



Watford Borough Council's
**Communications and
Conversations Strategy
2023 - 2026**



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

Empowering our communities

In Watford, we believe in the art of the possible. As a town and as a council we are ambitious to achieve more and do things better for our people, which is clearly expressed in our Council Plan and Delivery Plan. What these plans also highlight is that the people of Watford - the community and businesses we serve - are always at the heart of everything we do. These principles are woven throughout the Communications and Conversations Strategy.

Excellent and effective communication is pivotal in both achieving the bold goals we have for Watford and ensuring the community remains the driving force behind all our activities. Good



Foreword by
Peter Taylor,
Elected
Mayor of
Watford

communication goes far beyond just talking to and updating people. It's about empowering our communities by equipping them with tools, knowledge and information to improve their everyday lives. It's about hearing people, discovering their stories, insights and experiences and in so doing, ensure that we continue to deliver excellence across all our services. Most importantly it's about uniting people. This comes through strongly in our Communications and Conversations Strategy, along with the need to reflect everyone who makes our town what it is.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "P" and "T".

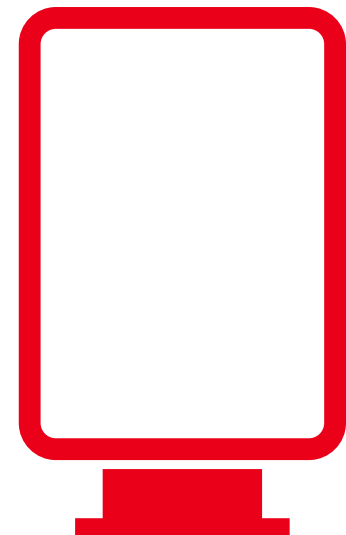


Driving communications and conversations excellence for watford

Watford is town that is known for its ambition, entrepreneurial spirit and creativity, which makes us it an exciting place to live, visit, work and to do business. We are forward-looking and have a 'can do', welcoming and caring spirit that makes great things happen; creating the feeling of endless possibilities that makes Watford so different.

The council reflects the drive of our town, embracing innovation, seizing opportunities and harnessing our collective energy to achieve more for Watford, our residents and our community. Our Council Plan 2022-26 sets out how, together, we will achieve our vision and ambitions. Through this Communications and Conversations Strategy, we will align our voice to amplify our messages and enhance the profile of our council, our services and all that we do to make Watford so special.

We have included conversations in our strategy to reflect the importance of talking, listening and having a discussion or just a chat - whether online or in person.
con-ver-sa-tions (noun): talks, especially informal ones, between two or more people, in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, with news and information exchanged.



Through this strategy we will take our communications and conversations to the next level by:

- Encouraging everyone to share their stories to promote what we do.
- Exploring different and innovative ways of communicating.
- Making our communications more meaningful and relevant for our diverse audiences.
- Making the best use of our resources by consistently using our Champion, Core, Classic model to prioritise council communications.
- Carrying out robust evaluation to understand what works for our community and how we can improve our communications and engagement.
- Ensuring we work to the principles of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity in 2011 so that that all communications activity is:

- lawful
- cost effective
- objective
- even-handed
- appropriate
- aware of equality and diversity
- issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity, such as before elections

Stepping up to support the Council Plan

Our communications and conversation themes

We will support the successful delivery of the Council Plan and raise how we deliver communications and conversations by:

Theme 1 - Promoting what is important to our town and community through a shared and coordinated programme of activity

Theme 2 - Recognising the different ways people from our diverse community choose to hear from us and communicate with us, targeting their needs and preferences

Theme 3 - Amplifying our voice to highlight our achievements and successes within Watford and beyond

Theme 4 - Building resilience so we can pivot effectively to respond to new opportunities



Understanding the people who make our town

We are committed to a people first approach, so having a comprehensive understanding of our residents and businesses is the bedrock of all our communications and determines:

- the most effective platforms for each communication/project
- other methods and channels we can use
- timing of communications activities
- tone of voice

The best conversations flow two-ways. We don't just want to throw information out and talk at people. To succeed in ensuring Watford continues to thrive and prosper we need people to be interested in what we have to say and invested enough to talk back and pitch in.

This can only happen if we have a true sense of who our residents, businesses and communities are. They need to know that we get them and from there we can create trust, build on relationships, cultivate community

cohesion and hit the apex of working with, not just for, the people and businesses we are here to support.

Building community spirit.

Our diverse and vibrant community is central to what gives Watford its spark and energy. We are proud to have been recognised as a 'rainbow town' that has welcomed people from many different backgrounds and experiences to enjoy all that Watford has to offer.

Communications, and the conversations it encourages, play a vital role in building community spirit and a sense of pride, and reaching as many groups as possible. Our communications need to reflect, and be led by, our community so that it includes and involves everyone. This in turn helps in overcoming barriers and being a trusted voice for Watford, for our community and also for our staff through linking to our Customer Experience

Strategy, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and our Community Engagement and Participation Strategy.

We will:

- ensure our communications and conversations reflects the full diversity of Watford
- work with our Elected Mayor, councillors, community leaders and groups to better understand our residents and how they want to hear from, and talk to, us
- ensure content (videos, online content, website forms, printed materials, advertising) meet accessibility standards and use images and photos that truly reflect the people of Watford
- use the data we have about our audiences to shape our communications and target resource towards the most impactful channels
- help to ensure equality of access to our services

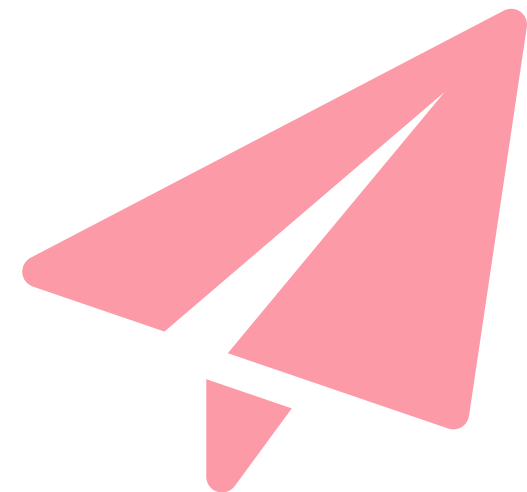
Setting our future direction

It is vital the way we communicate reflects our values of integrity, trust and respect - who we are - along with our values of bold, together and agile - how we work.

This underpins our aspiration to use communications and conversations to improve the lives of our residents and help keep Watford an outstanding place to live, work and do business.

We will achieve this through this strategy and its delivery plan, and by embracing these core principles of work:

- **People first** - the people we are talking to and working for are always our starting point.
- **Never stand still** - explore new technologies and techniques which are always emerging to ensure effective use of resource and to best serve our town and community.
- **Evaluate, question and learn** - take the time to assess if communications are landing and why, exploring alternatives and challenging ourselves to apply what we've learned.



Reflecting our local character and identity

A consistently applied and authentic council brand, including our tone of voice, use of language and imagery is essential in telling Watford's story and generating key conversations. Our brand is more than just a logo, it's a window into the lives of our community, our personality and our ambitions, giving us visibility across the town and credibility when communicating with residents and businesses. If we use our brand well, we can successfully continue to communicate our vision for Watford's future.

Amplifying Watford's place brand and narrative

Watford's place brand and narrative showcases Watford as a dynamic, vibrant and bold town, highlighting all that makes it such an attractive and unique destination to live, visit and work.

We will champion the place brand and model how it should be used, encouraging others to embrace what it can achieve for the town, its profile and reputation. The council brand will reflect and complement the place brand, helping to embed it across Watford and beyond, building its presence and impact.

To maintain our strong branding presence and to make sure it works successfully with the town's place brand we will:

- align with Watford's place brand and use it where appropriate
- model the use of the place brand and champion it to local partners and key organisations
- apply the council brand consistently across all our services, channels and communications materials

- ensure agreements are in place with partners on collaborative projects on how to use both our brand and place brand (where appropriate)

Our reputation is underpinned by

- ✓ what we say about ourselves
- ✓ what people say about us
- ✓ doing what we say we will do

Our tone of voice

We are shaped by the people around us. So, as a proud Watford organisation that's here to serve the people and businesses of this town, it makes sense to talk like Watford. The language we choose to use is important because it allows our personality to shine and lets our residents and businesses know that we get them.

- **Bold** - keep it short and to the point to maximise impact and show that we are honest and straight-talking.
- **Friendly** - chatty language is clearer for people to understand, indicating we are open and tying in with our commitment to make Watford a welcoming place for all.
- **Approachable** - avoid technical language to get people engaged with our communications and to kick-start conversations.





How we communicate

Our focus

Following the cuts to local authority funding, the unprecedented fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, high inflation and the cost of living crisis, we continue to operate in the midst of a perfect storm. Two-way council communications are increasingly essential for our community while resources, including budget, are decreasing.

Watford's ambitious Council Plan also means that the breadth of our communications is growing. Although small geographically, we also have a fast-growing and diverse population, with different needs and communications preferences.

This strategy looks at how we can maximise

the resource we have, and communicate and engage effectively with our community by:

- shaping our communications around our community's preferences
- consistently using the **Champion, Core, Classic** model to focus resource

Pivoting our planning and resource

Watford's big, bold agenda means we must deliver complex communications with limited resources and diminishing budgets. Using the **Champion, Core** and **Classic** communications model allows us to tier our activities and focus our communications planning.

The objectives of the model are to:

- show our community the scope of Watford's ambitious Council Plan
- enable the best allocation of resource and budget to drive value for money
- allow for proper and effective campaign planning
- encourage conversations and collaborations with the community, Mayor and members, staff, residents and partners
- empower all Watford BC staff to communicate effectively in face-to-face communications, via professional channels liked LinkedIn and building case studies and best practice examples ➤

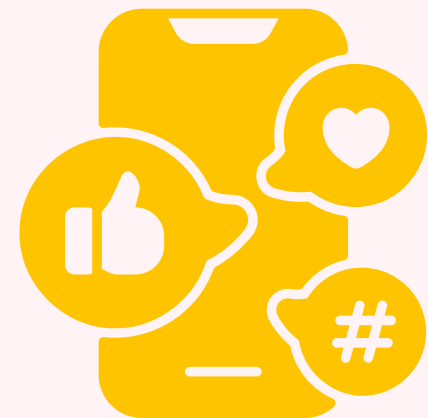
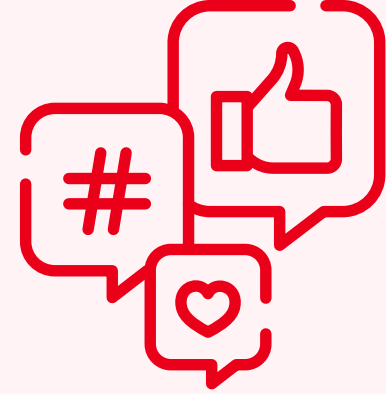
	Features	Budget	Channels options	Design	Example
Champion	High impact with big audience Ambitious multi-faceted project Council Plan priority Long term	Higher budget	Social media Website Email marketing Print advertising Radio Meetings and events Mayor and members Partner channels Explore new opportunities	Unique creative identity	Town Hall Quarter programme Rediscovering the River Colne
Core	Low impact with big audience or high impact with limited audience Contained project or initiative Medium term	Low budget	Social media Website Email Limited print and direct engagement options	Standard design work required	EV charger rollout Shopping parade upgrades
Classic	Standard service information sharing and updates Low impact with limited audience Short term	No budget	Website Potentially social media and email marketing	No design required	Temporary bin collection changes

Building our media and public relations profile

As a lively town so close to London and as a Mayoral local authority, Watford attracts significant local, regional and national media attention.

- In line with our commitments to being transparent and promoting our wonderful town, we take a proactive approach to media relations, working to build positive relationships with the media and issuing an average of 1,000+ press releases and arranging around 20 broadcast interviews a year.
- We also respond to around 200 media enquiries a year, and aim to provide useful briefings and statements swiftly. Not only does this enable us to tell Watford's story but it means we can ensure the information the public are receiving is accurate and balanced.

- With so many ambitious projects in track, trade media is becoming increasingly important in building Watford's reputation as an innovative and dynamic council and we will identify where stories and messages would generate interest beyond our boundaries



Creating strong social media connections

Unsurprisingly, social media has become critical to all our communications, enabling us to have real conversations with residents, share information and updates quickly and target our messages to keep them relevant - all for free or at minimal cost.

- We know that people want to engage with us on social media, with almost 60% of those in our top MOSAIC groups¹ having a preference for using it. Over the last two years, our follower numbers have grown exponentially, increasing by more than 20% to a total of 64,527. This is partly down to our understanding the distinctions between each platform and its audience, an ongoing piece of work, enabling us to create interesting content which works and gains traction.
- Social media is about having great conversations. It's a window into the life of our community and, in line with our commitment to be open, friendly and approachable, we

always try to respond to comments, positive or negative, directly on the platform.

- We challenge ourselves to keep informed of changes, trends and new technologies so that we can keep building relationships with communities. New platforms are always emerging and we will explore and trial these, adopting the right ones to suit both our community and our resource.
- Monitoring what has worked well helps us to shape and evolve our social media approach
- Our social media guidance for staff and members sets out how we use our platforms and offers advice on using them successfully both at work and home. We encourage all Watford BC colleagues to have great conversations through LinkedIn, which is a great way to celebrate our corporate and individual successes and maximise the council's resource and impact



Facebook: 21,585 followers - primary users 25-34 year olds



X / Twitter: 12,493 followers - primary users 18-29 year olds



Instagram: 5,540 followers - primary users 18- 24 year olds



LinkedIn: 6,437 followers - primary users 30-39 year olds



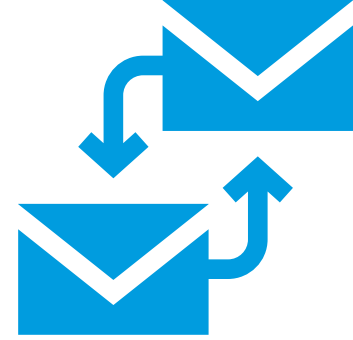
Nextdoor: 18,472 followers - primary users 55-64 year olds



As of June 2023

¹ Rental hubs 22% of our community, Urban cohesion 19% of our community and Domestic success 16% of our community

Enhancing our profile through websites and email



We recognise that the website is a place where people want to get things done and access the information they need quickly.

- We are committed to ensuring web content is easy to understand, accessible for those who are sight impaired and that it is translatable.
- Detailed information about the council's key programmes, which are complex, multifaceted and have a big impact will be delivered via microsites, including watfordtownhallquarter.com, rivercolnewatford.org. These sites have a shelf life and aim to provide the community with a full overview of major projects in a simple and accessible way. They help people to see the bigger picture for our town and capture the long-term vision, so that people feel properly informed.

Email also continues to play a role in our communications toolkit.

- We have a weekly resident enewsletter providing regular updates on events, useful information and campaigns straight to inboxes.
- With around 7,000 people signed up, this is an area of growth for the council, with a sign-up campaign underway along with a review of how and where we give people the opportunity to subscribe to e newsletters.
- Email also gives us a way to update specific groups, forums and communities about things they are interested in, including our sustainability group and people registered for housing updates.





Targeting traditional media

There can still be a place for traditional, printed media.

- It has a broad reach, is very visible and helps us get messages out to those who aren't active online or on social media.
- But it can be expensive and there is an environmental impact, so using our communications model we can decide if it's right for the project and our audience.
- We always look to cross promote where possible and maximise the use of traditional print media when we do use it, by adding inserts to dedicated mailings, and posting long-term campaigns on our poster sites to minimise cost.

Media	Timing	Reach
26 town centre digital boards	Continuous, 10 seconds per minute	Around 1million visitors a month to town centre
131 bus shelter poster sites, 6sheet and 14 underpass poster sites	Continuous, option to change every two weeks	1million+ a month
Dedicated council mailings, including council tax and elections	Twice a year	Every eligible resident/ household
Flyers	As needed	Limited for targeted audiences



Delivering our strategy

Our strategy will be translated into action through a detailed Delivery Plan (2023-26). We will rigorously monitor this plan and measure how well we are doing through our council commitment to continuous improvement and reporting back to our residents and community. As we deliver, we will review this strategy, also providing the opportunity to refresh with new ideas, innovation and best practice.



Our communications strategy is integrated into our strategic fabric



Our people

Our people are our key ambassadors. Together, through this strategy, we will tell our community both within Watford and beyond about all the fantastic work our people do and the difference they are making.

We recognise the critical role of our people across everything we do. It is reflected and amplified through our values and behaviours and recognised in our People's Strategy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.

Championed by our Chief Executive, we have a strong framework of communications and engagement that underpins our People Communications Strategy, which encourages people to share, learn from others and celebrate what they do.

People Communications

Ensuring our people informed, engaged and inspired is key to who we are and our success.

Just as with this outward facing Communications and Conversations strategy, our people communications goes beyond informing and consulting to really involving, collaborating and empowering to create greater belonging and deeper engagement.

How we inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower

- In Touch** updates from the Chief Executive and celebrating our successes
- TeamTalk** news from CMT, written each fortnight by a member of CMT
- Staff Ambassadors Group** an empowered staff group, supporting the Chief Executive by testing new ideas and shaping how we work
- Pathfinders** an enthusiastic team who pioneer initiatives and show how it is done
- Conversations** an opportunity to spend some time with the Chief Executive, sharing day-to-day work experiences
- Team Watford pulse surveys** checking in to create a greater people experience



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communications@watford.gov.uk

 01923 226400

 www.watford.gov.uk