Bolsover District Council

Communications Strategy 2026 to 2028

The Communications Strategy will outline how the work of the Communications, Marketing and Design team will support the strategic priorities of Bolsover District Council.

Bolsover District Council's priorities are:

Customers:

Providing excellent and accessible services.

This includes:

- working with partners
- promoting equality and diversity
- modernisation of services
- supporting and involving vulnerable and disadvantaged people
- improving health, wellbeing and increasing participation in sport, leisure and social activities

Economy:

Drive growth, promote the district and be business and visitor friendly.

This includes:

- support enterprise, innovation, jobs and skills
- unlock regeneration and development potential of long-term vacant land and buildings
- ensure financial sustainability, increase revenue streams, achieve best value, make best use of our assets
- promote the district, work with partners to increase and support the cultural and tourism sector
- maximise our influence and opportunities within EMCCA to ensure our citizens have the opportunity to develop key skills and access opportunities to work well
- help create a strong, sustainable local economy

Environment:

Protect the quality of life for residents and businesses, meet environmental challenges and increase biodiversity.

This includes:

- collectively lead the way in moving from fossil to fusion and play our part in achieving our national ambition to achieve net zero by 2050
- reduce our carbon footprint whilst supporting and encouraging residents and businesses to do the same
- increasing recycling
- enhancing biodiversity across the district
- working with stakeholders, regional and local partnerships to deliver shared strategies and priorities that support the local environment
- ensure all areas of the district are places people want to live, feel safe and are proud to live in

Housing

Deliver social and private sector housing growth

- enable housing growth by increasing the supply, quality, and range of housing to meet need
- building more, good quality, affordable housing and being a decent landlord
- preventing and responding to homelessness through early intervention and personalised solutions
- maintaining and improving property and management standards
- ensure living conditions contribute to better health outcomes for all

Core principles

The underlying principle of all communications in the council, for all audiences, is to be open and transparent.

All communications must adhere to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (appendix 1). There must be a consistent and strategic approach to communications across the council, using best practice.

The following core principles complement the above and underpin the communications strategy:

Values

Values – to be credible, Bolsover District Council's values must be reflected in our communications, both in their visual style and in the way we deliver our messages.

Clear, consistent and honest – ensuring communications is in language that is free from jargon and easy to understand. Where technical terms are needed, we will fully explain them.

Clear, consistent and honest

Open and transparent

Open and transparent – making information as widely available as possible. All residents and stakeholders should be able to easily find relevant information about the council and how it is making a difference to their quality of life, in turn enabling them to better understand, assess and contribute to our work.

Targeted, relevant and timely – recognising the need to need to tailor communications for, and targeting, specific audiences.

Targeted, relevant and timely

Accessible

Accessible – communications should be accessible for all, reflecting the diverse needs and preferences of our audiences.

Insight led – effectively using previous evaluations, industry best practice, behavioural science and intelligence so that communications and engagement activity and the wider council resources can be effectively targeted and subsequently evaluated.

Insight led

Our voice

It is vital that we interact with people, internally and externally in a straightforward and honest way.

Plain English should be used, jargon should be avoided, and we should ensure we communicate in a way that is easy to understand. Acronyms should not be used unless they are explained the first time they are used and then repeated as an acronym.

We should also ensure we are listening to what residents say and are open to feedback.

All Council communications should be written in an appropriate style for the medium they are being published on.

For most communications it is appropriate to use a formal, authoritative tone. This can ease for social media channels and internal messaging.

We refer to the Council in the third person e.g. 'BDC has taken action'.... As opposed to 'We have taken action'.

Press releases will be written in a journalistic style, adhering to the grammatic rules thereof.

Our audience

The council's audience will typically include:

- Residents
- Tenants
- Bolsover District Council staff and councillors
- Hard-to-reach groups
- Visitor attractions
- The media
- MPs
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- The business community
- Visitors and those who work in the area
- Other public sector organisations (EMCCA, police, fire etc.)

Communications methods

The council will ensure it remains transparent by producing accessible, relevant and timely communications.

There are multiple channels available for the council to use to communicate, and the most appropriate channels will be used for whichever audience is needing to be reached.

Currently communication methods used are:

- Press releases
- Website
- Social media
- E-newsletters
- InTouch (quarterly magazine)
- Bolsover Homes (twice yearly housing magazine)
- Video and photographic content
- Digital screens

Internal channels include:

- Intranet
- Internal emails
- Print

The Press

The media plays an important role in shaping perceptions of the council.

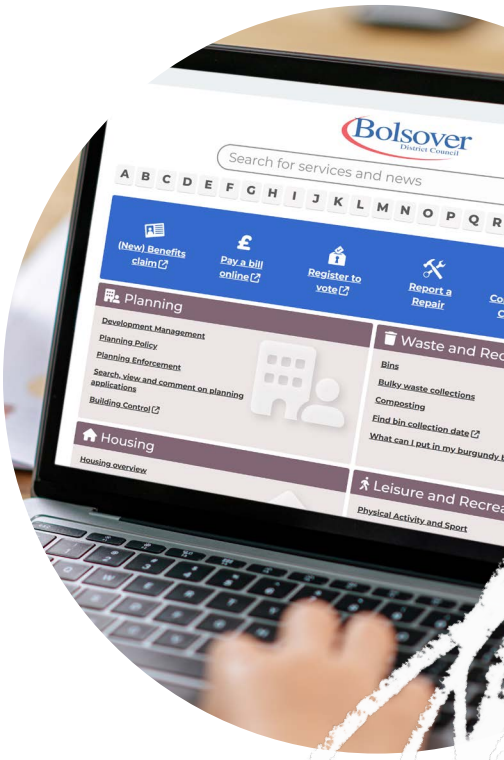
The ever-changing nature of journalism means the press will pursue a range of different stories.

It is important to build a working relationship with local reporters where possible and ensure the council's side of the story is told accurately.

Key points for effective management of media relations:

- Respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time
- Be helpful, polite and positive
- Never say 'no comment'
- Issue timely, relevant and well-written press releases
- Refer all hostile enquiries to the Customer Services Manager, Monitoring Officer or Chief Executive Officer
- Pre-empt potential stories arising from council agendas and minutes

Website



The council's website is a depositary for all the council's documents and information. It is to be regularly updated and kept up-to-date.

Regular work is to take place to ensure accessibility compliance and software viability.

Social media

The council's current social media channels are:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Bluesky
- LinkedIn

All channels are open to review and new channels may be started if deemed appropriate. Likewise, old channels can be deleted if necessary.

No Council social media channels should be created without the express permission of the CMD Manager. If channels are created for specific teams, the CMD team should be given access to those channels.

The main social media channels are the BDC corporate channels but there are also channels for Extreme Wheels, Go! Active and Bolsover UK (Place programme).

E-newsletters

The council uses a GovDelivery system to send a variety of e-newsletters to communicate to subscribers.

These topics can change at any point, but subscribers cannot be migrated from one e-newsletter to another.

The e-newsletters are used to send more specific information to people on narrower topics. There will be articles published via this medium that are not necessarily repeated elsewhere e.g. environmental awareness days.

InTouch

The InTouch magazine is a quarterly printed form of communication that is delivered to every household in the district.

The magazine is uploaded onto the website in PDF format at the same time as delivery commences.

The content of InTouch reflects the news from the previous 3 months and complied by the Communications, Marketing and Design Manger and agreed with the Council Leader.

A Leader's Column forms part of the magazine and should include the Leader's activities and a round-up of Council activities from the previous three months.

Bolsover Homes

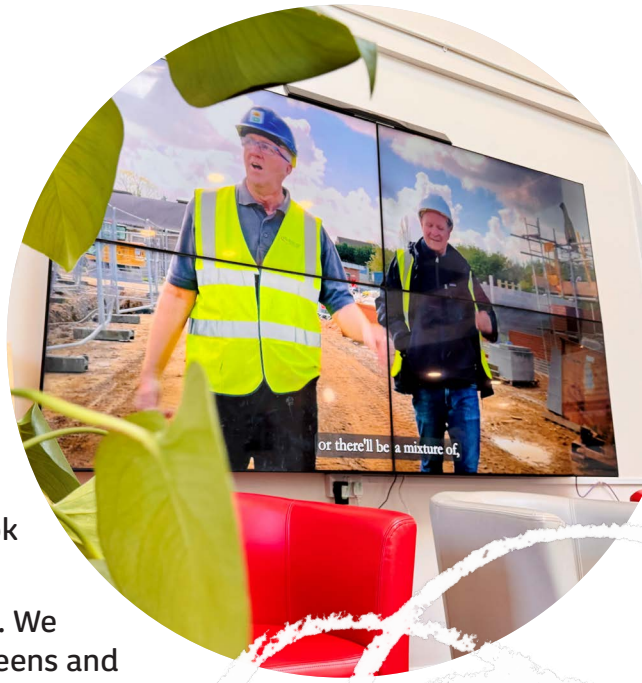
This is a printed magazine delivered directly to the homes of Council tenants and the Council's Independent Living Schemes.

The content is created by the Housing team and is sent to the Communications team to rework as needed. The magazine is then designed by the CMD team.

Video and photo content

This is produced primarily by the Visual Content Producer but the Communications Officers and CMD Manager will also take part when needed.

Digital screens



The Council has digital display screens in the three of the four contact centres (Clowne, Bolsover, Shirebrook), as well as a large display at the entrance of The Arc and several around the Go! Active facility.

Some of these screens are video only and some are a mixture.

The content of the screens can be tailored to the placement of the screen. For example, the screen in Shirebrook might display a business advert for a Shirebrook business where the others do not.

It is free for businesses to display adverts on these screens. We are able to accommodate most local businesses on the screens and do this when requested by those businesses or groups.

Intranet

The intranet is an internal communications tool run by the CMD team. The CMD team should work with the Employee Engagement Officer to publicise personal achievements and milestones of staff.

Internal emails

These should be sent only when needed. Requests for internal emails can be refused and instead adding that request to the weekly bulletin.

Internal emails should only be sent when the matter is urgent or time specific.

The weekly bulletin is sent at 2pm every Friday and is a round-up of all Council news both internal and external. The author of these emails can add an informal element to these emails as appropriate e.g. a weekly quiz or ‘did you know’ section.

Posters

There are several areas within the offices where printed posters can be displayed.

Posters should be designed in a professional manner and be on relevant topics only.

Aims

The next few years will be essential for Bolsover District Council as the move to a unitary authority draws closer.

The top five priorities for the Communications, Marketing and Design team are:

1. Improve internal engagement

Local Government Reorganisation will be unsettling for many and the high-level discussions taking place will need to be turned into user friendly, accessible articles.

- Build a clear and consistent flow of information using the corporate internal channels to help staff understand decisions and changes.
- Foster a culture where staff feel informed and involved
- Use a mix of channels to reach office-based and remote workers.
- Align internal messaging with external communications to ensure the organisation speaks with one voice.

2. Strengthen trust and transparency

The Council should be working to ensure that decisions are publicised in an even-handed manner.

- Communicate clearly and consistently about the Council's decisions and services.
- Use plain, jargon free language in accessible formats.
- Publish news updates in a timely manner

3. Enhance digital and social media communications

Social media is one of the council's strongest communications tools. The CMD team will be working to improve these channels.

- Fast and responsive, user-centred communications across all social media platforms
- Use data and analytics to understand what content works and what is getting engagement
- Ensure consistency across channels including brand identity

4. Support corporate priorities by celebrating work that meets those goals

All communications should align with the council's strategic priorities.

- Provide professional support to departments to ensure consistent messaging
- Develop campaigns to drive behaviour change e.g. recycling, community safety

5. Strengthen insight, evaluation and data-driven decision making

It is essential that communications is a data driven team, using analytics to improve the messages we send, and the way we send them.

- Build evaluation into all campaigns to measure impact, reach and effectiveness
- Use analytics from digital channels to understand trends
- Develop a culture where communications decisions are guided by data as well as professional judgement

Communities and Local Government Circular 01/2011
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SWIE 5DU

31 March 2011

CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY

1. I am directed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to draw the attention of your authority to the annexed code of recommended practice on local authority publicity, which has been issued under section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986. It comes into force on 31 March 2011. On the same date the codes of practice issued on 15 August 1988 (Department of the Environment circular 20/88) and 2 April 2001 (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions circular 06/2001) are withdrawn in relation to local authorities in England.

2. The code has been prepared following consultation with such associations of local authorities as appeared to the Secretary of State to be concerned and such local authorities with whom consultation appeared to the Secretary of State to be desirable. A draft of the code has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.

Signed

Paul Rowsell
A senior civil servant in the Department for Communities and Local Government

The Chief Executive –

County Councils in England

District Councils in England

London Borough Councils

The Council of the Isles of Scilly

Parish Clerks of Parish Councils in England

The Town Clerk, City of London

The Chief Officer of the –

Metropolitan Police Authority

Police authorities established under section 3 of the Police Act 1996

The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

The Broads Authority

National Parks Authorities

Joint authorities under Pt 4 of the Local Government Act 1985

The Manchester Combined Authority

THE CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY

Introduction

1. This code applies to all local authorities in England specified in section 6 of the Local Government Act 1986 and to other authorities in England which have that provision applied to them by other legislation. Where the term "local authorities" is used in this code it should be taken as referring to both those categories of authority. References to "the Act" are to the Local Government Act 1986.

2. Local authorities are required by section 4(1) of the Act to have regard to the contents of this code in coming to any decision on publicity. Section 6 of the Act defines publicity as "any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public". The code therefore applies in relation to all decisions by local authorities relating to paid advertising and leaflet campaigns, publication of free newspapers and newssheets and maintenance of websites – including the hosting of material which is created by third parties.

3. Nothing in this code overrides the prohibition by section 2 of the Act on the publication by local authorities of material which in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. Paragraphs 21 to 24 offer some guidance for local authorities on the management of publicity which may contain or have links to party political material.

Principles

4. Publicity by local authorities should:-

   - be lawful
   - be cost effective
   - be objective
   - be even-handed
   - be appropriate
   - have regard to equality and diversity
   - be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Lawfulness

5. Local authorities should ensure that publicity complies with all applicable statutory provisions. Paid-for advertising must comply with the Advertising Standards Authority's Advertising Codes.

6. Part 3 of the Communications Act 2003 prohibits political advertising on television or radio. Local authorities must ensure that their publicity does not breach these restrictions.

7. Section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 places a specific restriction on the publication by a local authority of material relating to a referendum under Part 7 of that Act, during the period of 28 days immediately before the referendum is held.

8. Regulation 5 of the Local Authorities (Conduct of Referendums) (England) Regulations 2007 (S.I. 2007/2089) prohibits local authorities from publishing material in the 28 days immediately before a referendum which expresses support for, or opposition to a particular answer to a referendum question relating to the constitutional arrangements of the authority.

9. Regulation 15 of the Local Authorities (Referendums, Petitions and Directions) (England) Regulations 2000 (S.I. 2000/2852) prohibits local authorities from incurring expenditure to publish material which appears designed to influence people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition relating to the constitutional arrangements of the authority, or to assist others to publish such material.

Cost effectiveness

10. In relation to all publicity, local authorities should be able to confirm that consideration has been given to the value for money that is being achieved, including taking into account any loss of potential revenue arising from the use of local authority-owned facilities to host authority publicity.

11. In some circumstances it will be difficult to quantify value for money, for example where the publicity promotes a local amenity which is free to use. In such a case authorities should be able to show that they have given thought to alternative means of promoting the amenity and satisfied themselves that the means of publicity chosen is the most appropriate.

12. If another public authority, such as central government, has issued publicity on a particular topic, local authorities should incur expenditure on issuing publicity on the same matter only if they consider that additional value is achieved by the duplication of that publicity. Additional value might be achieved if locally produced publicity gives a local context to national issues.

13. The purchase of advertising space should not be used as a method of subsidising voluntary, public or commercial organisations.

14. Local authorities should consider whether it is appropriate to seek advice from economic analysts, public relations experts or other sources of expert advice before embarking on a publicity campaign involving very large expenditure.

Objectivity

15. Local authorities should ensure that publicity relating to policies and proposals from central government is balanced and factually accurate. Such publicity may set out the local authority's views and reasons for holding those views, but should avoid anything likely to be perceived by readers as constituting a political statement, or being a commentary on contentious areas of public policy.

16. Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should 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. It is acceptable for local authority publicity to correct erroneous material which has been published by other parties, despite the fact that the material being corrected may have been published with the intention of influencing the public's opinions about the policies of the authority. Such publicity should seek to explain the facts in an objective manner.

17. Where paid-for advertising is used by local authorities, it should be clearly identified as being advertising. Paid-for advertising, including advertisements for the recruitment of staff, should not be used in any publication owned or controlled by a political party.

18. Advertisements for the recruitment of staff should reflect the tradition of political impartiality of local authority employees and should not (except in the case of advertisements relating to the appointment of staff pursuant to section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (assistants for political groups)) refer to any political activities or affiliations of candidates.

Even-handedness

19. Where local authority publicity addresses matters of political controversy it should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner.

20. Other than in the circumstances described in paragraph 34 of this code, it is acceptable for local authorities to publicise the work done by individual members of the authority, and to present the views of those individuals on local issues. This might be appropriate, for example, when one councillor has been the "face" of a particular campaign. If views expressed by or attributed to individual councillors do not reflect the views of the local authority itself, such publicity should make this fact clear.

21. It is acceptable for local authorities to host publicity prepared by third parties – for example an authority may host a blog authored by members of the authority or a public forum on which members of the public may leave comments. Maintenance by a local authority of a website permitting the posting of material by third parties constitutes a continuing act of publication by that local authority which must accordingly have a system for moderating and removing any unacceptable material.

22. It is generally acceptable for local authorities to host publicity, such as a blog, which itself contains links to external sites over which the local authority has no control where the content of those sites would not itself comply with this code. This does not amount to giving assistance to any person for the publication of material which local authorities are not permitted to publish. However, particular care must be taken by local authorities during the period before elections and referendums to ensure that no breach of any legal restriction takes place. It may be necessary to suspend the hosting of material produced by third parties or public forums which contain links to impermissible material during such periods.

23. It is acceptable for publicity containing material prepared by third parties and hosted by local authorities to include logos of political parties or other organisations with which the third parties are associated.

24. It is acceptable for publicity produced or hosted by local authorities to include a logo associated with a particular member of the authority, such as a directly elected mayor, or leader of the authority. Publicity material produced by local authorities relating to a particular member must not seek to affect public support for that individual.

25. Where local authorities provide assistance to third parties to issue publicity they should ensure that the principles in this code are adhered to by the recipients of that assistance.

Appropriate use of publicity

26. Local authorities should not incur any expenditure in retaining the services of lobbyists for the purpose of the publication of any material designed to influence public officials, Members of Parliament, political parties or the Government to take a particular view on any issue.

27. Local authorities should not incur expenditure on providing stands or displays at conferences of political parties for the purpose of publicity designed to influence members of political parties to take a particular view on any issue.

28. Local authorities should not publish or incur expenditure in commissioning in hard copy or on any website, newsletters, newssheets or similar communications which seek to emulate commercial newspapers in style or content. Where local authorities do commission or publish newsletters, newssheets or similar communications, they should not issue them more frequently than quarterly, apart from parish councils which should not issue them more frequently than monthly. Such communications should not include material other than information for the public about the business, services and amenities of the council or other local service providers.

29. Publicity about local authorities and the services they provide should be freely available to anyone who wishes to receive such information in a format readily accessible and understandable by the person making the request or by any particular group for which services are provided.

30. All local authority publicity should clearly and unambiguously identify itself as a product of the local authority. Printed material, including any newsletters, newssheets or similar publications published by the local authority, should do this on the front page of the publication.

Equality and diversity etc

31. Publicity by local authorities may seek to influence (in accordance with the relevant law and in a way which they consider positive) the attitudes of local people or public behaviour in relation to matters of health, safety, crime prevention, race relations, equality, diversity and community issues.

32. Local authorities should consider how any publicity they issue can contribute to the promotion of any duties applicable to them in relation to the elimination of discrimination, the advancement of equality and the fostering of good relations.

Care during periods of heightened sensitivity

33. Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums – see paragraphs 7 to 9 of this code. It may be necessary to suspend the hosting of material produced by third parties, or to close public forums during this period to avoid breaching any legal restrictions.

34. During the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, local authorities should not publish any publicity on controversial issues or report views or proposals in such a way that identifies them with any individual members or groups of members. Publicity relating to individuals involved directly in the election should not be published by local authorities during this period unless expressly authorised by or under statute. It is permissible for local authorities to publish factual information which identifies the names, wards and parties of candidates at elections.

35. In general, local authorities should not issue any publicity which seeks to influence voters. However this general principle is subject to any statutory provision which authorises expenditure being incurred on the publication of material designed to influence the public as to whether to support or oppose a question put at a referendum. It is acceptable to publish material relating to the subject matter of a referendum, for example to correct any factual inaccuracies which have appeared in publicity produced by third parties, so long as this is even-handed and objective and does not support or oppose any of the options which are the subject of the vote.

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