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# Communications Strategy – May 2021

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**Elmbridge**  
Borough Council  
*... bridging the communities ...*



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## Communications at Elmbridge

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Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) believes that good communications is about engaging with our audiences, not just informing them about issues and services. Communications is also about giving people the opportunity to express their views and opinions as well as providing information. Good communications leads to better services, a stronger reputation and positive relationships.

Internal and external communications affect all aspects of our day to day business: from businesses talking to employees about planning issues; families buying leisure activities; Councillors advocating on behalf of their residents; and information in the council tax letter about value for money.

Communications is the responsibility of everyone who works at Elmbridge Borough Council, not just the communications team. The council wants to keep improving its services and functions, including communications. All employees can play a role in this improvement.

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## Why Elmbridge needs good communications

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There are clear relationships between how well-informed people are about their council's services and how satisfied they are overall. Good communications leads to more effective services, a better reputation and higher levels of trust. A good reputation and high levels of trust are especially important when things go wrong. Local residents and businesses need to know that they can trust Elmbridge Borough Council to deliver good services and provide effective community leadership at all times.

The Local Government Association (LGA)'s 'Reputation of Local Government' campaign highlighted the importance of good council communications and the effect it can have on perceptions of local government and the services it delivers.

It highlights three big issues that are crucial:

- leadership
- brand
- strategy

It also sets out the five rules of reputation, that is, the areas that all councils need to focus on to improve reputation:

- prove that you provide good value for money
- always inform and engage residents and staff
- build trust and confidence in what you do
- improve key services and show you are doing so
- focus on changing lives for the better

These principles are the foundations of the communications strategy at Elmbridge Borough Council.

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## What is a communications strategy?

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A communications strategy is key in supporting delivery of the council's vision and priorities. It provides a framework to ensure that the council delivers clear, consistent and coordinated communications, that offer good value for money. It should set out priorities for delivery and improvement. Together, officers, Councillors, residents, businesses and other partners, such as the voluntary sector, can use this strategy to make sure the council is communicating clearly, consistently and through appropriate and accessible channels.

As a **resident** you can use this strategy to help:

- Understand what channels of communication are available and which are most suitable and convenient for you
- How you can communicate with the council to give it views, feedback on services, highlight issues of concern and share community activities
- Measure how effectively the council is communicating and how it offers good value for money.

As a **Councillor** you can use this strategy to help:

- Understand and challenge how the council is doing in communicating effectively
- Signpost residents and businesses to communication channels that you think may be useful to them
- Understand priorities for improvement in communications and how the council is delivering these.

As an **employee** you can use this strategy to help:

- Understand what external channels of communication are available and which are most appropriate to engage with your customers and service users
- Understand what internal channels are available so you have the all the information you need to deliver excellent services
- Understand priorities for improving communications and your role in supporting delivery of this

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## Our approach to communications

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Our communications will be timely, open, trustworthy and focused on issues that matter to the residents of Elmbridge. We will communicate in plain English.

Our goals are to

- Always inform and engage residents and staff
- Prove we provide value for money
- Build trust and confidence in what we do
- Improve key services and show we are doing so
- Focus on changing lives for the better

To meet the goals of the council's communications strategy we will aim to:

- Communicate as one organisation with one voice
- Engage with our audiences through channels which work for them: listen and ensure we are easy to communicate with
- When possible, act on feedback we receive
- Ensure our communication is successful by measuring the quality and impact of what we do.

How we will do this

- We will deliver clear, creative and value-for-money communications based on the issues that matter to Elmbridge residents
- We will protect the brand of Elmbridge Borough Council so that all residents recognise the council's role in improving the borough
- We will ensure our employees are informed and engaged in all that we do

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## Key messages for 2021-2022

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Our key messages for 2021-2022 are linked to our [Council Plan](#).

- **COVID recovery:** Implement measures to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, rebuild our budgets and plan our capacity in terms of service planning and delivery, projects and programmes. In parallel, maintain our capacity and agility around future emergency actions to support our communities.
- **Council budgets:** COVID has cost us, like many organisations around the country. This will mean we have difficult decisions to make. But our pledge is to always make these decisions with our residents in mind; we will always weigh up what's in the public interest.
- **Climate change and a low carbon future:** Elmbridge is committed to a local carbon future.
- **Housing affordability:** Demonstrate the importance we place on the delivery of more affordable housing.
- **Strategic representation and community leadership:** We have your back on matters that impact you such as emergency planning, flood alleviation, airport capacity and any devolution or local government reorganisation.
- **The Elmbridge Local Plan:** we are working to protect the borough and preserve what we love about the borough, while also meeting the Government's housing expectations.

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## Tone of voice

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Our **tone of voice** in delivering these messages is in keeping with our values and principles:

**Our employees:** professional, committed, continually developing and striving to deliver quality services.

- **Compassion:** we are compassionate in our approach
- **Value for money:** we spend your money wisely
- **Progressive:** we are a progressive organisation, listening to our residents

- **Customer Service:** we take customer service seriously
- **Governance:** we are committed to democracy, transparency and probity
- **Respect:** we respect each other and expect others to do the same.

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## Communications channels

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Elmbridge Borough Council communicates and engages with residents, Councillors and employees through a wide range of channels:

- The council's website – [elmbridge.gov.uk](http://elmbridge.gov.uk) – is our main communications channel
  - The average weekly page views on the homepage in 2021 : 10,500
  - Most visited pages:
    - Most visited pages in 2021 (after the homepage):
    - Find a planning application
    - Planning landing page
    - What goes in my bin
    - Comment on a planning application
    - Coronavirus data and statistics
    - COVID-19 updates
    - Council tax
    - Rubbish collections
    - Residents landing page
    - COVID-19 vaccine
- Various social media channels \*
  - Facebook: 3,139
  - Twitter: 9,980 followers
  - Instagram: 1, 987 followers
  - Nextdoor: 24,970 members
  - LinkedIn: 2065 followers
- Residents email
- Business newsletter
- Print and broadcast media – regular press releases and occasional radio adverts
- Adverts and public notices in local press when appropriate
- Public engagement events including the Annual Public Meeting
- Public noticeboards
- Business masterclasses
- ECIF drop-in sessions
- Bus stop advertising, budget allowing

### **Regular internal communications**

- Bridge-it
- Inside Elmbridge – staff newsletter
- Staff forums
- Internal groups such as BIG and Culture Group

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## **Digital first**

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For 2021-2022 digital communications will dominate due to budget restrictions.

A digital version of the Elmbridge Review will be issued in June 2021 and we will work on implementing an enhanced news section to the Elmbridge website, as well as increasing the distribution of the residents email news (which post COVID can only be issued to those who sign up).

\*figures correct as of 17 May 2021