

# Communications and Engagement Strategy

2022-2025



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# Introduction

The following document sets out the overarching Communications Strategy for Dacorum Borough Council (DBC).

Our aim is to deliver a first class, effective and efficient communications service that is highly valued and respected by our residents, businesses and our stakeholders.

It has a clear focus on supporting the organisation's corporate priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan 2020-2025, and a strong and clear focus on stakeholder communication and engagement. This will help influence behaviours and engage stakeholders in matters that are important to them and our communities.

The strategy also aims to create greater awareness and understanding of the Council's wider activities and services.

This strategy sets out our approach for the next three years.



*Comms - the  
beating heart of an  
organisation*

# The role of communications

Working with colleagues across the organisation, effective communications contributes to raising the profile and enhancing the reputation of the Council.

In a world where anyone can communicate with large audiences via social media or other digital channels, it is more important than ever to communicate clearly and effectively to achieve 'cut through' with residents, businesses and other key stakeholders.

Failure to communicate effectively at all levels, particularly online, can leave a vacuum which will be filled by other voices, often spreading misinformation or to further personal or political gain.

## **A clear, strategic plan will:**

- improve and enhance our corporate reputation and build trust
- help to maintain and enhance the reputation of the Council
- demonstrate the value of the organisation to our residents, businesses and stakeholders
- help to deliver the organisation's priorities
- develop our staff as part of our 'Communications Forward' culture.

**Communications is at the heart of every part of an organisation.**

**It can influence, impact and make or break reputations.**

**Comms really is more than just the comms team, and is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation.**

# Our identity and brand

Corporate identity is who we are as a Council, including corporate design, culture, values and internal and external communications, creating an overarching identity for the whole organisation.

Brand identity is the collection of elements that portrays an image to our customers and relevant stakeholders. Our brands are more than a visual identity, it is our relationship with our customers and stakeholders, and how we are perceived.

Our brands are a promise to our customers, offering excellent customer service and an experience that matters, delivered by everyone within the organisation.

Our brands are therefore not only an external promise to our customers, but a means of delivering corporate priorities via internal brand-led behaviour and culture change.

## Our brands:

- Corporate brand
- Place brands
- Commercial brands (product/service brands)

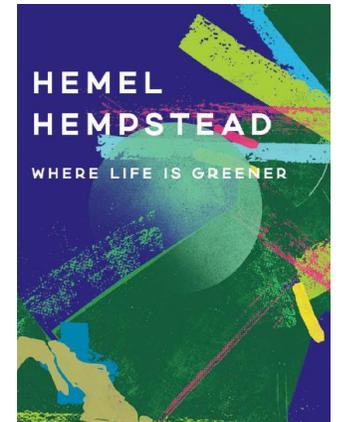
## Corporate brand:



## Place brands:



**Hemel**  
Garden  
Communities



# Our narrative and key messages

In today's complex and sometimes chaotic world, telling an organisations story simply, effectively and truthfully has never been more important. A good story – corporate narrative – allows us to share our vision, key messages and plans with employees, residents and other stakeholders in a powerful and compelling way.

A successful corporate narrative will see everyone from members, managers and employees at all levels, telling the same story about the council to anyone who asks.

## Why is this important?

- It unites people behind a common purpose and direction
- Creates a context for change
- Makes sense of multiple initiatives and links the connections
- Aligns leaders to demonstrate a unified organisation
- Inspires people and creates pride
- Helps employees make sense of their roles in the organisation
- Challenges and changes employees' behaviour

## Our Customers

- To put the customer at the centre of our services in order to provide a positive and effective customer experience, and to empower our staff so they can deliver consistent and quality Council services.

## Our Places, and communities

- Hemel Garden Communities - Creating a greener, more connected New Town: a green network; integrated neighbourhoods; a self-sustaining economy; engaged communities.
- Hemel Place – where life is greener: where connections matter; a vibrant destination for enterprise; enhancing your wellbeing in Hemel.

## Our People

- The right staff, in the right place, at the right time, working in the right way.

## Our Commercial approach

- A Council which adopts a commercial mind-set across the organisation. We expect staff to think innovatively and deliver services differently. We will use commercial principles to maximise the impact of our assets (whether physical or intangible) to benefit our communities and strengthen financial sustainability.

# Communications objectives

The Council's strategic objectives are to deliver the six priorities as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2020-2025. This allows us to work in partnership to create a borough which enables the communities of Dacorum to thrive and prosper and which delivers on the corporate priorities.

## Communications objectives:

- 1 Promoting the council's day-to-day work, ambitious plans and progress on the key priorities across a variety of traditional and digital channels, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity to reach all stakeholders
- 2 Embedding our commitment to care for the people and places in Dacorum, to create the best possible place to live and work throughout all communications
- 3 Training councillors, employees and partners in the communication skills necessary to become ambassadors for the Council
- 4 Leading the way in digital communications whilst ensuring that no resident is left behind or digitally excluded
- 5 Ensuring the council's communications are data-driven and responsive to residents' needs
- 6 Building relationships with a wide range of influential external communicators including local and regional print and broadcast media, popular local social media accounts, government, community and business groups

## Corporate objectives:

-  Ensuring economic growth and prosperity
-  Building strong and vibrant communities
-  A clean, safe and enjoyable environment
-  Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery
-  Climate and ecological emergency
-  Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need

# Our principles

The Government Communication Functional Standard was published in August 2019 to set clear, measurable expectations for the management and practice of government communication.

There are 12 principles at the heart of all government communication:

- **Strategic communication** – setting, co-ordinating and guiding the development and implementation of an activity in the right time frame.
- **Marketing** – using cross-channel communication activity to influence behaviour change.
- **Media relations** – explaining governmental activity to media partners to create public understanding and build trust.
- **External affairs** – building and maintaining relationships with external stakeholders.
- **Internal communication** – informing and engaging employees in a way that maximises their performance.
- **Behaviour change** – identifying barriers to desired behaviours and how to address them.
- **Communication in an emergency or crisis** – ensuring the timely flow of reliable, accurate and relevant information during a crisis situation.
- **Partnership marketing** – providing a cost-effective way to reach audiences and increase our impact.
- **Capability and capacity** – balancing the supply and demand for communication resources, including people and facilities.
- **Brand** – complying with identity guidelines safely and professionally.
- **Writing style** – making sure our communication is clear, concise and consistent.
- **Learning from experience** – evaluating our work to avoid repeating mistakes and develop improved practice.

# Our tactical approach

## Evidence Based Messaging

Three of our six corporate priorities are best communicated using evidence-based messaging:



Ensuring economic growth and prosperity



A clean, safe and enjoyable environment



Building strong and vibrant communities

By using visual evidence (e.g., before and after images of litter being cleared, images of new businesses on opening day, photos from community events etc.) we will ensure residents can see the results of the work the council is doing in each of these priority areas.

This visual communication should be member-led. Images should include the relevant cabinet member where possible so that the public can put a face to the council's delivery.

## Statistical Based Messaging

The other three priorities are best communicated using stats-based messaging:



Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery



Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need



Climate and ecological emergency

By highlighting key facts and figures (number of new homes, impact of climate change work, speed of service delivery etc.) we will ensure that residents are properly informed of outcomes rather than process.

As with evidence-based messaging, when using photos as part of this messaging, this should be member-led, and councillors and officers should be encouraged to share content on their own channels.

# Communications operating model

## Communications operating model

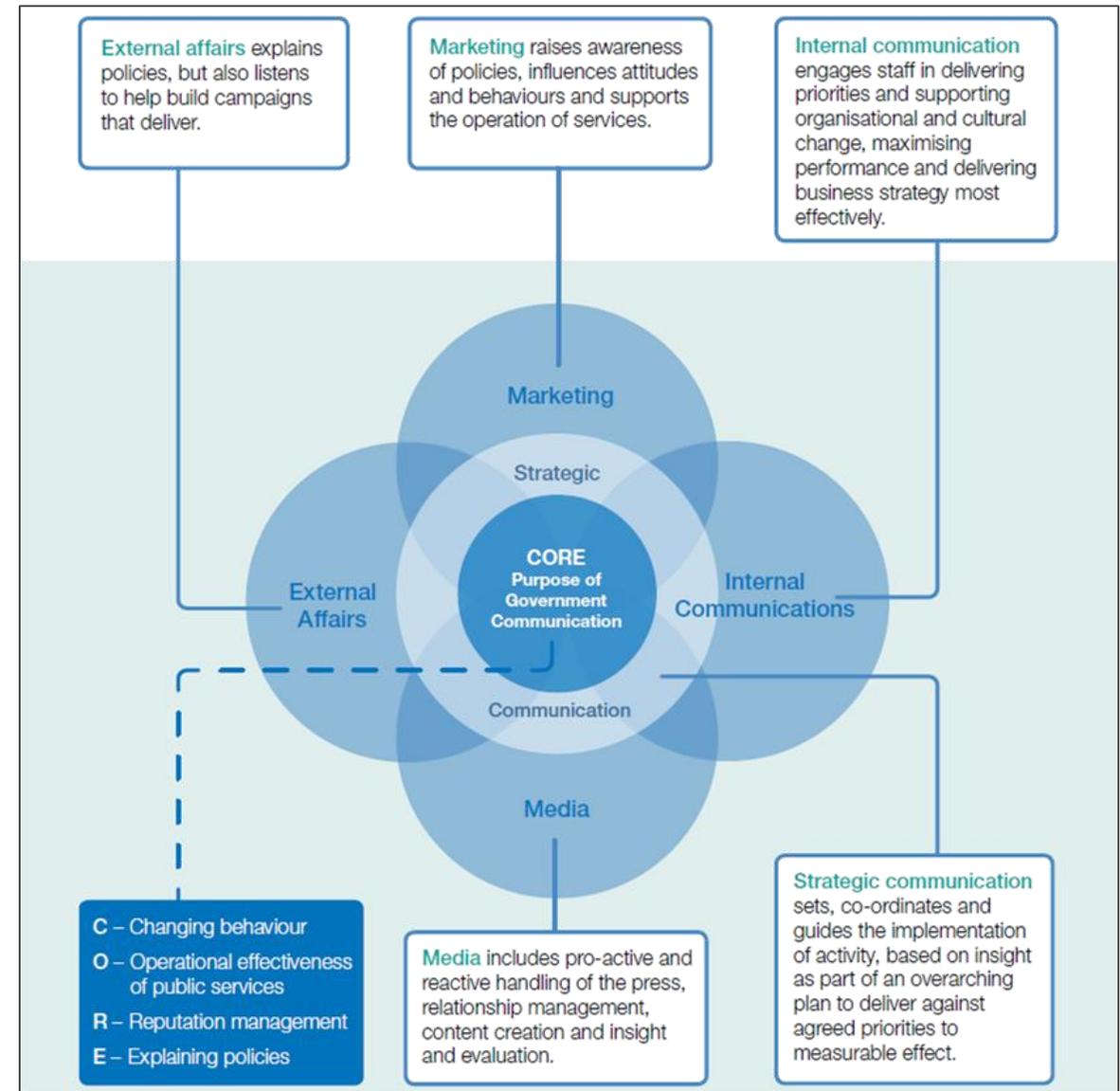
The new Communications and Engagement Service takes its lead from the Government Communication Service (GCS) operating model.

This model provides the structure of the required skills and capabilities for a high-performing communications and engagement service, to deliver on the Council's corporate priorities and ambitious transformation agenda.

### The CORE operating model covers:

- External affairs
- Marketing
- Internal communications
- Strategic communications
- Media

The remit of the DBC Communications and Engagement service extend beyond the CORE model, and also includes corporate/civic events and filming.



# Campaigns and digital communications

Digital communications sits at the heart of our service to residents, businesses and other stakeholders. Our customers expect us to provide services online with the same level of interactivity that they find elsewhere, and be able to access information digitally.

Each year we carry out hundreds of campaigns from large-scale corporate projects to service-specific campaigns, and have grown our audiences significantly across all of our digital channels (social media and digital portfolio on DotDigital).

From 2022 our approach to campaigns, across the organisation, will set out a clear methodology to plan and deliver effective and successful campaigns.

## Campaign methodology:

- insight and research
- clear and measurable objectives
- corporate strategy and service plans
- implementation of tactics
- measurement and evaluation

The future of government communication depends on the ability to connect with target audiences in a timely, appropriate and relevant way, giving them information and helping change behaviours in a way that fits in with their lives.

In this respect digital communications can enable the Communications and Engagement service to integrate more closely, connecting directly and quickly with influencers and audiences in a well-governed and planned way.

This means we need to master new techniques, including digital technologies, and remain at the forefront of the latest practice, revising and updating our skillsets to keep ahead of the extraordinary pace of change.

A programme of campaigns and digital communications will be planned each year, and will be outlined in the annual Communications Programme.



# Media relations

Our media relations function maintains and develops the Councils profile and reputation by raising awareness of its policies, projects and campaigns. This includes both proactive and reactive media relations (press enquires), and crisis management.

Each year we issue hundreds of press/media releases. Our media work extends beyond the issue of traditional press releases, and operates across multiple channels (including social media) and multiple stakeholders.

In order to monitor our media programme, we make use of a media monitoring platform (Meltwater). Clear measurement of our media activity helps to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of our media operation.

In 2022 we will support elected members (Cabinet), senior and corporate leadership teams through media training, to ensure we have a wide range of spokespeople, available to explain our policies and address reactive issues with the media when they arise.

From 2022 our approach to media releases, across the organisation, will set out a clear methodology to plan and deliver effective and successful releases.



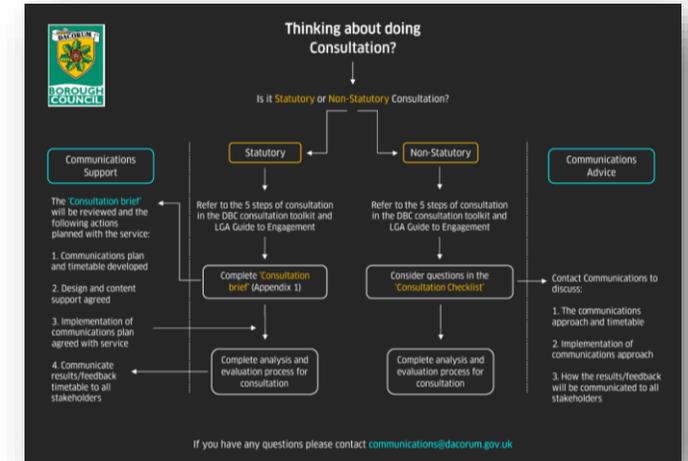
# Stakeholder engagement and consultation

The term 'engagement' is used to describe any activity that creates a stronger two-way relationship between the Council and the community. This runs from formal consultation to more deliberative and informal listening exercises. It can include co-production, crowdsourcing, events and public meetings.

Consultation is part of the democratic process. The Council believes it crucial to decision making that the views of local residents, businesses, user groups and other stakeholders are sought on what they want in respect of the local area, what priorities they identify and what they think of the Council's performance. Of course, councillors and council officers will always need to weigh the views expressed through consultation against a wide range of other factors: such as legislation and government guidance; demographic data; financial costs and environmental impacts etc.

We as a Council deliver our priorities by encouraging community involvement, developing participation and giving influence to the community, and we develop our profile and reputation by communicating, consulting and informing.

From 2022 our approach to stakeholder engagement and consultation, across the organisation, will set out a clear methodology to plan and deliver effective and successful engagement. This will be supported by an Engagement Toolkit and requirement to complete a consultation brief before the start of any consultation. A programme of engagement and consultation activities will be planned each year, and will be outlined in the annual Communications Programme.



**Local Government Association**

- Contents
- Foreword
- Introduction
- Which hat are you wearing?
- Context
- Section One: The Basics**
- Section Two: Surpassing Expectations**
- Section Three: Pilot Projects**
- Further reading
- Glossary

**New Conversations**  
LGA guide to engagement

# Commercial awareness and marketing

The purpose of marketing is to help fulfil operational and policy objectives by effectively understanding and meeting the needs of our customers. Marketing campaigns include research into customer behaviour, insight generation, strategic planning and the implementation of communication programmes across multiple channels.

## Marketing campaigns should:

- focus on delivering a high-quality end-to-end service and customer experience
- support the raising of awareness of policies, influence attitudes and behaviours
- aid the operation of services
- be based on reliable data
- use appropriate and validated creative techniques to influence attitudes and behaviours
- be founded on established behavioural science
- build confidence and trust in local government institutions and brands
- be measurable in terms of effectiveness and achievement goals

From 2022 our approach to marketing campaigns, across the organisation, will set out a clear methodology to plan and deliver effective and successful campaigns. This will be supported by a campaign checklist and requirement to complete a campaign brief before the start of any marketing campaigns.



# Internal communications

Communication with employees, or staff engagement, has established itself as a business function in its own right. Its evolution over recent decades into the refined discipline that it is today reflects its importance in the overall business strategy and impact on the bottom line.

Internal communications is about involving and engaging employees and must be based on principles of honesty and openness. Communication should always be two way where possible, but with larger dispersed workforces (such as Cupid Green and satellite sites) the Council will need to turn to other methods.

It is critical that the focus is on the recipient of the message i.e. in what context is the member of staff receiving this message, and is it relevant to them personally?

## **Internal communications methods:**

- Face to face
- Print
- Online (broadcast, new media, intranet)
- Events (staff awards, staff conferences/Town Halls etc.)
- Staff engagement/consultation

Whilst careful consideration must be given to the channels of internal communications, it is important not to overlook the content of the message itself. Instead of asking 'how will we communicate this?' ask 'why are we communicating this and 'what is the desired outcome?'

If staff do not have answers to the basic motivational impulse of 'what's in it for me?' they will simply be unable to hear what comes next. Real involvement only occurs when the personal implications are afforded equal significance. Only then can staff get to the questions of 'what's in it for us?' and 'how can I help?'

Where possible, corporate messages should come from the most senior and credible source (CEO, HR or Communications), or from the immediate line manager, in plain and simple language. In most situations a mix of channels will have the most effective outcome and it is important to choose the most appropriate channel for the message.

A programme of internal communications activities will be planned each year, and will be outlined in the annual Communications Programme.

# Publications, print and design

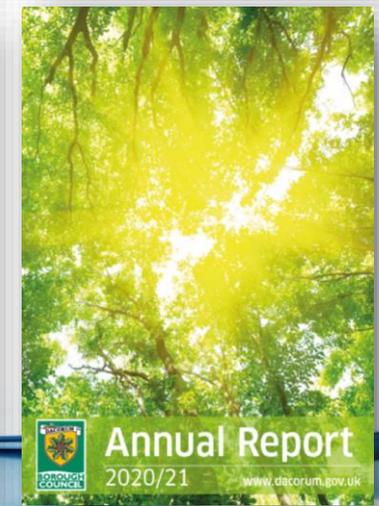
The Council manages a portfolio of print and digital publications issued throughout the year. The delivery of this portfolio is supported by a print and design function, covering all areas of design including print, marketing collateral, events, insignia and promotional items.

## Our publications aim to:

- Provide the Council and its services with a cost-effective (value for money) means of communicating with residents and stakeholders, and provide good quality, accessible information.
- Provide engaging and informative publications containing material of interest to all the diverse communities and age groups which make up Dacorum Borough.

From 2022 our approach to content curation, across the organisation, will set out a clear methodology to plan and deliver great content for our readers.

A programme for publications will be planned each year, and will be outlined in the annual Communications Programme.



# Corporate events

The Council manages a calendar of community and civic events throughout the year. Public events can be a great way to bring communities together, and supports the corporate priority of building strong and vibrant communities.

The Dacorum Safety Advisory Group (DSAG) brings together a number of statutory agencies with responsibility for safety and public protection in the Dacorum area, including Dacorum Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire Police, Herts Fire and Rescue Service, and the East of England Ambulance Service, and allows event organisers an opportunity to obtain advice on their proposals from multiple agencies through a single channel.

From 2022 our approach to event planning, across the organisation, will set out a clear methodology to plan and deliver high profile events successfully. This will be supported by an events checklist and marketing/communications guide.

A calendar of community and civic events will be planned each year, and will be outlined in the annual Communications Programme.



# Our main communications channels

## Digital communications:

- Corporate website (800+ pages)
- Facebook (11,000 followers)
- Twitter (8,600 followers)
- LinkedIn (3,500 followers)
- Instagram (860 followers)

## Media

- Media contact database (300+ media contacts)

## Publications:

- Dacorum Life (print) – twice per year (Distribution: 70,000 copies)
- Annual Report
- Dacorum Life (digital) - weekly (12,000+ subscribers)
- Business Bulletin – weekly (2,500+ subscribers)
- Members News – weekly
- Corporate Plan
- Council Tax
- Business Rates

## Internal communications:

- Intranet
- CE messages (email)
- DBCall (email)
- Annual Staff Survey
- Staff WhatsApp (Broadcast Group) (350+ staff)

## Engagement and consultation:

- Residents online consultation group (900+ residents)
- Residents Satisfaction Survey

A detailed programme of all communications channels are outlined in the annual Communications Programme.

# Audiences

Local authorities are large complex organisations, and as such communicate with a wide range of audiences. Our primary audience is our residents. We will place them at the heart of all our communications activity. From 2022 we will scope out our audience engagement, across the organisation, to set out a clear stakeholder engagement plan. This will outline the planned activities and engagement channels for each audience.

## Summary of key audiences:

### Internal audiences:

- Members
- Council employees
- Trade Unions

### External audiences:

Residents  
Local businesses, business forums  
Local MPs  
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
Non-departmental public bodies  
Media (local press, broadcast, digital)  
Developers and landowners  
Town and Parish councils  
Third sector, community and voluntary organisations  
Education sector  
Health sector  
Investors  
Younger people  
Neighbouring Local Authorities

# Resources



Head of Communications  
and Engagement

## Corporate Projects and Events

Comms Lead Officer  
(Corporate Projects and Events) (P/T)

Comms and  
Engagement  
Officer (P/T)

Filming  
Officer

Events  
Officer

Environmental Projects  
Lead Officer

Enviro  
Awareness  
Officer

Enviro  
Projects  
Support  
Officer

## Digital Communications and Engagement

Comms Lead Officer  
(Digital Communications and Engagement) (P/T)

Comms and  
Engagement  
Officer (P/T)

Web  
Comms  
Officer

Graphic  
Designer  
(P/T)

Digital Marketing  
Officer  
15 month contract  
2022-23

(P/T) – Part-time

# Professional development and learning

Our focus is on developing our skills and expertise across the full range of communications disciplines, driving innovation and ensuring value for money for the services we support.

In order to do so, we have to continuously develop our skills to stay abreast of changes in the communications, marketing and digital landscapes. This will be achieved through a combination of personal continuous professional development, membership of professional bodies and team training.

## CPD cycle

- **Identify:** Understand where you've come from, where you are and where you want to be.
- **Plan:** Plan how you can get to where you want to be, with clear outcomes and milestones to track progress.
- **Act:** Act upon your plan, and be open to learning experiences.
- **Reflect:** Make the most of your day-to-day learning by routinely reflecting upon experience.
- **Apply:** Create opportunities where you can translate theory into practice and put your learning to work.
- **Share:** Share your learning in communities of practice to generate greater insight and benefit from the support of your community.
- **Impact:** Measure the overall impact your learning has had on the work you do.

The logo for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), featuring the letters 'CIPD' in a bold, purple, sans-serif font.

Chartered Institute  
of Personnel and  
Development

The logo for The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), featuring the letters 'CIM' in a blue, outlined, sans-serif font.

The Chartered  
Institute of Marketing



The  
Consultation  
Institute

The logo for the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), featuring the letters 'CIPR' in white on a red rectangular background.

CHARTERED INSTITUTE  
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The LinkedIn Learning logo, featuring the word 'LinkedIn' in white on a blue background, followed by the word 'LEARNING' in white on a dark blue background.

# Communications Strategy delivery plan

In order to deliver the Communications Strategy 2022-2025, the following outputs are required:

**Communications Strategy Action Plan**  
(delivery by Q2 2022/23)

**Communications Programme 2022/23; 2023/24; 2024/25**  
(delivery by Q1 each financial year)

**Working with Communications Guide (Staff)**  
(deliver by Q3 2022/23)

**Working with Communications Guide (Members)**  
(deliver by Q3 2022/23)

# Contact

Communications and Engagement  
Service:

[communications@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:communications@dacorum.gov.uk)

