The future of Council Communications and Community Engagement

BREAKTHROUGH COMMUNICATIONS
SPECIALISTS IN CONNECTING COUNCILS WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES

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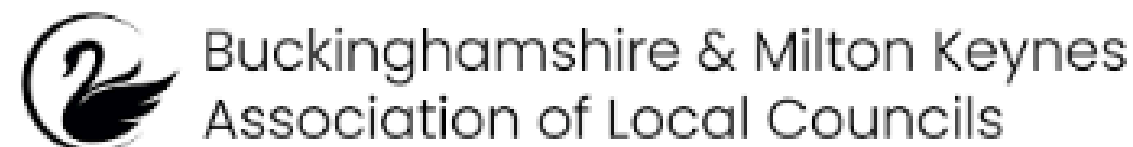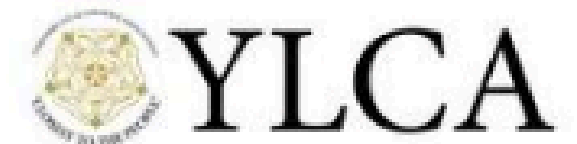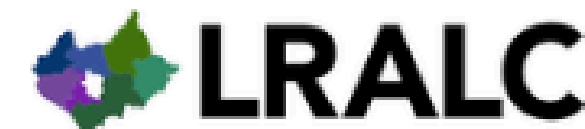Social Media   Community Engagement   Surveys & Consultations   Strategy

Freedom of Information   Data Protection   AI Governance and Privacy

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Council Communication and Community Engagement matters more than ever

- Engagement is changing, not only because of technology, but because of people's changing expectations.

- Many residents also don't distinguish between tiers of local government AND parish councils are taking on more services than ever before, so it's never been more important to communicate who we are, what we do, why we do it, and to build two-way engagement

Quick question:
Who feels community engagement is getting *easier* or *harder*?

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The 2025 communication context: *What is changing...*

- **Digital-first communities:** rise of social media groups, local apps, and short-form video.

- **Evolving demographic expectations:** e.g. younger residents expecting instant, transparent communication.

- **Devolution, LGR and workload pressures:** councils doing more with fewer resources.

- **Declining trust:** misinformation, online negativity, and civic disengagement.

- **AI and the rise of automation:** new tools for listening, carrying out surveys, and increasing accessibility — but with skill, ethical, bias and capacity challenges.

2025

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The 2025 communication context: *What's NOT changing...*

- **The fundamentals of good communication still matter:** building relationships, actively listening to the community, building visibility and communicating your council's message, all year round.

- It remains vital to have a **parish-shaped communication and community engagement strategy** in place

- People still want to feel **heard, valued, and connected** – technology doesn't replace that.

- The role of parish and town councils, **as trusted local community anchors**, remains critical, We are often the most visible and accessible tier of local government.

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Common Engagement Hurdles

- **Harder than ever to get response** – the same few people always respond, or engage with the council. Can be a challenge to hear from hard-to-reach voices.

- **One-way communication** – councils sometimes focus their resources on broadcasting instead of conversation.

- **Fear of backlash or negative engagement** – councils may seek to avoid engagement due to online hostility.

- **Lack of confidence or skills to explore new approaches** – especially in digital engagement.

- **Competing priorities and limited capacity** – engagement can sometimes slip down the priority list when officers and councillors are stretched thin.

Practical Solutions and Quick Wins

- **Shift in mindset in how we approach communication**: from "informing" to "involving."

- **Blend online and offline communications and engagement**: digital surveys plus physical drop-ins or 'pop-up' style events.

- **Storytelling and transparency:** explaining why decisions matter and how residents' voices shape them, for example with LGR or budget-setting.

- **Bring the council to life:** use video to showcase your council's people - who we are, what we do, why we do it.

- **Inclusive engagement:** reaching seldom-heard voices through partnerships (schools, community and faith groups, etc).

Does your council take a strategic approach to its communications?

- An effective strategy can help ensure councils achieve more positive outcomes and can make better, more informed decisions

- When it comes to communications, why do we do the things we do? Why is it we use certain communications channels and not others? Do we have clarity on who we want to engage with, what we want to say and what we want to know?

- Remember: Strategy is not the same as policy.
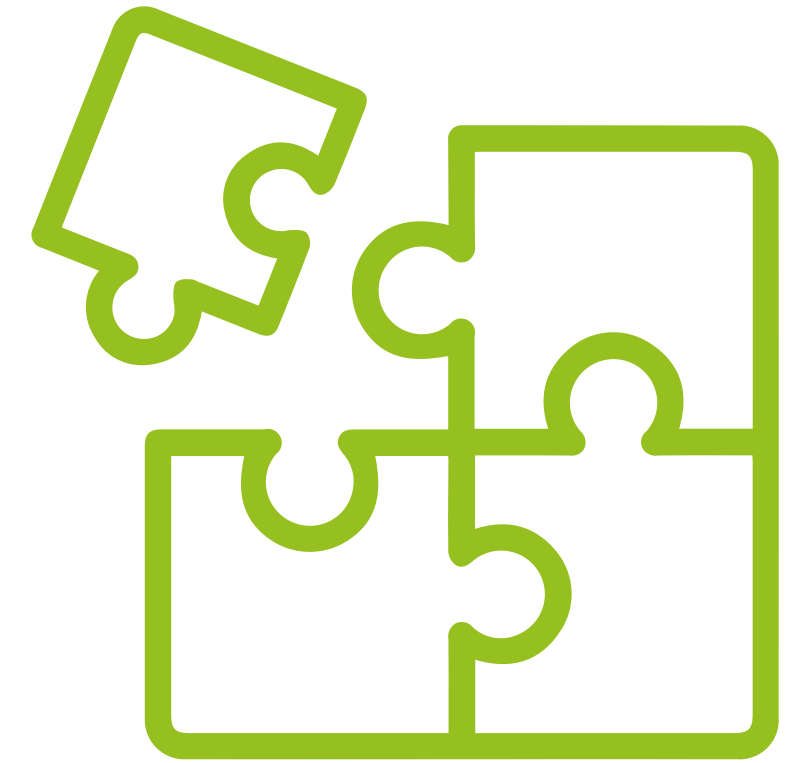
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SPEAK less
LISTEN more

How does your council communicate, engage and listen to the community?

- What communications channels does your council use to broadcast and communicate its messages, both online and offline?

- Regardless of the size and resources of your council, does your council have an appropriate mix of channels to get its messages across?

- How does your council use those channels to strategically and tactically listen to the commiunity?

Whose voices aren't we hearing from?

- In many communities, there's often groups and individuals who are good at getting their voices heard and sometimes shouting the loudest

- Who do we hear from the most? Who do we hear from the least – and what can we do about it?

- Consider, for example, younger demographics who are less likely to use council services and facilities, new residents who may not be aware as to your council's role in the community, etc.

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The Role of AI in Council Communications

- **Smarter Communications:** AI tools can help draft newsletters, social media posts,and create press releases, as well as provide agenda and meeting summaries, saving valuable officer time.

- **Better Listening:** AI-powered tools can summarise resident feedback from surveys, social media, and consultations, helping councils identify themes, sentiment, and emerging issues.

- **More Accessible Engagement:** AI chatbots and virtual assistants can make information available 24/7, answering common questions and guiding residents to relevant services.

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But don't just take my word for it...
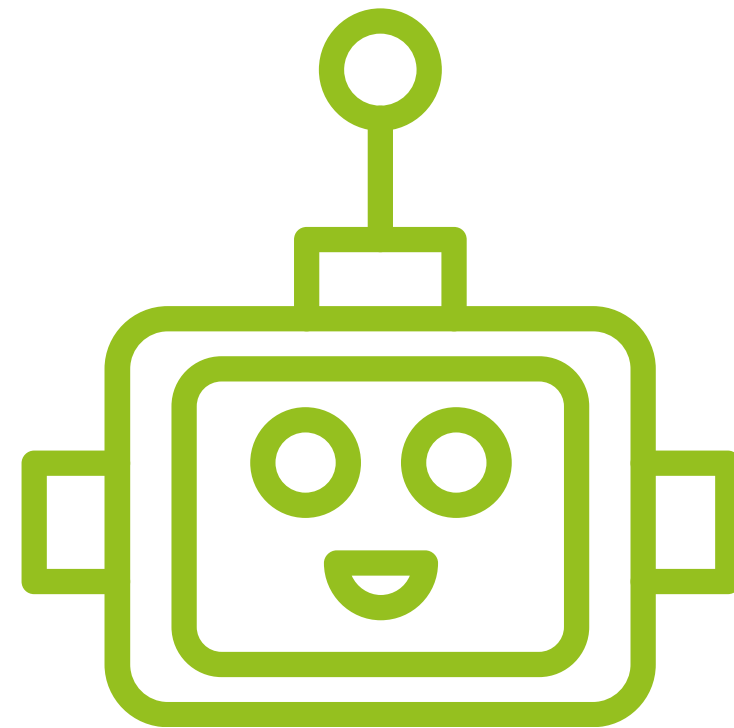
Three things to consider in your council

1 Consider your council's strategic approach to its communications. Who do you want to engage with? What do you want to say? What do you want to know? What channels will you use?

2 Review your current balance of broadcast vs listening and consider how you can use your communications channels to listen more effectively.

3 Carry out a regular (annual or bi-annual) community survey to better understand and track views over time – and then report back to the community – in order to build a cycle of *communicate, listen, feed back.*

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Remember: **Communication and community engagement in 2025 isn't about doing more, it's about doing it *better*, *smarter*, and *with heart*.**

Consider: **What one, small thing could your council do to strengthen community connections?**

Explore: **How could your parish or town council make use of AI to boost engagement?**

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