



SANDWELL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

2025-26

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FOREWORD

Sandwell Council has been through rapid improvements in recent years. We're proud this is now being reflected in our latest residents' survey.

Satisfaction with how the council runs things has increased significantly this year, up from 65% in 2024 to 72% in 2025 and sits well above the LGA benchmark of 56%. Trust in the council also remains well above LGA benchmarks at 65% against the benchmark of 50%.

Making sure our residents are informed is key to maintaining trust and satisfaction, and the proportion of residents feeling that the council keeps them well informed has increased this year, to 65% compared with 55% last year.

We're not content with the improvements that have already been made and have now set our ambition to become an outstanding council.

Communications has not always been valued as a strategic function in Sandwell but that has changed in the last few years. Effective communications is central to achieving our ambitions, and our communications service needs to be helping drive forward further improvements as a strategic enabler within the council's 'engine room'.

Our services make a difference in the lives of our residents every day and we're determined to tell a new story about Sandwell. Through well planned and impactful communications we can improve outcomes and people's quality of life; support our staff and galvanise partners to deliver on our priorities, and attract investment that can help create opportunities and raise aspirations for our borough.

This is a strategy for the whole council - to be led by our communications team - and sets out how we want to deliver our communications activity so that we are fully focused on our priorities and present ourselves consistently as a confident and coordinated organisation.



**Shokat Lal,
Chief Executive**

**Kerrie Carmichael,
Leader of Sandwell Council**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective communications is central to achieving our ambition to become an outstanding council.

Good communications connects our services to the residents that use and rely on them in their daily lives. It is crucial in building trust in the council so that we can deliver on our aspirations for Sandwell; bringing together residents, our staff, businesses and partners around a shared vision. A healthy local democracy is built upon local councillors who are kept informed to fulfil their role as community leaders, and through transparently communicated decision-making.

This strategy sets out our approach to effective communications. It is a strategy for the whole council. Every officer and member has a part to play in delivering it.

The Communications service is a strategic enabling function providing advice, helping the council navigate a complex environment and ensuring communications is effective and impactful.

Reaching the right audience, at the right time and in the right way can help deliver better outcomes and inform people to influence positive behaviour change. To achieve this, we need to coordinate activity across the council to build campaign plans focused on our priorities. Through working in partnership, the Communications team and services can develop excellent content to engage target audiences.

To reach these audiences in a rapidly evolving communications landscape, the Communications Service is responsible for curating our mix of communication channels, including media relations, direct communications such as the Sandwell Herald, e-newsletters and our social media channels, and internal and partner communications.

Communications activity should be based on research and insight to identify target audiences. Our channels should be data-led, using evidence to understand and evaluate what content works and what impact it is making.

We have finite resources, so we must prioritise the work that will have the greatest impact. The Council Plan sets out our key organisational priorities. Business plans are developed annually to deliver the objectives in our Council Plan. Our communications priorities flow from this, with our resources focused on delivering campaign plans that support these priorities.

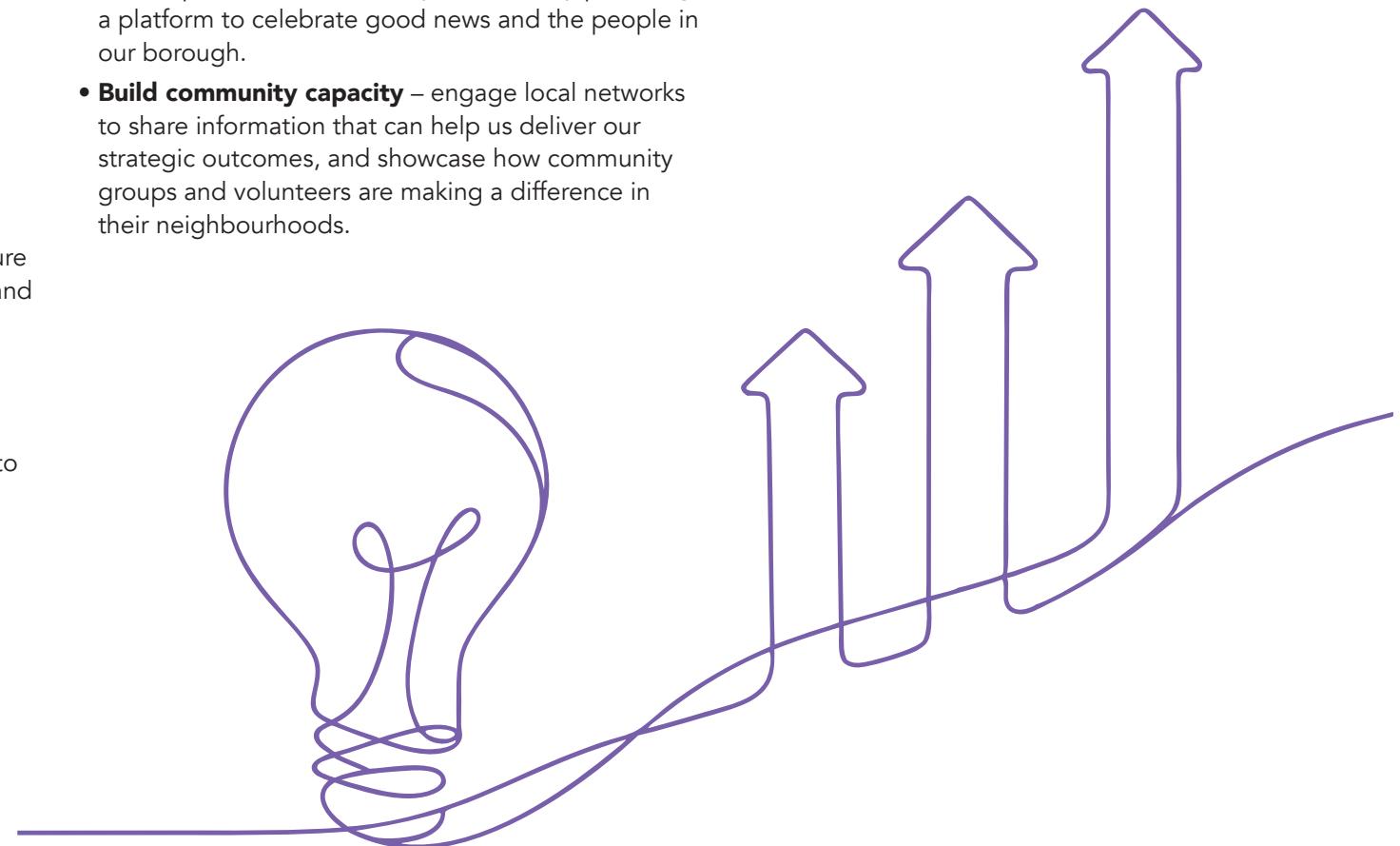
Finally, to be effective

communications must be consistent, based on a clearly articulated vision that sets out our ambitions for our borough; an organisational narrative and set of key messages that explain our objectives, and a distinctive brand so that our audiences are clear on our values and what we stand for.



OUR OBJECTIVES

- **Tell our own story** – if we don't tell our own story, others will do it for us, and we will not be in control of how we're perceived. Sandwell Council has been on a rapid improvement journey in recent years, and we want to tell the story of how we make a difference in our residents' lives every day.
- **Promoting Sandwell** – we are focused on raising aspirations in Sandwell. Through our Sandwell Story, we can showcase our borough as a place where people are making it to attract people and investment.
- **A clear vision and purpose** – when there are so many competing calls on our residents' attention, consistent messaging and branding is vital to ensure our communities understand our purpose, vision and values, and how we are delivering for them.
- **Enabling our employees** – supporting our colleagues to live the values and behaviours of the organisation, recognising and celebrating achievements and making links between services to help break down siloes.
- **Support innovation** – driving our ambition to become an outstanding council through effective change communications and a clearly articulated vision and priorities.
- **Inspiring our community** – build community pride and help maintain community cohesion by providing a platform to celebrate good news and the people in our borough.
- **Build community capacity** – engage local networks to share information that can help us deliver our strategic outcomes, and showcase how community groups and volunteers are making a difference in their neighbourhoods.



OUR PRINCIPLES

1. We're a trusted organisation with a human voice.

We are open and transparent, enabling people to get involved in decision-making. We explain our challenges and the reasons for decisions in simple terms so people can understand and trust what we tell them. We showcase our staff to help connect authentically with our residents, always using natural, conversational language and avoiding jargon wherever possible.

2. We coordinate activity across the council.

Our residents don't see different services, they just see 'the council', so we need to present ourselves as a single coordinated organisation. We use our narrative, key messages and brand to tell the story of our activities and connect people to the services we provide. By developing clear forward plans linked to agreed communications priorities, we can get information to the right audience, at the right time and in the right way.

3. We work with our partners. The council is not able to achieve our ambitions for Sandwell alone. By working in partnership, we can maximise our impact in our borough and ensure we punch our weight regionally and nationally. We also recognise that other voices can connect with our audiences in ways the council can't, and will always be focused on achieving the best outcomes.

4. Our communications are accessible to our diverse community. We follow accessibility requirements and use plain English across our various channels and formats to make it as easy as possible for everyone to access information and engage with us.

5. We are a data-led organisation. We work with services to use insight and data to understand what's happening in our community, which helps us target our activity and find the best approach so we can drive positive behaviour change that helps deliver our strategic outcomes.



THE COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE

The Communications Service sits in the Assistant Chief Executive's directorate.

Responsibilities of the Communications Service

- External communications: Strategic advice; media relations; campaigns; crisis communications; e-newsletters; social media; Sandwell Herald; award submissions
- Internal communications: Strategic advice; change communications; Chief Executive weekly update; Executive Director updates, Viva Engage; Sandwell Showcase; Leadership Conference; We are Sandwell Awards; All Staff briefings; Weekly News; internal campaigns
- Graphic design
- Web Management: Council website (including microsites); Intranet; Schools Extranet
- Marketing and advertising: campaigns; behaviour change; out-of-home advertising; sponsorship; commercial advertising
- Stakeholder communications: Sandwell Story; Member bulletin; Public Affairs Strategy



HOW WE WILL WORK

We have limited resources, and the audiences we are seeking to influence have limited bandwidth, so it is important we focus on the most important priorities.

Vision 2030 sets out the ambitions for Sandwell, and the Sandwell Together Partnership are developing a new vision for our borough. Our Council Plan sets out the council's key priorities and the outcomes we are seeking to deliver. From that, service level business plans set out how we are going to deliver these outcomes, and will contain insights and objectives. Our communications strategy flows from these plans.



Place Narrative - sets out our ambitions for our borough, developed and owned with our partners.

Organisational Narrative - sets out what we are trying to achieve as a council, explaining our purpose, vision and values.

Brand guidelines – set out how the Sandwell Story and council branding should be presented across all platforms to ensure consistency.

Key messages – a set of phrases that describe our priorities, objectives and achievements in plain English.

Campaign plans – planned communications activity over a set period of time aiming to deliver an agreed set of objectives.

TELLING OUR STORY

To tell our story and to ensure we are supporting our council objectives, our key communications activity can be split into two categories.

1. Beating of the drum

Marking regular milestones in the delivery of our key priorities. This can be through announcements, such as at the start or when reaching a key moment of a project, or it could be through case studies or visits to show the impact of work already underway.

2. Campaign

We run campaigns for a specific purpose, such as helping to change behaviour. A campaign will be time-limited, should be clearly linked to measurable objectives and be targeted at specific audiences.

We use the five-step OASIS planning model to ensure communications campaigns achieve the best outcomes.

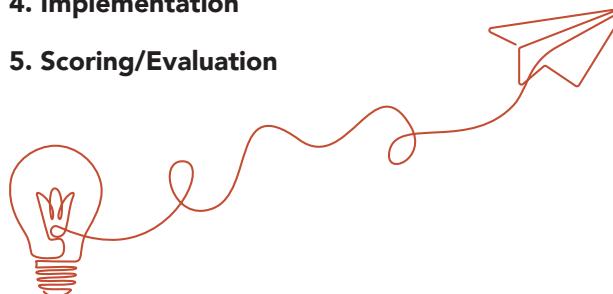
1. Objectives

2. Audience/Insight

3. Strategy/Ideas

4. Implementation

5. Scoring/Evaluation



How we prioritise

To help ensure we are focused on our priorities, our campaigns and activities are split into gold, silver and bronze categories.

Gold

- Major focus across multiple channels to mark milestones over a long time period
- May need additional budget for advertising

Silver

- Medium focus for a specific purpose and over a limited time period
- May need additional budget for advertising

Bronze

- Week-to-week communications to mark council priorities – e.g. awareness weeks or announcements
- Delivered as business as usual in line with agreed communications priorities and needs to be well planned in advance to make the most of the capacity available

The Internal Communications, Employee Engagement and Brand Manager and three Communications Managers (ACE/Finance & Transformation, People, Place) attend Directorate Management Team meetings and plan strategic internal and external communications with senior officers.

The Communications Managers can also be contacted directly for any reactive, reputational issues within their respective directorates.

Contact the Corporate Communications Service via our webform to request other work.



OUR PLACE NARRATIVE – SANDWELL STORY

Made 50 years ago from six proud towns – Wednesbury, Tipton, West Bromwich, Smethwick, Oldbury and Rowley Regis, Sandwell is a place built on making things happen. It's where industry met innovation, and where strong communities still shape the future.

Making It Home

We're still making it our home today. Our towns are regenerating, creating new spaces to live, learn, work and connect. We have a culturally rich, diverse and young population. In Sandwell, we're vibrant, ambitious and full of potential.

From our beautiful Sandwell Valley, world-class Aquatics Centre and Albion's home at the Hawthorns, to our live music and cultural events, iconic sculptures and the canals, bridges and roads that have continued to connect us at the heart of the West Midlands.

Making It our Business

It Starts in Sandwell. If it can be made, it's been made here. From the glass in Big Ben, to Wembley's arch, Sandwell has long been making and manufacturing for the world. Now, we're making the workforce of tomorrow, fostering advanced logistics and emerging technologies, and supporting businesses big and small.

Making a future

We're making a difference – through new schools and learning opportunities, a landmark new hospital, creative networks and much more. The Sandwell Story brings together key stakeholders, Sandwell Ambassadors, and a growing community of people and partners committed to making Sandwell shine.

Making it home. Making it business. Making a success. Making a future.

Together, we're Making It Sandwell.



OUR COUNCIL NARRATIVE – A CARING COUNCIL THAT GETS THINGS DONE

In Sandwell, we care about each other and it is our community that makes us proud to call this place our home.

We're down to earth and proud of our heritage as a powerhouse of the industrial revolution, and this history is still evident today in the unique and distinct character of our towns and neighbourhoods.

Sandwell is at the heart of the West Midlands and we have a young and rapidly growing population. We're proud of the diverse communities that bring so much to our borough.

Our borough is full of wonderful green places, like our much-loved Sandwell Valley Country Park. We're the green gateway to the Black Country from Birmingham and have great connections to the rest of the country.

We already have an outstanding track record in bringing funding into our borough and are passionate about supporting businesses to grow in a way that ensures people and communities benefit too.

We are determined to make the most of our peoples' skills, abilities, and resourcefulness to create good jobs and opportunities that will boost everyone's life chances and attract even more investment into Sandwell for the long term.

The Sandwell Aquatics Centre showed what we can do when we get the chance. We played host to visitors from all over the world during the Commonwealth Games and we now have a state-of-the-art community

leisure centre for all of our residents to enjoy.

But the thing that really makes Sandwell bostin is our people.

It's not like us to shout about our achievements or put ourselves in the spotlight.

We know that we face some big challenges here. Too many of our residents' have their health and life expectancy impacted by their social circumstances. Child poverty is double the national average and some people's prospects – especially when it comes to health – might not always be as good as they can be.

Times have been hard for many of us in recent years. But we also know our community is amazing when we come together, and there is so much potential to unlock.

The council hasn't always got everything right, but we've maintained vital services for our residents most in need.

Our focus is on being brilliant at the basics. That means getting things right for our residents – delivering high-quality services that are easy to use and working for the people who need them.

And our ambition doesn't stop there. We want our borough to be a great place for children to grow up. We want to make Sandwell a cleaner, greener and

safer place to live and for our residents to live longer in good health. And we want to create the good jobs and opportunities that will help everyone realise their potential.

We are a caring council that gets things done.

Together we can deliver a great future for Sandwell and change people's lives for the better.



HOUSE OF BRANDS



Our corporate logo



The Sandell Story is a campaign and branding that celebrates the people, places and partnerships that make this borough a great place to live, work, learn and visit. It underpins the programme of work that will be developed by the Sandwell Together Partnership to achieve our ambitions for Sandwell.

WE ARE
SANDWELL!

We Are Sandwell outlines our purpose, vision and values. It shapes our workplace culture and employee experiences.



RESIDENT SURVEY AND CHANNEL INSIGHT

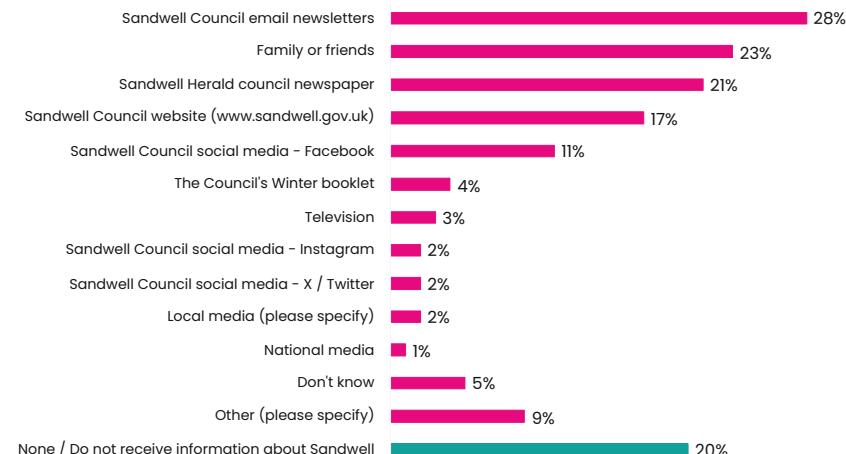
The way that people access information and news is increasingly fractured. In 2024, Ofcom reported that online had overtaken TV as the biggest news source for adults in the UK.

Whilst Ofcom have found that 70% of adults access news online, our residents' survey shows 9% of Sandwell experience barriers accessing the internet, with those barriers more prevalent among over 75s, those living with disabilities and economically inactive residents.

Through our residents' survey we know that family and friends remains a key source of information, and that residents are more likely to access information about the council through our direct channels – particularly our e-newsletters, the Sandwell Herald and Facebook – than via the media.



Residents are most likely to keep up to date about what the Council is doing through its email newsletters, friends and family and the council newspaper



Q20. How do you keep up to date with what the council is doing and what is happening in Sandwell?
Unweighted base: 1,129

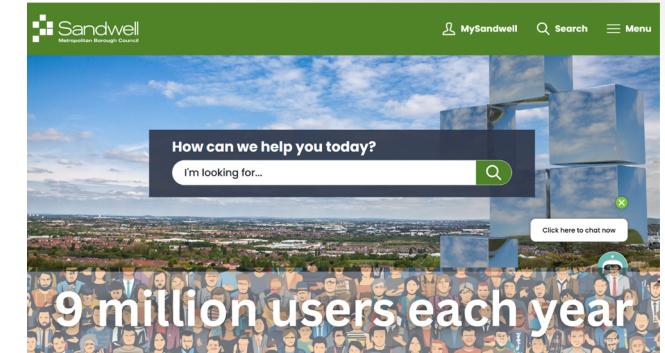
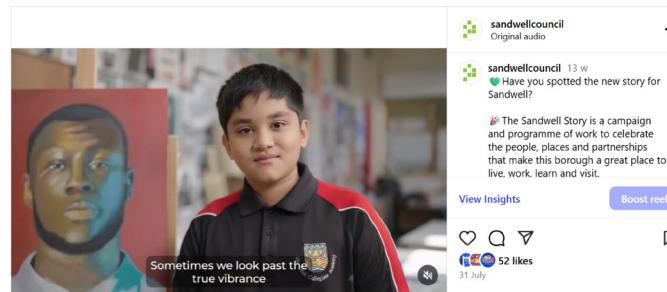


OUR CHANNELS

The Communications Service oversees and curates our corporate communications channels to tell our story.

The national data and our Residents' Survey shows that no single channel will reach all our audiences, and we need to tailor our approach to each channel.

Our neighbourhoods communications approach is fully integrated, with some channels working for both borough-wide and local stories.



OUR CHANNELS – BOROUGH-WIDE

 **Facebook:** Our most established social media channel, with more than 50,000 followers, we use Facebook to share updates and information about council services and promote events.

 **X:** Whilst the number of active followers has dropped significantly, X is still used as a source of news by some. We use X to share updates on urgent issues and emergencies, and to ensure we are able to address and respond to any misinformation directly.

 **LinkedIn:** We profile our staff and shine a light on their achievements and stories allowing our employees to be strong advocates for the council. We share updates on council activities via LinkedIn, primarily to an engaged, professional audience to help ensure stakeholders and partners are informed about what the council is delivering and as an attraction and recruitment tool.

SANDWELL HERALD: The Sandwell Herald is delivered to every household in our borough three times a year. It is our best way to share information and updates about council services to audiences who do not access news online.

 **Instagram:** We use Instagram to promote events and raising awareness of council services and activities by telling the stories of our people and our place.

 **TikTok:** We will use TikTok to promote Sandwell, celebrating what it's like to live, work, grow up and visit here. We want to use TikTok to connect with younger audiences who don't access our other channels, and position the council as an employer of choice for young people. Where appropriate for the channel, we will also use TikTok to support with behaviour change.

Council website: Our council website receives more than 9 million unique visits a year, and remains our main channel to provide information about our services for those who need to access them.

Borough-wide



SANDWELL HERALD
WWW.SANDWELL.COM



OUR CHANNELS – BOTH

 **E-newsletters:** Through our e-newsletters we share updates on services based on specific topics that our subscribers sign up to. We share a weekly borough-wide newsletter and are establishing quarterly town newsletters to share updates on our activities at a neighbourhood level.

 **Facebook groups:** About half the population are members of Facebook groups, and they can be valuable places to share important or urgent updates, and to address locally circulating misinformation.

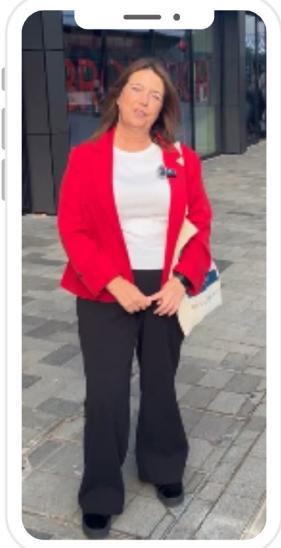
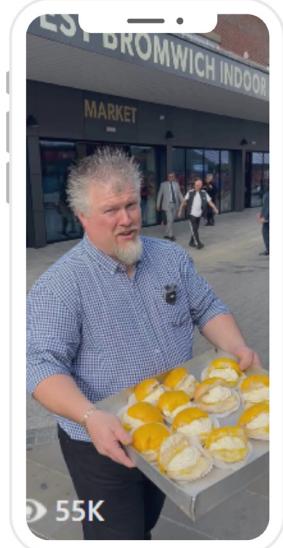
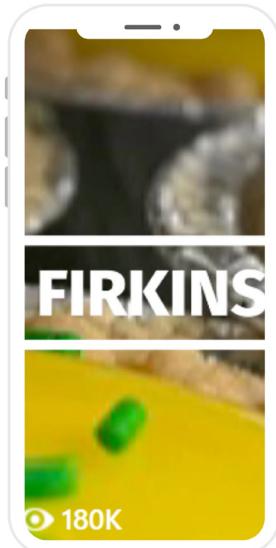
 **Press releases:** We use press releases to make announcements and share updates about council activity. They can focus on borough-wide or local activity, and in addition to being sent to local and regional media contacts they are shared with members and MPs.

 **Whatsapp:** With many people getting news from their friends and family, we are launching a Whatsapp channel to share updates in a way that can easily be passed on.



OUR CHANNELS – LOCAL

nextdoor: More than 50,000 residents in Sandwell have Next Door accounts. Next Door is set up based on where the account holder lives, so gives us an opportunity to share updates about our activities at a local level directly with those who live in the area.



INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Internal communications is critical to achieving our ambition to become an outstanding council, helping to clearly articulate our purpose and vision so that staff understand how their role fits in to delivering better outcomes for our residents. It also helps to break down siloes, making connections between services and growing understanding of how we all contribute to improving our residents' quality of life.

We are seeking to fully embed a culture of continuous improvement, building on the progress over the last few years, and as we continue on our journey our values and behaviours are our toolkit to navigate change across the organisation.

Through internal communication, we can showcase and recognise colleagues who are living the values and behaviours; demonstrate visible leadership and facilitate two-way dialogue that demonstrates leaders listen to ideas coming from all parts of the organisation.

By making our intranet as user-friendly as possible we want to support our staff to find what they need to do their job quickly so they can focus on the work that makes the most of their unique skills, and where they add the most value.

As our transformation programme grows, effective change communications is crucial to ensure staff understand the reasons for change and how they help us become outstanding, and are kept informed and engaged about changes that affect them.

Our residents' survey shows that family and friends is the second most common way for people to stay



informed about the council's activities. 54% of our staff live in Sandwell, and if we give them the right tools and knowledge, they can also be powerful advocates in our community.

Our internal communications channels and offer

Events	Updates	Engagement	Change
Sandwell Showcase	Chief Executive weekly update	Viva Engage	Change communications
Leadership Conference	Executive Director updates		
We are Sandwell Awards	Directorate live events		
All staff briefings	Weekly News		
Intranet			
Strategic advice			



HELP US TELL THE COUNCIL'S STORY.

We want to know how we can beat the drum, and showcase the milestones as we deliver our council priorities.

Communications is not just about when we have something significant to announce, it's about telling the story of the difference we make in people's lives every day.

Visit the communications pages on the intranet to find more information on how to contact the communications team and our guides on how best to work with us.

