



Communications and Engagement Strategy: DCC Budget

Communications and Engagement Strategy

Report to	Budget Board
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Principles

All communications and marketing materials will be developed and produced in accordance with the following Council standards and guidelines:

- [Corporate Branding Guidelines](#)
- Welsh Language Standards
- [Design & Print Framework](#)
- [Engagement framework and toolkit](#)

All communications, and engagement with the public will be proof-read and approved by the Corporate Communication, Marketing and Engagement team before publication and distribution.

The corporate communications team can arrange interviews requested by the press with the leader, or requested by the leader to enable him to set out the Council policy or position. The corporate communications team can advise and help him to prepare, but it is his decision as to the line he takes in those interviews. If there is any specific political message that he would like to promote, then at that point it is for his PA to arrange.

Communications and Engagement Strategy

Background information

In light of the current budget pressures and cost increases, it is necessary to produce a communications and engagement strategy, to help staff, councillors, residents and businesses to understand and engage with the current financial challenges faced by the Council. This strategy will cover the budget implications for the year 2023-24, with a view to extending the activity throughout the summer and Autumn to prepare for the financial year 2024-25.

There are different levels of communications activity to take into account in this plan

1. High level political communications – which are the responsibility of the leader and cabinet advised as appropriate by the communications team, CET and Head of Service.
2. CET messages agreed with cabinet at a cabinet workshop
3. Corporate Budget Communications – led by Steve Gadd, supported by the communications team where needed.
4. Project level budget decisions and impacts on services – the responsibility of the relevant CET member, Head of Service and supported by the communications team. Each of the major service changes will require their own separate communications and engagement plans, with reference back to the key corporate messages.
5. There will also be key reactive communications activities developed as and when unplanned external factors are brought into play.

Communications and engagement aims

To ensure that all target audiences have access to information and key budget messages are communicated effectively.

To ensure staff councillors, residents and businesses have an opportunity to engage with the council on this subject.

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To ensure that where service cuts affect specific users there is a targeted communications and engagement plan in place, and where there are options available there should be consultation on those options with those affected.

Communications and engagement objectives

To produce clear messages and signposting to information and to promote opportunities to engage with the council.

To engage effectively with key audiences where appropriate

To monitor activity and produce a report on the outcomes of this strategy

Communications and engagement outcomes

The information about the budget and budget setting process on the Denbighshire County Council channels will be accurate, clear and accessible.

The relevant audiences will either be informed or engaged, depending on the direct impact of the budget setting process.

Measurement and evaluation

Feedback and evidence from Councillors and staff

Opportunities to engage and the level of interaction with the engagement opportunities

Press coverage

Social media and website analytics

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Key message development

All messages will be developed in conjunction with Steve Gadd and Rhian Evans.

Corporate messages will be based on WLGA messaging as there is no need for independent lobbying

Corporate messages will also be developed with Cabinet

Core messages

Key messages release schedule

Key message	Milestone	Dates
Budget pressures mean services are at risk. Council Tax may have to rise to cover deficits. (Linked in with costs of living message and Croeso Cynnes)	ITV news interview with DCC leader Jason McLellan	13.12.2022
Include messages from cabinet workshop	Gary Williams has agreed to organise this and Sian will facilitate	
Despite the WG budget the council has less money for the coming year, It a “real term cut”		
Inflation means that the things the council buy cost more		
Both rising costs and the money we are given mean we cannot afford to deliver everything we would want to		

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Key message	Milestone	Dates
We will continue to find the best savings options we can – staff will focus on keeping unnecessary costs down to a minimum		
We will continue to ask for and listen to new ideas about cost effective ways to deliver services		
Due to surging inflationary pressures and sky-high energy bills. The impacts on our communities and residents are likely to be profound.” Based on WLGA line		
As it stands, local services are facing a £784m budget black hole next year alone which is only likely to rise ever further in subsequent years Based on WLGA line – we could add our own figure in here	To be reviewed on receipt of further info	During 2023
The economic outlook remains bleak which means that councils will still have to take difficult decisions to meet spiralling budget gaps due to energy bills, inflation and pay costs Based on WLGA line		
Specific messages about specific cuts – detail to follow		

Communications and Engagement Strategy

Communications and engagement activity plan

There is a very detailed communications activity plan which has been populated and is updated after each budget team meeting. This is an operational document for use by the project team.

Key target audience groups (Appendix 1)

See Appendix 1 for the key target audience groups.

Governance

A budget communications team has been set up and will meet monthly.

The recommendations from the team meetings will be approved by the Head of Service/ section 151 officer and the budget board.

This report will be shared with CET

Communication and engagement risks

Timescales to develop and deliver some of the actions in the plan are very tight. Some actions may be dropped to ensure the overall plan can be delivered.

Ability to provide accurate financial information at a time when the financial position is changing rapidly. On occasions we will have to use what we have at that specific time to the best of our knowledge.

Interdependencies

WLGA and WG messaging will provide the background for the campaign. Key messaging will integrate with this through the local use of national lines that chime with our local conditions.

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The Welsh Government are running a cost of living campaign which will influence and chime with the DCC budget messaging to ensure that the population understand that we are managing budgets within the context of their real life experience.

Signposting to sources of advice and support alongside this campaign will help to ensure public resilience to dealing with these messages is supported.

The Corporate Plan Communications Strategy will focus on the delivery of the priorities, reflecting the current budget context.

Costs

Any additional costs will be funded from the Budget Mitigation Reserve. Costs are expected to be minimal

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Appendix 1: Key target audience groups

List of key target audience groups

- Cabinet
- Councillors
- Staff
- Affected residents
- Businesses
- Unions
- Partners

Communications and Engagement Strategy

Key target audience groups/stakeholder matrix (Optional)

Audience Group	Interest (Low / Medium / High)	Influence (Low / Medium / High)	What's the Group's most important goal?	How will they contribute?	Best way to manage	Contact method(s)
Cabinet members	Highest	Highest	Balance the budget Maintain essential services	Feedback and approval Cabinet messaging workshop	Directly and closely	Cabinet meetings and direct email/ briefings
Councillors	High	High	Balance the budget	Feedback and approval	Directly and closely	Council meetings Council workshops

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Audience Group	Interest (Low / Medium / High)	Influence (Low / Medium / High)	What's the Group's most important goal?	How will they contribute?	Best way to manage	Contact method(s)
Staff	High	Medium	To ensure they can maintain services to residents	Staff briefings by SLT and middle managers	Directly and closely	Staff briefings by SLT and middle managers
Unions	Interest	Medium Influence on specific projects	To protect staff interests	HR and middle manager briefings	Directly and closely	Monthly meetings with HR, briefing notes from finance
Affected residents	Medium	Medium	To understand how the council spending affects them personally	Direct contact Surveys	With clarity, integrity and openness	Through Council information channels

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Audience Group	Interest (Low / Medium / High)	Influence (Low / Medium / High)	What's the Group's most important goal?	How will they contribute?	Best way to manage	Contact method(s)
Affected businesses	Medium	Medium	To understand how the council spending affects them personally	Direct contact with business groups Surveys	With clarity, integrity and openness	EBD/Tourism newsletters to include articles on the budget cuts
Political Groups	High	High	To understand how the council spending will affect their communities	Direct contact Surveys	Directly and closely	Presentations from Steve Gadd? Direct email contact

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Audience Group	Interest (Low / Medium / High)	Influence (Low / Medium / High)	What's the Group's most important goal?	How will they contribute?	Best way to manage	Contact method(s)
Partners	High	High	How will council cuts affect their operation	Direct contact	Direct and closely	SLT/Contract manager direct contact