasonal nature, together with work with our partner organisations, is planned in by both teams as and when required.

Work for the Design and Print Team must be allocated via the Design and Print Requisitioning System.

As a general rule, media work, by its nature, usually has shorter lead in times and a quick delivery timescale, with work usually taking hours or days to complete. Marketing communication campaigns have a longer lead in time and can often take weeks or months to complete.

The media team will continue to receive requests from service leads and managers, with the ultimate decision to undertake the work made by the Head of Corporate Communications, and if deemed controversial, in conjunction with Strategic Directors or service leads.

Work for the Communications and Marketing Team will be agreed and planned in to a Campaigns Delivery Plan. This plan will cover a six-month period towards the end of which it will be reviewed and the following six months' work will be included. In order for work to be placed on the Campaigns Delivery Plan by services, service leads and/or managers must complete a Communications Brief. This will ask for brief details on aims, objectives and outcomes of the activity together with budget and timings. This is to help services to focus on “why” the activity is needed instead of “what” activity will take place and to also assess the request against the council’s objectives as set out in The Council Plan. All planned work must be agreed and approved by a Strategic Director.

It is often the case that urgent or unforeseen work needs to be completed, sometimes due to changing external situations and pressures. In this case service leads must complete a Communications Brief and a decision will be taken by the Head of Corporate Communications and Strategic Directors as to what planned work can be put back to accommodate the new work.

### 5.3. Stakeholders

A stakeholder is a person, group or organisation that can affect or be affected by an organisation’s actions, objectives and policies. They have varying needs and different stakeholders are entitled to different considerations. They can also have varying levels of influence.

Below are a number of the council’s stakeholders, listed according to their likely interest and influence on the council and the borough:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Players</th>
<th>Keep Informed</th>
<th>Monitor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Helens residents</td>
<td>Partner organisations</td>
<td>Pressure groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Members</td>
<td>Volunteer organisations</td>
<td>Think tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service users</td>
<td>Government - Department for Local Government &amp; Communities</td>
<td>Wider general public outside St Helens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community groups</td>
<td>Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA)</td>
<td>National/international businesses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When communicating with our stakeholders we will ensure that we take into consideration the needs of our diverse community, including:

- People who do not speak and/or read English
- People who are young or older
- People with a learning difficulty
- People who are hearing impaired or deaf
- People who are visually impaired or blind

### 5.4. Narrative

Our corporate narrative, or key messages, support the council’s ambitions and objectives as set out in The Council Plan. The narratives below are a sample of the top-line messages that can be used for each objective/activity. Further messages are developed within individual communication plans. These ambitions, objectives and narrative are further supported by one of three specific council brands:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council Ambitions</th>
<th>Council Objectives</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improving people’s lives</strong>&lt;br&gt;Brand: St Helens Cares</td>
<td>Building an integrated, sustainable health and social care system</td>
<td>St Helens Cares will be a leading example of a place-based care system, where organisational boundaries will be broken down and partners will work together to meet the needs of the people of St Helens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a better place</td>
<td>Growing the economy</td>
<td>Confidence in St Helens economy is at a high. The borough is home to more than 4,500 businesses, including a plethora of strong locally grown SME’s as well as some of the UK’s most successful companies such as NGF, Pilkington, Tata Steel and Sainsbury’s distribution, all contributing to a booming business community and economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting the Local Plan</td>
<td>At St Helens Council we’ve embarked on an ambitious 30-year plan to boost local jobs and build more homes to meet our housing needs and growth aspirations. The availability of new well located employment land is essential to St Helens economic prosperity as not being able to supply this kind of land will simply result in companies relocating to regions further along the motorway network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building a vibrant town</td>
<td>St Helens, a town born out of enterprise and entrepreneurship, with a rich and varied cultural...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Brand: St Helens Place

- **Scene, set in an enviable location** – between beautiful countryside and bustling cities. Our town has a lot going for it – not least the pride and determination of its people. We owe it to our town centre to revive its fortunes by building on its many assets and strong foundations. Together, public and private organisations, residents and businesses, communities and individuals – we can all work to build a better future for St Helens Town Centre.

- **Promoting the M6 growth corridor**
  St Helens is maximising its ideal location as a centre for logistics. Positioned on the M6, M62 and A580 places St Helens in the heart of the northern logistics catchment area.

- **Celebrating 2018**
  2018 marks the borough’s 150th anniversary, and whilst reflecting on our history and heritage in coal, glass making, pharmaceuticals and rugby, we will celebrate our future as a place for ingenuity, innovation and culture.

- **Raising aspirations, skills & employment**
  St Helens has a strong work ethic, young people who are well educated, successful and established businesses in a range of sectors, and a market of over 35 million people within a few hours’ drive. Most importantly we will continue to focus on entrepreneurship and innovation as our routes to growth and prosperity.

- **Culturally centred**
  We have numerous established cultural assets in St Helens and we see these working together to form a hub of arts and cultural activity that will be of national significance. These will be used as a catalyst to bring different cultural offerings to St Helens, that will enliven our town centre and reach all parts of our community.

### Becoming an adaptive, innovative council

- **Communicating the budget and its impact**
  As a council we are currently facing one of the most turbulent times in our history. We’ve already lost £74 million of Government funding from our budget since 2010, with an additional £20.6 million of savings to make over the next three years. In total, our funding to spend on services in St Helens by 2020 will be £90 million less than in 2010. This is particularly hard when we have already made most of the efficiency savings in previous years.

- **Improving digital connectivity**
  Connectivity cuts across everything we do. We cannot create a sustainable health and social care system without embracing digital change, and we cannot grow our economy, or raise the towns ambitions, without having that digital infrastructure in place.

- **Traded Services**
  The changing landscape for local authorities is enabling innovation in service delivery and St Helens Council is looking to embrace this by
pursuing commercial avenues to explore ways in which we can generate more income so we can continue to deliver high quality services to our residents and those in our community most at need.

5.5. How we will communicate

The council uses a number of communication channels to reach its stakeholders, including:

- St Helens First
- Websites – including the council’s corporate site, Invest in St Helens, St Helens Cares and Traded Services for Schools
- Local, regional, national and trade/industry media
- Our Facebook, Twitter and You Tube profiles
- Marketing materials
- Advertising – newspapers, magazines, billboards, radio and Facebook
- Signage
- The intranet
- Council app
- Events, roadshows and displays
- Reports and policy documents
- Council meetings and minutes
- Councillor surgeries
- Email marketing
- Consultation suite – access to surveys on the council website
- Senior management meetings and council staff meetings
- Vehicle livery

As well as enhancing existing communication channels, there is the opportunity to develop new ones that will enable the public to engage with the council in a variety of new ways. This will be needed in order to deliver the priorities of this strategy.

In particular, digital technology offers many new opportunities to facilitate channel shift and the ability to engage with communities through a variety of social media channels and tactics, targeted email marketing, Facebook and internet marketing, the use of video and web chat. It can also help us develop two-way communication with our staff through a new intranet.

5.6. Delivery

The programme of work that will make this strategy happen over the next three years is outlined in a Communications Action Plan in Appendix A. Following on from this strategy will be three overarching action plans within the areas of;

- Internal Communications
- Digital Communications
- Consultation and Engagement
6. Communication activity

Media & PR

Media relations, particularly in an increasingly digital age, plays a vital role in the delivery and execution of the communications strategy.

Consumer behaviour around gathering information and news has changed significantly over the last decade. The age of printed newspapers being the primary source of local information is long gone and residents now have a much wider set of tools to gather news from a wider range of media stakeholders than ever before, meaning they can share, react and comment on information instantly – becoming media stakeholders in their own right. Media outlets can no longer wait until their next edition to run stories and this is driving a “breaking news” culture both in broadcast and online.

In order to keep pace with this, an increasing number of councils are switching to a “digital newsroom” approach whereby instead of issuing a one-size fits all press release to media contacts, the emphasis is on developing more tailored content for a specific channel and audience, which is then distributed through the council's own channels, for journalists, freelancers, community groups and residents to pick up. So increasing the reach and impact of council messages, by creating content people want, instantly.

St Helens Council will look to develop a digital newsroom approach, however for this to take place further development of digital channels is required, also the investment in staff development and equipment, the requirement for better media monitoring tools and the closer alignment of the role of Media Officers and Marketing Officers to become more “cross-channel publishers”. This is obviously a longer term goal, but some of the key activities suggested in the Communications Action Plan will help the council to establish a framework for which to gradually increase digital media transformation over the next two years.

The borough is served by a number of local and regional media outlets. Increasingly people are accessing these via their websites or media-owned social media channels;

Newspapers include:
- St Helens Star
- St Helens Reporter (online only)
- Liverpool Echo

Radio outlets include:
- WISH fm
- BBC Radio Merseyside
- Capital Liverpool
- Radio City

TV outlets include:
- BBC North West
- ITV Granda Reports
- Made in Liverpool

Social media based local community news sites include;
- St Helens Hour
- St Helens Unlimited
- St Helens Now
Proactive Media

In order to be best placed to communicate and promote the work and achievements of the council, the Media Team will:

- Encourage service leads and relevant managers to inform the Media Team at the earliest opportunity of any potential good news stories and developments within their service areas.
- Package news opportunities to the media in an effective, easy-to-communicate way, including the researching, writing and issuing of media releases on a regular basis. This may involve the requirement to include video footage, the arranging of photo calls, offering relevant interview/photo opportunities to the media, the use of relevant graphics or CGI etc.
- In the case of all proactive good news stories, in a timely manner, post these stories to the corporate social media accounts and relevant service accounts, and place in chronological order on the news section of the council’s website.
- On a regular basis ensure that staff and elected members are kept informed of news stories appearing within the local, regional and national media and trade press.

Reactive Media

In the age of openness and transparency, the media, as a facet which residents utilise to communicate with the council, have every right to challenge, and hold to account the council, if and when levels of service fall below that which residents expect from the council.

The prevalence of social media also means that reactive media, and the need to deal with adverse comments, has vastly accelerated the speed at which adverse news can travel to a large number of people.

Inevitably, ‘bad’ news stories always generate more interest from the media – and the very nature of local government services makes it easily open to criticism.

One of the aims of this communications strategy is to counterbalance and effectively manage these negative news stories to ensure that news is communicated in a balanced, accurate and timely manner.

In order to be best placed to manage reactive media relations, the media team will:

- Adopt a coordinating response to the media, by highlighting the importance of reputation management across the organisation, to ensure that media enquiries are dealt with efficiently and in an open and transparent manner.
- Continue to build upon developing working relationships with local, regional and national media and press colleagues.
- Utilise media monitoring tools to allow for greater identification of negative and potentially incorrect information circulating within comments on media owned websites and social media channels, blogs, forums etc and allow for corrective action to be taken.
- Highlight to service leads and managers the importance of communicating potential areas of impending negative/difficult situations which are likely to give rise to media interest/potential criticism from residents. Where time allows, comprehensive media management strategies will be developed to ensure that correct information is supplied in a timely manner.
We aim to:

- Communicate and promote the council’s achievements, details of service delivery, policy developments etc, to residents of the borough and other key audiences, through utilising the media, both traditional and digital, locally, regionally and nationally where relevant.
- To ensure media journalists, press reporters and community reporters seeking information and/or comment from the council receive accurate and timely responses to queries.
- To act to protect the council’s reputation in an honest and open way by monitoring and responding to negative or damaging comments or incorrect information.
- To further utilise digital media, e.g. website, social media, video etc, to ensure that council news and information is generated, delivered, managed and responded to swiftly and efficiently.
- To continue to build positive relationships with press and media colleagues to maximise publicity opportunities and continue to develop trust and understanding of deadlines, confidentiality and council/media policies.

Crisis and Emergency Communications

The Local Government Association (LGA) defines a ‘crisis’ as ‘any action which is a significant threat to the health of your business – embarrassing tweets, leak of customer data, sudden resignation of the Leader or Chief Exec. Emergency communications is concerned with public safety and can include floods, fire and terror attacks. Usually emergency communications involve the co-ordination of a number of organisations, who will have the same goal in common, but different tasks at hand. There is a difference between crisis and emergency communications, but there is also great potential for overlap.

In regards to emergency communications St Helens Council is a member of the Merseyside Resilience Forum. This forum is developing a ‘Warning and Informing Generic Plan’ which aims to provide strategic direction for organisations involved in communicating at major emergencies or a situation where a multi-agency response is required. The Press Officers and the Head of Corporate Communications are members of this forum.

The Media Team will look to provide cover in an emergency situation, but an out of hours on call facility does not exist within the council’s Media Team.

We aim to:

In the event of an emergency situation, the media team will play a key role in:

- Helping to make sure, through regular, timely communication, that public safety is of paramount importance.
- Identifying at the outset which emergency service, were appropriate, is the lead authority and ensure that appropriate messages are used to direct people to the relevant channel of that service, so as to avoid conflicting and confusing messages.
- Acting swiftly in the dissemination of appropriate information to both the media and residents and answer queries in an open, honest and transparent manner, if applicable.
- Acting as a bridge between the organisation and the public, ensuring that available communication channels are utilised appropriately, effectively and regularly.
- Utilising internal communication channels to ensure that council staff, elected members and partners, as required, are kept regularly informed with appropriate information.
Digital Communications

We will use digital communication to ensure good engagement with residents, offer better customer service, encourage people to channel shift to a more cost effective channel in their dealings with us, and to facilitate the wider sharing of information on services and issues that are most important to customers.

One way to ensure we do this effectively, is by using social media strategically – ensuring it is well researched, well planned, regularly monitored and closely evaluated to ensure that it is working.

Increasing numbers of councils and public sector organisations, encourage people to ask questions, make enquiries and contact the organisation, in the first instance, through social media. In order for that to work successfully within the council, an increase in capacity will be required in order to deal with public enquiries on social media. According to the Institute of Customer Services one in four social media account holders use them to make a complaint, and according to the 2016 Sprout Social Index, 90% of surveyed consumers have used social media in some way to communicate with an organisation, with over a third saying they preferred social media to traditional channels like phone and email. This method of managing customer interactions is being seen as convenient and transparent for service users and will incur very little additional costs. But it also offers the opportunity to engage in two-way conversation and ultimately make the interaction with the council into a more positive one.

Agreements are required around the management and responsibilities of using social media in this way. This could be; for the strategic direction and development of social media channels together with the daily responsibility for posting news, promotional messages, campaign information, events and the general searching and retweeting of partner and other information would be carried out by the Corporate Communications Team. Responding to dealing with customer service related enquiries would be dealt with by the Customer Services Team. The two teams can continuously keep updated as to one another’s actions on social media via a Management and Monitoring system, one of which is already in place.

The council should consider developing accounts on other existing social media platforms to further support its key messages, objectives and actions.

The council’s corporate website was redesigned and launched in June ’16 to facilitate self-service. There are a number of other bespoke websites such as Invest in St Helens and Traded Services for Schools, which serve a target audience with specific messages. An area which requires further research is how we can further drive traffic to our websites.

The use of video is increasing within the council, to meet customers’ needs to consume information in an engaging and easy to understand way. This work can be undertaken by the Corporate Communications Team, although staff within the team will not be expected to deliver videos of a high quality nature – this work will be outsourced, but instead, and with subsequent training and equipment, can carry out basic, short videos that can be provided to the media and placed on social media.

**We aim to:**

- Become more strategic in our use of social media, to be clear on our objectives – whether they are to increase engagement and reach, deal with customer service enquiries or promote our services – or all of the above
- Build in time to innovate on those platforms and activities which are more likely to deliver results and positive outcomes. To ensure time is given to benchmarking and looking at best practice from other public sector organisations in order to achieve results from social media
• Ensure social media channels are measured and evaluated monthly and fed back to senior managers and Cabinet

Marketing Communications

The Marketing & Communications Team manage all aspects of marketing communication campaigns as well as more ad hoc communication activities on behalf of the organisation, and utilise graphic design, brand management, advertising and print in order to produce materials and carry out activities.

In creating integrated communication campaigns and activities the team will ensure that;

• Aims, objectives, outcomes and a targeted approach are identified as a minimum at the outset. Detailed communication plans will be produced for more complex and potentially controversial campaigns
• According to the governance structure set out in this communication strategy, that Strategic Director backing has been approved
• Appropriate resources ie budget and staffing, are in place and that the campaign has an imperative to achieve real change
• Advice and guidance is provided in relation to the overall approach and individual communication activities and messages making up the campaign
• Value for money is at the heart of each integrated campaign and that all alternative communication techniques and channels relevant to the desired audience and outcome have been explored
• Clearly defined evaluation measures are built into the process
• The desired outcomes from each individual communication campaign supports the ambitions and objectives of the council as set out in The Council Plan

Services and departments requesting marketing communication campaigns must;

• Have clear evidence/requirement/research for the campaign work to take place
• Seek and gain approval from the relevant Strategic Director for work to be undertaken, according to the governance structure set out in this communication strategy
• Complete a Communications Brief template outlining evidence/requirement/research, aims, objectives and desired outcomes, together with confirmation of resources ie budget, staff assistance
• Adhere to the advice and guidance provided by the Marketing & Communications Team in regards to communication activities
• Agree to defined evaluation measures to ensure that value for money is achieved and lessons can be learnt in regards to communication activities

We aim to:

• Provide a full marketing communication service which addresses the issues and objectives that we as a council want to achieve

Corporate Publications

St Helens First magazine is distributed to 70,000 households across St Helens and is produced three times a year, however it has an annual cost of £67,000 to design, print and distribute. Approximately £33k of the annual cost is in the distribution. Although it is not suggested that St Helens First should be discontinued, it could be produced in a different format in order to reduce costs. However, no decision
should be made on the future of the magazine without first establishing residents’ opinions on it, as well as more generally establishing how residents would like to be communicated to by their council and the frequency of this.

An increasing number of councils are turning to email marketing to communicate with residents and subscribers on a regular basis, and this is an area which the council should investigate further.

Research should also be undertaken in to how income can be maximised through advertising in corporate publications, as this can help to offset the cost of production.

We aim to;

- Provide the right information to our residents and other stakeholders in the right way at the right time
- Understand how we can generate income from our communications in an appropriate and measured way

Consultation & Engagement

Now more than ever it is important to engage with residents – when public services are undergoing fundamental change, resources continue to diminish, public expectations are raising but trust in institutions is falling. In this context a serious effort to involve and understand residents is needed. By grasping what people need and what they can do for themselves, authorities can work better with communities and be more efficient. By bringing people in on decision-making, councils can get decisions right, manage expectations and improve relationships with residents.

Currently within St Helens Council consultations are predominantly carried out on proposed changes to individual services, such as the school crossing patrol. These are placed on the Consultation Suite on the council website and social media provide a link to the page. Individual services periodically will conduct a survey to assess performance, however, there is no generic, on-going engagement or consultation about public perceptions of the council and its general performance, how people feel about St Helens as a place, what residents think their council should be prioritising, or how they would like to contact or receive information from the council.

In addition, there have been three larger consultation and engagement exercises in 2017 involving the need for more detailed and complex communication, these are; the review of libraries across the borough, Phase I of the Local Plan and Parkside Link Road. There will be the need for further consultation in 2018 around the continued redevelopment of St Helens town centre, Phase II of the Local Plan and on-going engagement in regards to St Helens Cares. Most of these will be carried out by Corporate Communications.

We aim to:

- Ensure that when we say we will engage with our communities, that this involves, where appropriate, representatives from all parts of the borough, of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, vulnerable groups, difficult to reach, users of specific services, businesses, partner organisations and the media.
- Recognise that different levels of consultation and engagement are appropriate in different circumstances, dependant on;
  - The purpose of the engagement
  - The stage in the project planning cycle at which engagement takes place
Those we are engaging with – recognising that different groups and individuals have different preferences

Brand Management

Three overarching brands are currently emerging which will represent the council’s ambitions, in its three key areas:

- **St Helens Place brand.** Supporting work and activities aimed at developing and growing the economy and promoting the “place”
- **St Helens Cares brand.** Supporting work and activities aimed at integrating health and social care to improve outcomes for individuals and communities within St Helens
- **St Helens Corporate brand.** Supporting work and activities aimed at delivering effective, integrated and personalised services for our residents and communities

These are overarching brands. There will still be the requirement to adhere to branding which is established nationally, or with partners, such as fostering.

It is important that all of our visuals and written communications will follow rules set out within relevant brand guidelines, as poor branding distances our services and confuses customers. These guidelines will be an important reference tool for employees and external suppliers such as printers, publishers, video producers, graphic designers or other people who are contracted to produce or reproduce promotional activity material for us.

The Corporate Communications Team will be responsible for managing all aspects of the St Helens Corporate and St Helens Place brands. It is also responsible for managing and administrating St Helens Cares brand on behalf of the partners who form the People’s Board.

**We aim to:**

- Always present a strong brand identity, on all communication materials and channels, to clearly and consistently identify the organisation and its key messages to stakeholders
- Ensure that all parts of the organisation are aware of the three overarching brands and adhere to the agreed brand identity guidelines for these

Internal Communications

The council’s approach to internal communications has suffered from a lack of ownership. There are limited internal communication channels - consisting of mainly emails and the intranet. A decision was taken earlier in the year to discontinue the staff magazine, Council@Work, due to its low readership and cost. Currently a Friday email is distributed to all staff and councillors with links to staff information, news and press releases.

The process for disseminating information via email is sporadic, with no clear ownership leading to ambiguity over the type and tone of messages circulated.

The council intranet does not appear to be owned or managed by any one department. The content on the site is the responsibility of relevant services as subject matter experts but only parts of the site are used and it could be developed to become an open, multi-way communication vehicle; with top down, bottom up and peer to peer communication.
In addition to the lack of an internal communication structure for staff, there is also no process for communicating with councillors on a regular basis.

We aim to:

- Develop an effective communication system which allows staff and Elected Members access to timely information on the councils’ ambitions, objectives, messages and actions. This system must enable top down, bottom up and peer to peer communication
- Create a culture change within the organisation and reinforce that staff engagement and internal communication is just as important as communication to other stakeholders
- Encourage two-way flow of communication in an open and transparent way.

7. Monitoring & Evaluating

Currently it is not possible to benchmark performance against a number of communication and engagement activities. In some areas there has been little or no performance monitoring, especially within media. It would also be difficult to use a baseline for communication, consultation and engagement with residents, as there have been no general public consultations and engagement exercises, other than more specific surveys and questionnaires around the needs of customers in relation to a specific service and the performance of that service.

The Marketing and Communication Team carry out evaluation on specific campaigns and this is continuously fed back to inform the development of subsequent marketing communication campaigns.

The council social media accounts, websites, microsites and app all provided metrics that will allow us to determine benchmarking standards against which we can measure our performance and set realistic targets and goals for improving communications across the council. We will continue to monitor and evaluate these.

To ensure that we are achieving our communication priorities we will also monitor and evaluate them through various methods including conducting the following:

- Annual residents’ survey/public perception survey – if decision is approved by Cabinet
- Annual survey of Parish Councils
- Elected members survey on communication
- Staff satisfaction survey on communication
- Individual satisfaction surveys with customers on services
- Survey of local media
- Online and social media polls on specific elements of the strategy
- Annual survey on council publications, and continuous invitation to feedback on each edition in order to improve content
- Liaise with our borough based partners to gain access to any relevant data or survey results they may hold or information fed through from forums and groups

The introduction of a new media and monitoring service for the Media Team will allow robust data to be captured as to the production, distribution, coverage and media spend for all media activity. This will allow us to benchmark performance and SMART objectives to be set for 2018/19.
## Appendix A – Communication Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timescale</th>
<th>Area of work</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Communication Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Continue to develop a wider palette of media outlets in which to pro-actively promote the council's corporate, people and place based narrative; including local, regional and national media and trade and industry press.</td>
<td>Priorities 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>To undertake training on the new media monitoring tool – Vuelio and establish how it can be fully utilised to monitor positive and negative media coverage across media websites and social media channels</td>
<td>Priorities 2, 3 &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Review how emergency/crisis communications will operate within the council</td>
<td>Priorities 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Maintain an up-to-date contact list in order to enable out-of-hours contact with the local/regional media and partner’s communication/media teams if required.</td>
<td>Priorities 2 &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Brand Management</td>
<td>Review the St Helens Council logo and brand to update and bring in line with Place and St Helens Cares branding. Develop and produce new brand guidelines to enforce this.</td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Brand Management</td>
<td>Develop and produce brand guidelines for the St Helens Place branding and St Helens Cares branding</td>
<td>Priority 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Implement a programme of meetings with various management teams across the organisation to emphasise the importance/capabilities of the communications/media function, and consequently continue to build upon relationships in seeking out good news stories to communicate with the media and residents.</td>
<td>Priorities 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Develop a process whereby service leads and relevant managers can, on an on-going basis, inform the media team of any good news stories and alert to any negative issues such as changes in service or policy, quickly and easily.</td>
<td>Priorities 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Review and redevelop the new page section on the corporate website in order to drive self-service – including video, audio and image files where suitable</td>
<td>Priorities 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Develop relevant KPIs for the media/social media function and undertake regular evaluation against them. This should then be available as a communications dashboard to show delivered as well as upcoming activity to Strategic Directors, service leads and Cabinet on a monthly basis.</td>
<td>Priorities 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Continue to develop a template messaging matrix or holding statements for a number of likely emergency/crisis situations.</td>
<td>Priorities 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Ensure members of the media team are suitably trained in crisis and emergency communications.</td>
<td>Priorities 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<td>2018</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Comms</strong></td>
<td>Develop and produce a Digital Communications Plan to set the</td>
<td>Priorities 1, 2, 4 &amp; 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>objectives, direction, activity and overall strategic management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>for digital media, to help us achieve our communication and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>engagement outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Comms</strong></td>
<td>Review how the council can reach out to people on community</td>
<td>Priorities 1, 2 &amp; 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Facebook accounts and how this could work for the benefit of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the Facebook group and the council in a controlled and measured</td>
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<td>way</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Comms</strong></td>
<td>Review the numerous tools that can be used on social media</td>
<td>Priorities 1, 2, 3 4 &amp; 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to help us engage better and improve content such as live</td>
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<td></td>
<td>streaming, memes, GIFs, infographs, video, twitter polls,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>twitter chats – concentrate on those that can give the best</td>
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<td></td>
<td>results in line with our objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Comms</strong></td>
<td>Investigate relevant platforms for the council to be present</td>
<td>Priorities 1, 3 &amp; 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>on such as Instagram and LinkedIn and make a business case for</td>
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<td></td>
<td>their use</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Comms</strong></td>
<td>Review the current social media management tool, with the</td>
<td>Priority 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>possibility of replacing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Comms</strong></td>
<td>Continue to use social media advertising, ensure its part of</td>
<td>Priority 1, 3 &amp; 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>campaign planning and links to other marketing and communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>activities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Comms</strong></td>
<td>Undertake a monthly evaluation of social media accounts using</td>
<td>Priority 4 &amp; 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a number of specific metrics. Set a number of KPIs and develop</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a format to feedback to Strategic Directors and Cabinet by</td>
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<td></td>
<td>way of a dashboard or infographic</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Comms</strong></td>
<td>Review the council’s social media accounts. Take steps to</td>
<td>Priority 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>either address or delete failing accounts. Review services or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>activities where successful social media accounts could be</td>
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<td></td>
<td>developed. Share best practice between successful accounts and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>failing ones.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marketing</strong></td>
<td>Develop and communicate a governance structure and process</td>
<td>Priority 5</td>
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<td>for the allocation, approval and sign off of all marketing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>communication campaign activity, to be approved by the Council</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leader and Strategic Directors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate publications</strong></td>
<td>Produce a residents survey to establish opinions on St</td>
<td>Priorities 1 &amp; 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Helens First, and general views on what information residents</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>would like to receive from the council, how and when</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate publications</strong></td>
<td>Research how advertising income can be generated via council</td>
<td>Priorities 4 &amp; 6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communications to residents, in order to offset costs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate publications</strong></td>
<td>Produce a costed report detailing options for St Helens</td>
<td>Priority 2 &amp; 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First for the consideration of the Cabinet. Include within</td>
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<td></td>
<td>this options for offsetting costs such as advertising</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consultation &amp; Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Develop and produce a Consultation, Communication and Engagement</td>
<td>Priority 1 &amp; 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan regarding the direction for how, when and where we will</td>
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<td></td>
<td>consult, communicate and engage with stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Brand</strong></td>
<td>Produce a communications plan detailing the gradual</td>
<td>Priority 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Task Description</td>
<td>Priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Rollout of the St Helens Place branding for approval by the Council Leader and Strategic Directors</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal Comms</td>
<td>Develop and produce a costed Internal Communication Plan to set the objectives, approach and channels for our internal communication activity, for the consideration of Council Leader and Strategic Directors</td>
<td>Priority 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal Comms</td>
<td>Initial phase of implementation of new council intranet</td>
<td>Priorities 5 &amp; 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Continually look at new ways to make news stories more appealing for the media and the public, utilising digital media – using and creating video clips, audio files, live filming via social media, and ensuring staff within the media team receive appropriate training in order to learn these skills</td>
<td>Priorities 2, 3 &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Ensure that Cabinet members and relevant senior officers are appropriately media trained so that they are best positioned to represent the council, its views and its aims in line with The Council Plan and respond to an emergency/crisis situation should the need arise.</td>
<td>Priorities 1 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>Develop an annual survey to be distributed to media/press contacts to seek feedback on the existing service provided</td>
<td>Priorities 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media &amp; PR</td>
<td>To have fully implemented a digital newsroom approach by undertaking the above key activities and those activities highlighted within the Digital Communications section</td>
<td>Priorities 1, 2, 3 &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital Comms</td>
<td>Review and update the council’s Social Media Policy for the approval of the Cabinet to reflect the proposed increased use of social media by the council.</td>
<td>Priority 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate Publications</td>
<td>Review the use of email marketing for communicating to residents and other stakeholders</td>
<td>Priority 1 &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation &amp; Engagement</td>
<td>Develop links with specific groups and communities either individually or through forums such as the Youth Forum, or by alignment with our borough based partners, to enable further targeted engagement.</td>
<td>Priorities 1, 3 &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>