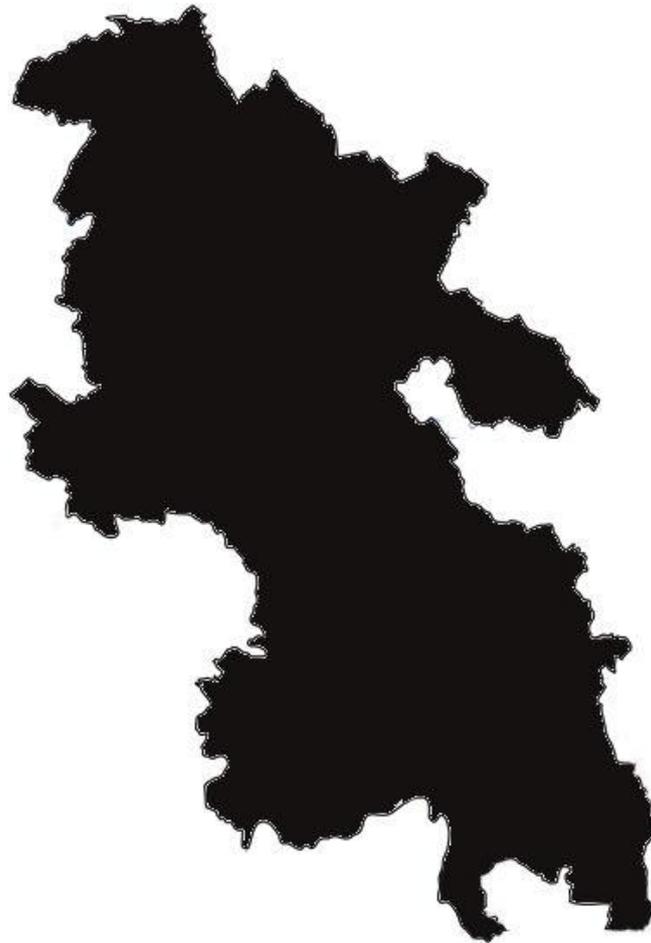


Delivering the new Buckinghamshire Council: our transition to a new unitary council

Communications and engagement strategy



Good communication and engagement is fundamental to ensuring a smooth transition from the existing five district and county councils in Buckinghamshire, to one new council for all of Buckinghamshire that will start on 1 April 2020.

It is important that residents, staff, members, parish and town councils, strategic partners including the health sector other public bodies and emergency services, businesses and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) are kept informed of progress and regularly reassured that public service outcomes will not be negatively impacted by the creation of the new authority.

The overarching communications strategy will have three phases of supporting communications and engagement plans:

- Phase 1 – the period up to the making of the Structural Change Orders.
- Phase 2 (a) – from the calling of the first Shadow Authority meeting to end March 2020, including transition arrangements
- Phase 2 (b) – promote the lead-in to the new council creation and then first 100 days in *(Detailed plans for phase 2 (b) will be developed further on into the programme to launch in January 2020)*

2. Principles underpinning the strategy

Buckinghamshire’s local authorities:

- Will speak with a united and co-ordinated voice wherever possible
- Will agree an approach that ensures that there is a shared and agreed set of messages while also allowing some agreed, specific localised messaging by each authority, where appropriate
- Will ensure that there is a regular and agreed flow of information to all our stakeholders
- Will counteract incorrectly reported information to ensure that our stakeholders have a clear understanding of process and decision making
- Will proactively manage their communications rather than reacting to external events

3. Context

During autumn 2016, Buckinghamshire County Council submitted a proposal to government for a single unitary council covering the same geography as the existing county council.

In January 2017, the four district councils jointly submitted a proposal to government for two unitary councils, covering the same geography as the Aylesbury Vale in the north of the county and of Chiltern, Wycombe and South Bucks in the south of the county.

In March 2018, the then Secretary of State Sajid Javid announced his “minded to” decision for one unitary council and invited representations to be submitted by the end of May 2018.

On 1 November 2018, a Written Ministerial Statement issued by current Secretary of State James Brokenshire confirmed the decision for one new unitary council for Bucks.

While the district councils initially expressed disappointment at the decision for one unitary council, all four have now committed to working closely with the county council to create a new unitary council by 1 April 2020.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will lay before Parliament the Structural Changes Order that will detail how this change will be implemented, following which shadow arrangements to implement the new council across the five councils will be established.

The enormity of the task to ensure that new council, which will dissolve the five existing councils, is up and running by 1 April 2020 should not be underestimated.

This strategy should be a live document, as our communications and engagement work must be able to respond where necessary to emerging requirements from the different unitary workstreams, issues affecting the progress of the programme to set up the new Buckinghamshire Council and feedback from stakeholders, staff, members and residents.

4. Objectives

1. To improve understanding and awareness of the process by which the new council will be created, including the creation of the Shadow Authority and the Shadow Executive
2. To provide reassurance to residents, partners and key stakeholders on the plans for the new Buckinghamshire Council and how it is being set up, and that they have a role in that process.
3. To provide reassurance for staff with a regular flow of information and engagement opportunities, to support the aim of minimising the loss of key staff as far as possible
4. To bring the five authorities together to speak with a united voice
5. To engage with relevant stakeholders in a timely, appropriate and meaningful way on matters which may affect them, or on which they could have an effect, in relation to the proposal for a single unitary council for Buckinghamshire
6. To support the aims and objectives of the Buckinghamshire Council programme

5. Resources

The Programme Communications and Engagement Lead Officers and Communications Support Officer, communication leads from each of the five councils, who make up the Communications Working Group (CWG), with any additional support within each council's communications teams as required.

6. Target audiences

There are a large number of stakeholders in this process. The potential impact of this change is so wide-reaching that it would be difficult to identify a group or individual locally who didn't have an interest.

While media are identified here, that is only insofar as they are a set of stakeholders who will fill any information void with potentially unhelpful material. For the most part they should be considered an element of the communications channel mix.

The following list is by no means exhaustive and additional audiences will be identified as the situation progresses, particularly in terms of segmentation within the larger stakeholder groups:

| Internal | Partners | External |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AVDC, BCC, CDC, SBDC and WDC staff • BCC-employed school based staff • AVDC, BCC, CDC, SBDC and WDC members • AVDC, BCC, CDC, SBDC and WDC volunteers • Trade unions • Employee reps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers • Parish and town councils • Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group ○ Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust ○ Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust ○ GPs – Medicas, FedBucks ○ Healthwatch Bucks ○ South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust ○ NHS England ○ Public Health England • Thames Valley Police and PCC • Voluntary and community sector • Businesses, BTVLEP, SEMLEP, local chambers of commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, BIDs, Oxford/ Cambridge corridor organisations, Bucks Business First • Bucks Fire and Rescue Service • Other strategic partners – TVLRF, Suppliers to all councils • Commercial tenants • MHCLG ministers and civil servants • Five Buckinghamshire MPs • Housing associations • Educational establishments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nurseries and pre-schools ○ Schools – Primary and secondary (academies, maintained, independent) ○ PRUs ○ UTC ○ Buckinghamshire College Group ○ Bucks New University ○ University of Buckingham | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents • Customers/clients of current services • Media – trade and local • Vulnerable groups • Harder –to-reach groups (young people, religious groups, BME communities) |

7. Key messages and risks

7.1 Overarching key messages

While the move to creating a new unitary council for Buckinghamshire is exciting and presents a number of opportunities, it will be important to manage stakeholder expectations in relation to the pace of change.

Key messages should pave the way for the Shadow Authority and Executive, and promote optimism for the new council in the lead up to 1 April 2020.

Further key messages will be developed for individual stakeholder groups and will develop as the transition is implemented.

- The new council is a brand new council
- Our priority is to ensure a smooth transition to the new council by 1 April 2020
- All five councils are united in their commitment to ensuring we deliver the best result for our residents and businesses
- Our staff are one of our biggest assets and we hope to retain as many as we can in the new council and seek to minimise redundancies wherever possible
- Our councils have extensive experience of transformation and this expertise will be at the heart of creating the new council
- There are many potential future benefits and opportunities for the new council and we will be transparent about the challenges
- The Shadow Authority and Shadow Executive will oversee the transition to the new council
- The creation of the new unitary council is not the answer to budget cuts – existing transformation and financial planning programmes will continue
- It is likely that you will access services in a very similar way to the way you do now and services you receive like bin collections will continue without the need for you to take any action
- A new council will make it easier for you to know where to go for services
- In time we will be able to join up services, where it makes sense to do so, and improve services for residents
- The ongoing work on improving children's services will not be affected

7.2 Risks

Risks as they currently stand:

- Lack of regular communication produces a vacuum which will likely be filled with rumour and speculation
- Lack of joined up messaging across all the councils will result in misinformation and confusion amongst stakeholders and undermine sense of ownership across all five councils
- Significant and unexpected change in government or parliament impacts on the timeline to create the legislation needed to establish the new council
- Loss of key staff impacts on the current councils' ability to deliver 'business as usual' services and on the new Buckinghamshire Council's ability to deliver services from day one
- Partnership working fractures as a result of an inability to agree collaborative arrangements
- Current non-statutory services are impacted by the need to redirect more resources to meet statutory responsibilities within any new unitary arrangements, resulting in a reduction in the quality of services for residents and businesses

8. Communication and engagement channels and approach

Our emphasis across each of the three phases will be to keep our stakeholders, especially staff and members, informed about the planning and progress of the transition to the new council, ensuring that key questions are answered.

We will adopt the 4 Ps of change communications¹:

Purpose – explain why we are doing what we are doing

Picture – tell people what the change will look and feel like when we reach our goal

Plan – tell people how we will get from A to B

Part – explain what people need to do to help make the change a reality and a success

Two- way engagement is also crucial throughout all of the phases, to ensure that people feel listened to, their opinions valued and that they have been able to be involved in shaping the outcome of the changes.

All the five councils will collaborate on learning from current and past communications and engagement to use customer insight and analysis in directing the communications approach throughout each phase.

¹ From the IC Space <https://communication.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ic-space/change-communications/>

Phase 1:

8.1 Phase 1 Approach:

This period will focus on maintaining communication and engagement with staff and members as the primary stakeholders.

It is important throughout this time not to lose contact with other key stakeholders such as town and parish councils, residents and strategic partners and we will regularly update these groups through existing channels.

We will make the most of existing channels, sharing key messages and providing regular updates on the progress to establishing the first meeting of the Shadow Authority.

We will create opportunities for these stakeholder groups to ask questions and stay informed about the process.

Throughout this period we will also work together to identify or develop as needed key channels of communication for phase 2 as detailed in the stakeholder plans, including introducing joint newsletters for staff and members, a shared area for staff communications and information, developing the Shadow Authority website and promoting the Shadow Authority to the public.

Phase 1 communications will be developed and agreed by the Communications and Engagement Workstream and adhere to the Joint Communications and Media Protocol (see Appendix xxxx)

9.2 Channels and approach

Internal channels for staff and members

Each organisation will have its own internal communications methods for staff, which might include channels such as staff newsletters, intranet, all-staff emails and briefings amongst others. We will use all of these tried and tested channels to ensure staff are kept up to date on what is happening and maximise opportunities to communicate and engage with them.

We will also continue to use existing arrangements for working with senior staff, leadership teams, employee reps and trade union reps to cascade key messages, improve understanding of the process and encourage engagement at all levels within our organisations.

In addition, each organisation will have its own ways of communicating with its members, which may include newsletters, briefings, seminars and emails. We will make use of these channels to communicate information about the programme and engage with members throughout the existing councils. The timing of members' own communication on political issues will be considered, although this is not part of the communications generated by the unitary programme and detailed in this strategy.

The unitary programme communications resource will share joint messages and key FAQs with the five existing councils, with consistent messaging across the organisations achieved through coordination with the Communications Working Group (CWG).

Media

Local media play a key role in helping us to share progress towards the new council with local residents, particularly when online articles are shared on social media forums.

It is critical that the local media understand the process and the decisions that are being made and speak to the council(s) as the most credible source of information about this. Press conferences could be used sparingly, but more regular direct press briefings and releases will be essential.

It is inevitable that the individual five councils will be approached by local media in their areas about issues relating to the new council, and there is a high likelihood that individual Leaders will receive requests for separate interviews.

It is important that key messages are understood and adhered to, alongside a comprehensive list of frequently-asked questions and potential answers. The CWG and Programme communications teams will coordinate to ensure all organisations are aware of media enquiries and interviews. A central record of media enquiries and responses will be created by the programme communications leads for reference by all organisations.

Social media

Social media enables two-way dialogue with stakeholders and is a cost effective and immediate way of communicating decisions and discussions about the transition to the new council. It is also a platform to correct misinformation in a timely way, and should be monitored and arrangements put in place to allow prompt responses to inaccuracies before they are able to spread rapidly further online.

Each of the five councils will use their existing social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, to publish and share agreed content about the transition process to the new council.

A Twitter account will be set up for Shadow Authority and we will use existing social media accounts across the five councils on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Nextdoor. Arrangements for the new council will be part of the Communications and Engagement strategy development for the new council.

The Future Bucks and Modernising Bucks social media channels, which were used to explain the two unitary proposals by the county and district councils, have been closed down.

Websites

Each organisation has its own website which should be used to convey updates via news channels. Some have already set up a section dedicated to discussions around local government arrangements – which can be regularly updated with information and be used to signpost to other websites.

A Shadow Authority website will be set up and ready from the point at which the Shadow Authority exists.

Future Bucks and Modernising Bucks websites should cease to exist once that Shadow Authority website is created (Modernising Bucks has already been archived).

Direct mail, publications and advertising

During phase 1 electronic direct mail to new and existing stakeholder networks should be maximised, ensuring where possible that duplication of information is minimised and joint messaging is consistent.

This includes the use of printed residents' magazines in Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe district and ezines from AVDC and Bucks CC.

Other publications for stakeholder groups, such as newsletters to town and parish councils, schools and GPs, should also be utilised.

Regular meetings

Each council holds regular meetings with stakeholders, such as parish and town council clerks, voluntary groups, local community groups, police, LAFs and so on and these meetings provide an opportunity for a regular agenda item to keep these organisations and groups informed. They are also an opportunity to answer any questions.

Schedules for these meetings should be exchanged and a co-ordinated approach in keeping messages current and attending meetings agreed.

Ambassadors

Members of each authority should be provided with as much information as possible, in order that they can speak with authority on the subject when asked by residents. During Phase 1 there are clear political complications within this and these should be anticipated and allowed for.

Well-informed and engaged staff can provide an effective front-line ambassadorial role when dealing with residents. In particular, customer service staff should, through the appropriate channels, be provided with regular updates and access to FAQs so they are able to formulate responses built around key messages.

The county's five MPs have the potential to provide a supportive voice behind the local authorities' collective activity. This should be encouraged through regular update meetings with Chief Executives and Leaders as well as briefing notes to ensure they remain aware of progress as it is made.

Voluntary and community organisations

Each authority engages with local volunteers, and this needs to be maintained through existing channels throughout business as usual and the work of the Shadow Authority, with consistent shared messages. As valuable parts of our local communities they could play a role as we move through the phases of the work in the distribution of the Shadow Authority's communications to important groups throughout the new council's catchment areas. They could also help us to access groups of people for engagement purposes in organised ways and provide direct regular updates via the most appropriate channels. . These could include volunteer organisations such as Action for Youth, Community Impact Bucks, Age Concern, and Buckinghamshire MIND.

9.3 Key Milestones and high level activity:

Communications activity during phase 1 will be focused around the following key dates:

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BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL

| Month | January | February | March | April | May | June |
|--|--|--|-----------------|--|--|--|
| Milestone | Letter from MHCLG Special Cabinet Meetings Regulations Order laid | Regulations Order Made | | Structural Changes Order laid | Structural Changes order Made | First Meeting of the Shadow Authority First Meeting of the Shadow Executive |
| Milestone related activity | | | | All staff email All member email | Joint all staff update, and member update Updates to strategic partners, businesses and town and parish councils Press release to local media Shadow Authority website launch Shadow Authority twitter launch Promotion of Shadow Website as place for first meeting papers | Press briefing (pre the meeting) |
| Ongoing communications activity | | | | | | |
| Internal staff and members | | Staff updates Member updates | Staff roadshows | Staff Roadshows | Joint Staff newsletter Joint member newsletter Informal member event | |
| Residents | | Resident updates in Aylesbury Vale Times, Wycombe District Times, MyBucks, | MyBucks | MyBucks Article for members to use in local newsletters and | MyBucks Shadow website and social media | |

| | | MyAccount newsletters | | community publications | |
|--------------------------|--|--|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| Town and Parish Councils | LAF meeting updates | LAF meeting updates | LAF meeting updates | | Invite to Localism events |
| | Local Newsletter update on Unitary Plans | Budget and Unitary Local E- Newsletter (BCC) | BMKALC events | | Launch Town and Parish Council newsletter Develop specific area for town and parish council on Shadow website LAF meeting report Localism Events TfB Stakeholder Event |

Phase 2

9.5 Approach:

Develop new joint communications channels to promote the work of the programme, whilst continuing to maximise the use of existing communications channels across the five councils, existing meetings and relationships to support this.

Develop a suite of materials including pull up banners, posters, leaflets and content for use across a number of channels that can be used at events, meetings and other opportunities by the PMO Communications team as well as the wider programme and communications teams to promote the new council.

Develop and deliver joint engagement events and activities to support the programme to create the new unitary council, keeping stakeholders informed of plans and progress towards delivering the new Buckinghamshire Council.

Support emerging engagement and consultation needs identified through the Programme Boards and Workstreams, making use of the new joint communication channels, and existing mechanisms to target the right audiences. The channels and approach for individual stakeholder groups are detailed in the stakeholder plans which are attached as appendices to the Communications Strategy. These plans have been developed as working documents and will evolve and be added to as the work of the Programme Boards and the PIDs for each workstream is developed.

The focus of Phase 2 is on the transition to the new council, promoting the work of the Shadow Authority, Shadow Executive and Implementation Executive and the work of programme to create the new council.

During this phase we will also develop further detailed plans to promote the new council from January – April 2020.

9.6 Shadow Authority specific communications

Promoting the Shadow Authority and Shadow Executive is essential to increase understanding of the shadow arrangements and their role in the creation and transition to the new council.

It is proposed that communication about the Shadow Authority **will** incorporate the new branding, the dedicated website URL and links to the relevant new social media. Communication will be through the existing and new channels created for each stakeholder group (detailed in the each of the stakeholder group plans developed alongside this document and attached as appendices). These plans will detail opportunities for engagement with specific stakeholder groups.

It is recommended that following each of the Shadow Authority, Shadow Executive and Chief Executives' Implementation Group meetings there are agreed communications about important decisions that can be shared via key channels and to interested stakeholders. This process will be developed by the Programme Office.

9.7 Channels

Internal channels – staff and members

It is proposed that the following be created for the transition period to achieve the best possible internal communication:

- a shared digital space that can be accessed by staff and members across all five councils
- new channels such as a specific newsletter for these groups
- a shared collaborative space for the work streams.

The detail of these new channels are outlined in the Internal Communications Stakeholder Plan.

Any internal messaging, including responses to questions which may be relevant to staff or members across all councils, must follow the clearance protocol in appendix A. It must be timely and for the most part, staff must hear the news first – or at least at the same time – rather than prioritising the media.

To ensure a coordinated approach to change communications and engagement it is essential that the HR/OD and Communications work streams are aligned and work closely together throughout the transition phase.

Media

Local media play a key role in helping us to share progress towards the new council with local residents, particularly when online articles are shared in social media forums.

It is critical that the local media understand the process and the decisions that are being made and speak to the council(s) as the most credible source of information about this. By sharing information about media enquiries and coverage, the Communications Working Group and the Programme communications team will work together to ensure all organisations speak with one voice create and respond consistently to emerging issues, enabling the media to have a clear understanding of the process and related decisions in setting up the new Buckinghamshire Council.

Informal and formal press briefings around key milestones such as the first Shadow Authority meeting will be useful in supporting the media to understand the transition and shadow arrangements and facilitate good reporting.

See appendix B for shared media relations protocol. See appendix C for a list of media contacts.

Social media

Social media enables two-way dialogue with stakeholders and is a cost effective and immediate way of communicating decisions and discussions about the transition to the new council. It is also a platform to correct misinformation, and a way to promptly address inaccuracies before rumours take hold if responded to quickly.

There will be a twitter account set up for the Shadow Authority @Shadow_Bucks – this will be used to promote meetings and key decisions as well as informing residents and followers about progress to the new council.

Each of the five councils will use their existing social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, to retweet these posts and share agreed content about the transition process to the new council.

Websites

A Shadow Authority website will be developed to promote its work: the agendas, minutes and papers for its meetings will be published on the site and it will be a source of wider information for the public about the move to the new council.

Engagement events

Two way and face-to-face engagement will be required throughout the transition to ensure key groups are involved and have the opportunity to help shape the future.

This will include engagement activities for:

Staff

Members

Town and parish councils

The public

There are a number of existing approaches across the five existing councils that will be used to engage with these audiences (including for example Local Area Forums, Residents Panels, Youth Forums).

Engagement planned with individual stakeholder groups will be detailed in the stakeholder plans and will include face-to-face briefings, events, workshops, online opportunities, interactive content, surveys and other consultations.

There may also be a requirement to consult with stakeholders on specific areas, such as Council Tax Harmonisation. These will require specific communication and engagement plans.

Direct mail, publications and advertising

It is important that throughout the transition period to the new council we make use of existing publications and magazine such as MyBucks (BCC), Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe District Times to keep residents informed.

Other publications for stakeholder groups, such as newsletters to town and parish councils, schools and GPs, should also be utilised.

In the lead up to the new council there will be a need to use posters in car parks, community noticeboards, council tax letters and other existing channels to promote the new council.

Making use of other public channels such as advertising to promote the new council will form part of the plan for Phase 3.

Regular Meetings

Continue to use existing meetings with stakeholders such as parish and town council clerks, voluntary groups, local community groups, police, LAFs and so on and these meetings provide an opportunity for a regular agenda item to keep these organisations and groups informed and to provide an opportunity to answer any questions.

Schedules for these meetings should be exchanged and a co-ordinated approach in keeping messages current and attending meetings agreed.

Ambassadors

Members of each authority should be provided with as much information as possible, in order that they can speak with authority on the subject when asked by residents.

Well-informed and engaged staff can provide an effective ambassadorial role front-line when dealing with residents. In particular, customer service staff should, through the appropriate channels, be provided with regular updates and access to FAQs so they are able to formulate responses built around key messages.

The county’s five MPs have the potential to provide a supportive voice behind the local authorities’ collective activity. This should be encouraged through regular update meetings with Chief Executives and Leaders as well as briefing notes to ensure they remain aware of progress as it is made.

Example High Level Plan – to be developed further

| Month | July | August | September | October | November | December |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Milestone | | | | | | |
| Milestone related activity | | | | | | |
| Ongoing communications activity | | | | | | |
| Internal staff | Staff newsletter Staff roadshows | Staff newsletter | Staff newsletter | Staff newsletter Staff Roadshows | Staff newsletter | Staff newsletter |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| Members | Member newsletter Member briefings | Member newsletter | Member newsletter Member briefings | Member newsletter | Member newsletter | Member newsletter Member Briefing |
| Residents | MyBucks | MyBucks Resident updates in Aylesbury Vale Times, Wycombe District Times, County Show | MyBucks Consultation on Localism options | MyBucks Article for members to use in local newsletters and community publications | MyBucks Shadow website and social media | MyBucks |
| Town and Parish Councils | LAF meeting updates | | | LAF meeting updates | | |
| Strategic Partners Businesses | Town and Parish Council newsletter | | | | | |
| | Regular updates | | | | | |

9. Evaluation

Staff surveys are a good yardstick of internal communications success, as are staff briefings and individual one-to-ones.

Where staff surveys are not currently in place, we will consider introducing them and aligning with other councils' questions to form base data on satisfaction, understanding, impact, happiness and dealing with change.

To understand and improve staff communications a cross council communications survey is recommended in the summer/ at the end of phase 1 to support the ongoing development of the internal communications planning for phase 2.

Success of public relations activity can be measured through a variety of channels including:

- Community group engagement
- Feedback from stakeholder partners
- Google analytics regarding messaging
- Web page views
- Social media metrics

All evaluation will feed back into the communications process to improve future communications delivery.

Appendices

A. Governance

The communications strategy is delivered through the Programme Communications and Engagement Lead Officers working closely with the Communications and Engagement workstream (CEW) to co-ordinate communications to staff, councillors, customers and other stakeholders relating to the formation of Buckinghamshire Council and the interim Shadow Authority.

Clearance of messaging

The PMO Communications Leads will ensure all communications are signed-off at an appropriate level to ensure the content is technically correct and that the message is cleared politically where appropriate – working closely with the CEW and Communications Leads across all the five councils to co-ordinate approvals. Messages must be approved according to the Joint Communications and Media Protocol at appendix B.

Joint communications from all councils

Press releases will be prepared by the PMO Communication Leads and cleared for publication as detailed in the Joint Communications and Media Protocol. They will then be issued centrally by the PMO on behalf of all councils.

Joint reports to committees such as Local Area Forums (LAFs) or parish councils will be coordinated by the PMO, messages cleared and issued by the nominated communication lead on behalf of all councils.

Where communications are to be delivered separately by each council, e.g. internal comms, the CWG will ensure the same message is sent to all recipients and, as far as practicable, at the same time.

B. Communications protocol for the five Bucks Councils – this relates to and is focused on the Shadow Authority and work towards the new Council

1. Context

It is essential that a collaborative approach is utilised across all workstreams in the preparation for a single new unitary council for Buckinghamshire. The communications teams are pivotal in ensuring the development of positive, clear and timely information for all our staff, partners and the public. We will work together to ensure that we effectively promote the work of the Shadow Authority / Executive and the move to the new Council.

2. Purpose

This protocol is designed to:

- Ensure a single point of contact with the Unitary Programme Team (Kate Walker/Jill Hemmings), county council (Kim Parfitt/Emma Denley) and single points of contact for the district councils (Catherine Spalton, Jez Vibert and Rachel Prance).
- Ensure a good working relationship between all parties, with particular emphasis on the respective communications leads across the council and unitary programme team.

3. Principles and overall approach

It is important to recognise that from December 2018 to May 2019 (phase 1 – the interim period) and from May 2019 to 31 March 2020 (phase 2 - the period when the Shadow Authority is in existence) the five Bucks Councils – AVDC, BCC, CDC, SBDC and WDC – will still be carrying out their respective duties and subsequently there will be a need for ongoing business as usual (BAU) communications work.

The communications leads from each of the authorities will be the 'go-to' people in the first instance for any Shadow Authority communications i.e.

- Jez Vibert – Head of Communications and Marketing (AVDC)
- Kim Parfitt and Emma Denley – Heads of Communication (BCC)
- Rachel Prance – Communications, Performance & Policy Manager (CDC)
- Rachel Prance – Communications, Performance & Policy Manager (SBDC)
- Catherine Spalton – Communications and Improvement Manager (WDC)

The programme office has appointed two communication and engagement leads (Kate Walker and Jill Hemmings) who will be a single coordination point for unitary-related communications and engagement across all five existing councils.

Communications activities for the existing Councils (AVDC, BCC, CDC, SBDC, WDC) will still be handled by their respective communications teams but they must work openly together and maintain regular contact where appropriate to facilitate a professional and joined-up approach to all communication activities.

A similar approach will be taken for social media activity. Each authority is encouraged to re-tweet posts where applicable, whilst also maintaining a close watch on social media activity for inaccurate or negative messaging.

All five councils' communications teams to monitor local media (TV, radio and print) for potential issues.

4. Scope

This protocol is intended to cover both proactive and reactive communications activity.

All varieties of communications from traditional printed and broadcast vehicles, including interviews and opinion pieces; to social and new media, can have an impact in terms of reputation. This protocol defines communications as:

- Internal communications i.e. with staff and members
- Press releases and written statements given to the print and broadcast media
- Interviews and opinion pieces given to the print and broadcast media
- Briefings, interviews, verbal statements and press conferences
- Publicity material, including posters, brochures, leaflets, newsletters (including email newsletters, magazines etc.) and reports
- Media information, blogs and commentary released across each organisation's social media channels
- Broadcast interviews, documentaries and public interest programmes
- Presentations and briefings for stakeholders and partners
- Information published on any of the organisation's websites

5. Operation

A number of operational commitments are necessary to enable effective implementation of the communications activity discussed in this protocol.

- All content on behalf of the unitary transition should be agreed across the five councils, and will be led by the communications leads. This should include all communications materials as outlined above. The exception to this will be any internal communications which is directly related to delivery from the programme workstreams (e.g. programme updates and newsletters). This communication will be produced and co-ordinated by the programme communications and engagement leads. Communications leads in each organisation and the programme office shall undertake to inform each other at the earliest opportunity of likely or actual relevant communications activity, as defined in this protocol.
- Communications leads in each organisation and the programme office shall manage the activity in the most appropriate way, mindful of issues of confidentiality. This shall include 1) sharing key messages or deciding on a joint statement, briefing or press conference; 2) an agreement that one organisation is the lead partner on a certain issue; 3) separate activity, reflecting that one organisation may disagree with the other's position or proposed course of action.

- Material issued by any of the organisations, which relates to the work or activity of one of the other parties, will be shared, in advance, with the relevant communications team.
- Material issued by any of the organisations will be placed on their respective websites, and shared electronically with a named individual in the respective communications teams.
- A record of press enquiries/materials issued will be kept and shared in a timely fashion.
- Communications leads in each organisation shall meet regularly to discuss strategies to achieve the long-term aim of reassuring the public, staff and members, to develop joint key messages and to discuss challenges facing the parties, therefore ensuring early consideration of any important issues.
- In cases of sensitive, or conflicting, positions the communications leads representing each organisation undertake to keep each other informed on a 'no surprises' basis. Any confidentiality or embargo relating to this information will naturally be upheld.
- Communications leads in all organisations agree to respond to requests for information or other support in a timely fashion, with the minimum response being an acknowledgement of any request within one working day.
- Contact details will be provided for requirements outside of normal working hours.

6. Internal communications

- This relates to communications with staff and members.
- It is essential that staff and members are informed of important news items before they are shared with the public/media.
- The communications leads across all organisations and the programme office will work collaboratively to agree messages at key times and ensure these messages are shared at the same time where possible.
- Approval for messages to staff to be cleared as shown in the procedures below; messages for members to be cleared as shown in the procedures below.

7. Procedures for signing off/clearance of communications materials before issuing

External communications

- Quotes for media statements and press releases on behalf of the Shadow Authority will be in the name of the Leader of the Shadow Executive. This comes into force once the Shadow Authority exists. Press releases issued on behalf of the Shadow Authority must be signed off by the Leader of the Shadow Executive and/or the interim Chief Executive (the media statement and press releases will be shared with the other Leaders/CEXs as a matter of courtesy and given a time limit in which to reply if there is an issue).
- Quotes for media statements and press releases on behalf of the respective existing authorities (AVDC, BCC, CDC, SBDC and WDC) will be in the name of the appropriate Cabinet Members or Leaders of that authority as per their media protocols.

Staff

- Communications to staff regarding issues within the existing authorities (AVDC, BCC, CDC, SBDC, WDC) will be in the name of and with the approval of the relevant Chief Executive.

- Communications to staff regarding issues relating to the Shadow Authority and direct programme delivery will be in the name of and with the approval of the interim Chief Executive.

Members

- Communications to Members regarding issues within the existing authorities (AVDC, BCC, CDC, SBDC, WDC) will be in the name of and with the approval of the relevant Leader.
- Communications to Members regarding issues relating to the Shadow Authority and direct programme delivery will be in the name of and with the approval of the Leader of the Shadow Executive.

8. Review

This protocol will be reviewed in July/August 2019.