



Context

Manchester City Council had a three-year communications strategy in place until March 2020.

At that point, given the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic and the work across the council to respond, the decision was taken to have a Covid-19 focussed communications plan that would align with the council response.

However, it is now appropriate to move back to a three-year planning cycle to allow strategic delivery of communications, better planning and to develop the service in line with changing needs.

Meaningful communications plays an important role in everything we do as a council and is the responsibility of everyone and is critical to delivery of the council's role in the community.

Our Communications Strategy sets out how we communicate with our local residents and stakeholders. The principal purpose of the Communications Strategy is to support the council's refreshed Corporate Plan, which sets out how we will help make the Our Manchester vision for 2025 a reality.

The Our Manchester Strategy's five main themes are to make Manchester:

- **Thriving and Sustainable** – vibrant with a cutting-edge economy involving and fairly rewarding all our people.
- **Highly Skilled** – work-ready, well-educated young people and all residents supported to take up opportunities.
- **Progressive and Equitable** – so all can thrive, with better joined-up support, care and health services.
- **Liveable and Zero-Carbon** – safe, enjoyable neighbourhoods with affordable housing, zero-carbon by 2038 using green growth and design, energy, and more climate-resilience.
- **Connected** – more walking, cycling and green transport, and accessible digital technology used by and working for everyone.

Our nine Corporate Priorities reflect what we – as a council – need to do and focus on to deliver the Our Manchester vision. Equality, inclusion and sustainability is at the heart of everything we do along with a renewed focus on young people, our economy, health, housing, our environment and infrastructure.

All communications activities must demonstrably promote work carried out to achieve the objectives outlined in the Corporate Plan.

The nine priorities are:

1. Zero carbon Manchester
2. Growth that benefits everyone
3. Young people
4. Healthy, cared-for people

5. Housing
6. Neighbourhoods
7. Connections
8. Equality
9. Well-managed council

Strategic Communications team and mission statement

Mission Statement

To support and enhance the reputation of the Council, through effective strategic communications, professional executive support for the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team (SMT), the leadership and successful events and programmes. Building trust and confidence that strengthens relationships with citizens, stakeholders, our staff and promotes the city and the Council.

Communications core objectives

- To develop a communications function that supports Council priorities based on an engagement model of communications - not traditional marketing
- To deliver communications that recognise Manchester's diverse audiences, targeted to their needs and preferences rather than blanket activity
- To develop communications that use and recognise the tools and voices available to us - listening and working with others, particularly supporting staff with the tools to act as advocates for the Council and city
- To lead the council's approach to accessibility, demonstrating best practice and ensuring compliance across the organisation
- To develop the Communications Service further as a centre of excellence that:
 - Protects and enhances the reputation of the Council and city
 - Supports council-wide priorities first
 - Is seen as a market leader in the delivery of strategic and operational communications
 - Delivers where appropriate through strong partnerships
- Ensure that all activity recognises Manchester's diverse communities, whether that's targeted communications activity or bespoke civic events and engagements

Team structure

The service is structured into two areas - **Content and Strategy** and **Operations and Commercial**.

Content and Strategy plans and develops the strategy for communications activity, drawing out the key messages and shaping the tactics to get the messages to the relevant audiences. They then bring the story to life by providing creative treatments, designing web pages and content presentation/ user journeys. The following services are provided:

- Strategic marketing, account management, insight, research (with assistance from PRI), channel planning, media buying and digital communications
- Press office - promotes the Council via proactive PR, protects its reputation and responds to media inquiries, major events supporting communications (marketing and digital)
- Internal communications – intranet, staff communication and engagement
- Creative design – crafting the look and feel of the messages and campaigns through all mediums based on the target audience

- Digital - creating effective web content that supports residents to access services and information

Operations and Commercial delivers the operational functions for communications - print, mail, distribution and supporting residents with interpretations and translations and supporting events with technical delivery. This team also identifies opportunities to commercialise our operations. The following services are provided:

- Print and mail services – apart from the obvious this also includes delivery of the digitisation of operational services, such as hybrid mail and management of the local print infrastructure
- Translations and interpretation services
- Presentation and technical AV services
- Commercial relationship management

Work Plan

The Content and Strategy team works within an annual work programme of communications and marketing campaigns that link directly to the service and council's business objectives and help protect and improve the council's reputation.

The work plan is developed by marketing/communications specialists working with service managers ensuring the council's strategic aims and services objectives are reflected in all communications activity.

There is a clear line of sight of all work coming into the team that can be prioritised by managers on an ongoing basis and resource is used as flexibly as possible to deliver the priorities and projects emerging.

Equalities runs throughout all activity, ensuring inclusion is a key part of service planning. This applies to how we develop and share messaging, the channels and networks we use, and how we listen to feedback.

The broad scope of the team's work is as follows:

- **Priority 1** campaigns are those that will have the biggest impact on council reputation and are vital to the delivery of one of our agreed priorities.
- **Priority 2** campaigns are closely aligned to priorities but have a lesser impact on the reputation of the organisation.
- **Priority 3** activity includes smaller campaigns - either aimed at smaller audiences or supporting time limited activity or events.

The service has significant income generation targets covering posts and revenue spending.

Since 2011/12, there has been overall savings of £1.225m. Since 2016/17 budgets have been fairly stable until the £300k savings in 2021/22.

Core principles

The underlying principle of all communications in the council, for all audiences, is that there must be two-way communications with meaningful opportunities for the audiences to respond and the council to listen.

This is in line with the Our Manchester Strategy which is committed to building a fairer city for everyone who lives, works, volunteers, studies or plays here.

There is 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** – to be credible, the Our Manchester 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.
- **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.
- **Accessible** - communications should be accessible for all, reflecting the diverse needs and preferences of our audiences.
- **Digital first** - In line with the council's digital transformation, and the work of the Future Shape programme, the team has for some time been working to a principle of digital first. This not only increases efficiency and reduces costs but is also more environmentally friendly. However, a range of communications methods are deployed to reach all our audiences, including those with limited or no digital access.
- **Collaboration** – building on the city's strong history of partnership working, we utilise both formal and informal partnerships to maximise and improve engagement with all our residents and communities. By working together and finding creative solutions we can create understanding and tackle inequalities.
- **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.

Audiences and stakeholders

While this is not an exhaustive list, key groups we will communicate with on various matters include the following. This will be through direct contact or via networks and third parties to reach relevant groups:

- Residents
- Businesses
- Our own workforce
- Elected members
- Sector partner organisations including MHCC, MFT, GMCA, MLCO, Growth Company, Marketing Manchester, TfGM and their networks
- Voluntary sector organisations
- Community groups (formal and informal) including resident groups (by location, practice, interest etc)
- Business networks (FSB, CityCo, Chamber of Commerce)
- Social networks
- MPs and national government as appropriate
- Local, regional, trade and national media

- Core Cities and the LGA
- Partners including regeneration partners, investors

Channels Overview

The Council has access to a wide range of channels. These can be free channels that we own or partner channels that will promote, influence and amplify our messages.

We will also use paid media channels and supplier channels as necessary. We do all of this so we can successfully reach/target and engage the identified audiences for our campaigns, projects and service updates. Supporting our objectives and delivering outcomes.

Channels and audiences – examples

Note: this is not an exhaustive list but highlights of some of the channels we are able to work with and regularly use.

MCC Channels

E-bulletins - Gov Delivery

MCC owned ebulletin service - direct digital comms to active subscribers focusing on key council campaigns

Used for all key council lead campaigns and key comms to residents – news, recycling/bin changes, community events, Elections

Corporate social media accounts

MCC has a substantial social media presence

Facebook - 100k Followers

Twitter - 195k Followers

Instagram - 18.5k Followers

Linked In - 31k Followers

Used for all key council lead campaigns, key comms to residents, events, culture, council meetings and initiatives, as well as amplifying content from partner channels where appropriate.

Also used reactively to distribute current events and real time messages for residents.

Community Facebook groups

For targeted messages to known Community Facebook groups when needed e.g. Covid updates and flood warnings and events or access to support.

MCC service owned social media accounts

In addition to the Corporate social media accounts there are accounts that are managed by MCC services, such as Neighbourhood teams, these accounts will share and promote priority campaigns and messages along with local content that is relevant or specific to their service areas.

MCC Services

We work with many of our services as they are a channel to engage our residents and businesses such as Libraries, Work and Skills, Neighbourhood Teams.

Partners

As a council we work closely with a variety of partners across Manchester and Greater Manchester.

Partners include: Health colleagues MHCC and the GMHSC Partnership, GMP, TfGM, the GMCA, MACC, LGBT Foundation, Visit Manchester, Recycle for Greater Manchester and more.

We work closely with businesses and charitable organisations in the city.

This joined up approach help us target even further and access audiences we may not be able to get to on our own.

Paid Media

Out of home/Outdoor

Digital screens

Large format digital screens across MCC council area.
Main suppliers Ocean, JC Decaux, Global, Clear channel.

Used for Flagship and high-profile campaigns and events e.g. Manchester Day, Zero Carbon, Fostering

City wide audience. All demographics.

Manchester City Council has access to an allocation of space free of charge on many of these sites e.g. Ocean city centre digital screens. As well as the new JC Decaux large format screens that have recently been installed across the city.

Large Format print sites

Multiple print sites across MCC council area
Formats - 6 sheets, 48 sheets, bus stop advertising.
Main companies are Clear Channel and JC Decaux.

Used for flagship and high-profile campaigns and events – e.g. Recycling, Festival of Manchester, Covid

City wide audience. All demographics. Plus, site specific options for location targeting.

Telephone kiosk advertising

External advertising on kiosks across MCC Council ward areas.
Offers an option for outdoor media at a lower cost.
Sites are owned by Global.

Targeted to district level and across MCC high and mid-level campaigns – e.g. MAES, Student Safety, Leisure activities

Audience can be geo targeted with these adverts - South Manchester for example (dependent on number of sites in an area)

Digital ad vans

Large mobile digital screens – that can carry multiple artwork and messaging. With the ability to move around ward areas and target high footfall sites.

Used for high profile campaigns. But budget cost can allow for mid-level campaigns where necessary – e.g. Covid, Thank you Weekend

Audience – Capable of high-level Geo targeting - we can map routes and areas in any of our wards for this activity. And also rotate creative and react to current issues.

Print Media

MEN

Largest focused print media supplier in Manchester area.

They offer print media and digital advertising packages to cover our full council area.

Used for multi-level campaigns and events. Budget can be set accordingly to the level of each campaign -Universal Credit, Budget/Consultations, Christmas Markets

Key MCC audience footprint.

Digital targeting available to ward level and key demographic audiences - Families, Community, etc.

Also, possible to target on theme and relevance of a campaign - relevant ads placed in context with editorial

Targeted print media

The use of specific publications based on demographic and/or location - e.g.:

Asian Times - Southern Asian audience

Your voice - South Manchester community

Primary Times - Families and parents

Used for key audience-based campaigns - Covid, All sorts to do, Budget/consultations

Audience footprint for these publications can range from GM to North West audience (except for localised South Manchester publications)

Radio

Traditional Radio

Advertising packages available for 30 second audio adverts across key stations in our council area.

Global and Bauer are the main leaders in the market

Bauer - Hits Radio (plus sub stations)

Global - Capital FM, Heart FM

Used for high profile campaigns, due to substantial budget needed – e.g. Manchester Day, Christmas Markets

Audience - Station footprints are GM and North west.

Digital Radio

Digital radio offers geographical and demographical targeting of digital adverts, across the suppliers network.

The adverts are distributed across mobile and smart devices - Echo, Google, ETC.
Bauer and Global have their own platforms that cover their own stations (plus independents)

Used for high to mid profile campaigns. Budget needs are lower than traditional radio as adverts are bought on an impression basis - Elections, Universal Credit

Audience - Geographical targeting to a Manchester footprint. Plus, some layering available depending on data sets - Families, Age ranges, Devices"

Hyper Local radio

Independent local radio stations in our area.

30 second radio adverts and live read and editorial packages can be arranged with these local providers

Used for local resident campaigns - relevant to localised audience and demographic – e.g. Covid, Domestic Abuse, Hate Crime

Stations in our area are:

North Manchester FM

All FM – covers South Manchester – Local to Longsight, Levenshulme, Gorton, Rusholme
Wythenshawe FM

Digital Media

Google display ads

Targeted digital display advertising across Google search and advertising network

Used for high profile campaigns in the main, as significant budget is needed – e.g. Register to vote, Christmas Markets, Foster Care

Audience - Multiple geographical and demographic targeting available, such as families, search footprint, mirrored social status

Facebook/Instagram

Paid activity across Facebook and Instagram's platform. Multiple artwork and messaging options, with direct link to web content and further action.

Used on campaigns at all levels, budget can be set accordingly – e.g. Markets, Our Manchester, Be proud

Audience - Geo targeting is excellent and can be drilled down to ward areas.
Demographic targeting Age, Parents, Interests - multiple options to create audience profiles."

Digital Mobile advertising

Targeted mobile display advertising - audience and behaviour lead options.

Used on campaigns at all levels, budget can be set accordingly – e.g. Markets, Our Manchester, Be proud.

Audience - Geo targeting available down to post code level. Multi demographics - based on user's digital footprint.

Print Distribution

Letters and Leaflets

Distribution of key literature - for localised or city-wide campaigns

Essential campaigns with a key need to reach an offline audience – e.g. local consultations, budget consultation, road closures.

Audience locality and a need to provide additional communications drives the targeting for this.

Internal communications

Internal communications is an area we have continued to develop, and which has come into its own during the pandemic and in the council's response to the findings in the race equalities review. However, we must continue that development ensuring staff and partners working on council priorities are included, engaged and that they receive messaging in a format that works for them.

The new intranet is now up and running which has vastly improved on the previous intranet, is usable for staff who do not work online, and staff survey feedback demonstrates improvement.

For this reason, internal communications has its own strategy focussing on continuous improvement, on closer working relationships with the Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD) teams and with its own improvement metrics.

The team remains a key part of enabling the transformation change programme Future Shape, the response to the equalities reviews and in ensuring the timely transmission of messages from the chief executive and SMT across the organisation.

Race and equalities review outcomes and progress

Communications and engagement was one of five themed workstreams established by the race equality working party to set about meeting the corporate Race Review recommendations and as such was also a key focus in the review recommendations.

Communications has a role to play in helping to embed race equality in what we see, hear, and do at all levels of the organisation. Our approach includes helping to develop and highlight opportunities to support and celebrate the workforce no matter what role they do or where they work and understand how we all contribute to a fair and equal council.

Strategic communications, specifically internal communications and directorate communications work closer together, alongside HR and Organisational Development, and with other stakeholders including staff, to meet the recommendations.

While progress has been good to date, it is recognised that there is still work to do and this is an important part of ongoing team development which will continue over the life of this strategy.

The review recommended a refresh of the Council's communications approach for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to ensure that:

- The review is high profile
- Key messages, such as the importance of race equality in the Council, reach all staff
- Staff are informed of progress made on race equality and reflects the experiences of black, ethnic or minority staff

Progress to date includes:

- New regular feature in our regular bulletin for managers – Forum - about progress, talent programme, staff networks
- New intranet pages created for the review –narrative and recommendations inaccessible format for all staff
- Staff are now signposted to the Race Equality Staff Network, so they can share ideas and stories with the staff group for a joined-up approach
- Collaboration with the Race Equality Working Party on future ideas including data campaign, engagement tools, summary outcomes
- Equalities features as key message in Our Manchester, Corporate Plan and Future Council narrative and subsequent messages
- Our Manchester brand refresh has developed new characters which are more representative of our staff and of Manchester

There has also been a number of stories in our corporate communications. Guidance has been shared with staff about how they can submit their stories –there are no barriers to having their stories told.

Showcasing and celebrating our diversity is valuable and important part of our work and while there has been progress made this year, we continue to build on improvements.

Partnerships and community groups, health equity and inclusion

The pandemic in many ways forced us to quickly review and change tactics in the way we engage with our communities. Looking forward, it is important to recognise that some of the improvements in our service delivery and indeed some of the ways of working need to remain in place to achieve our objectives.

The focus on health equity through the Covid Health Equity Manchester (CHEM) work has transformed community engagement and built a level of trust and co-operation that was previously not in place in a robust way. This partnership approach – with representatives from various community representative sounding boards, community groups, disability groups, health professionals and engagement leads - is our blueprint for the future.

And while funding will change post pandemic and the health landscape will change with the transformation to Integrated Care System (ICS), we must keep the approach in place which is founded on sharing data and intelligence with key groups to co-produce effective engagement and communications materials. This work will also incorporate the resulting actions from the 'Build Back Fairer' Marmot Review and our own Manchester Marmot Health Inequalities Task Group.

In the last year, there has been formal joint working with the Manchester Health and Care Commissioning(MHCC) communications team and the council communications team. The council's Strategic Head of Communications attends MHCC Executive meetings and a joint council/MHCC head of health communications ensures there are now shared outcomes on delivery of communications activity in the forward plan.

While at this stage the future locality offer is not clear, the fundamental principles of this joint approach – leading a communications and engagement group with representatives from the Manchester City Council, Manchester Health and Care Commissioning(MHCC), Manchester Local Care Organisation(MLCO), Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust(MFT), Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust(GMMH) and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise(VCSE) sector should continue and develop in the lifetime of this strategy.

These same principles have also been applied to the Age Friendly activity, and the relationships here will develop to continue to ensure the principles apply to all our communications activity.

Digital offer and media – digital inclusion

Over the course of this strategy we will continue to work on a digital first approach, targeting digital networks with information to encourage a direct relationship. We will continue the current level of engagement with traditional media, for both proactive and reactive work, but our focus will be on our own content creation and strategic positioning of that narrative. The team works closely with the press – across hyper local, local, regional, national and international outlets to gain proactive coverage for stories that reflect the Council's priorities.

The team also manages enquiries to ensure stories about the Council reflect a fair and honest representation of a given scenario (whether positive or negative), and importantly include a 'Right of Reply' in stories about the Council.

As such we will be publishers of information rather than providers to media. It should be stressed that media outlets are often also part of the same networks as the council.

This digital first approach is not at the cost of those people who do not have digital access – we will continue to work closely with services and communities to ensure that suitable non-digital alternatives are available. This applies to our external work as well as our internal communications activity.

Social media is now one of the council's main platforms for residents to receive information and news from us. Our channels have continued to grow steadily each month keeping residents more connected than ever, something that has been put into sharp focus during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our approach to social media is the subject of its own strategy.

Developing the team and individuals

Team and individual development is a vital aspect of a high performing service and as such is a high priority. However, given reducing budgets, much of the traditional external-based training is now no longer an option.

As a team, we will continue to generate our own cross-service learning, based on sharing best practice locally, with other core cities and with national providers including the Government Communications Service (GCS) and LGcomms. LGcomms is a national organisation made up of an association of authorities that works to raise the standard of communications in local government.

Individuals identify development needs through the 'About You' process, and we will continue to provide that support and development in-house through colleagues as

appropriate. Where team members attend paid for external courses, part of the development is to share that learning with wider members of the service.

Changing shape of the team/areas to invest and save

The team must constantly evolve to meet changing needs and preferences of residents and businesses, as well as the needs of the council.

Work will continue to ensure that the service can handle any reductions to its funding in the period of this strategy by:

- Developing the teams to be more generalist in skills, while retaining core specialist skills
- Recognising areas of growth and where more investment is needed (e.g. AV and presentations) and investing in training to ensure resilience and capacity
- To look at the overall structure of our offer and whether this remains the best way forward
- Team plans recognise where external factors may impact on the role of the service or individuals – for example the Resident and Business Digital Experience Programme (RBDXP) may change the nature of the digital team or retirements may mean succession plans need to be addressed
- Regularly review contracts for best value – for example social media management software, maintenance contracts

The team remains a key enabler for other services to achieve savings, and for the council's major transformation programmes including the Future Shape programme and Resident and Business Digital Experience Programme(RBDXP).

We will continue to use technology on offer to drive down our service costs, maintain our digital first approach but be mindful that some of those savings will continue to be used to ensure those who do not have digital access are not left behind.

Crisis communications

A standalone Emergency Communications Plan outlines the principles, resource allocation and strategic communications activity required to provide corporate communications during the response and recovery phases arising from an incident or civil emergency.

It forms part of the Council's emergency response and recovery plan and outlines how Manchester City Council will communicate with residents and a range of stakeholders. The plan is reviewed on an annual basis or following any major incident.

Evaluation

This is key to knowing whether as a team we are having an impact – if we are influencing and achieving outcomes, rather than outputs.

This has been a huge area of whole team development in the last two years and will continue to be developed as a core skill for all employees and a standard part of all communications planning.

All communications plans for priorities 1 and 2 work will have an evaluation scheme devised as part of the initial workplan.

For the life of this strategy, as a team we will:

- Continue to with the quarterly corporate reputation tracker of attitude, perception and satisfaction on the council priorities for internal use with SMT.
- Continue to use and develop further the monthly evaluation documents used for team development and challenge, also sharing with SMT and key directorates as appropriate (examples to be attached)
- Continue to include communications as a key strand of the annual staff survey
- Campaigns to have their own evaluation metrics to report to relevant directors

Examples of routine daily evaluation include:

Social media metrics

- Followers – building an audience
- User engagement – clicks on call to action
- Organic reach and impressions
- Shares

Web and direct email content

- Views and dwell time on agreed priority web pages
- Email click through –acting upon a call to action

Media

- Media coverage