

# **Appendix A - Draft our town recovery communications strategy**

## **An opportunity to improve**

Effective recovery has long term benefits for the town and the council has refocused its work and its priorities on recovery. It is being used as a catalyst to improve Harlow and create opportunity. Likewise recovery is a chance to improve the way the council communicates and engages with different sectors of the community. This means there is an opportunity to improve existing communication channels, discover new channels and create new ways of communicating and engaging with residents especially in hard-to-reach groups.

## **The strategy**

This strategy sets out the direction and focus of communication activity around the town's recovery. This strategy is a working document and will continue to develop in line with the recovery action plan and will be influenced by work taking place to analyse and gather data. It should be driven by insight into how residents and businesses are feeling.

The aims of the strategy are to ensure that residents, businesses, community and voluntary groups and stakeholders:

- Understand what they can do to help avoid a local lockdown.
- Take up specific opportunities which are available and opened up to them.
- Are aware of the council's plans for recovery and progress being made.
- Understand the role they can play in helping the town recover.
- Know what they can and cannot do in the event of a lockdown and where support is available.

## **Communication themes, priorities and key messages**

The vision for the town's recovery is:

*"To harness the positive aspects of the community response to the Covid-19 crisis and address the negative outcomes such that the Harlow that emerges - its residents, businesses and voluntary groups - is stronger, more resilient and poised to take full strategic advantage of the opportunities for growth and renewal."*

This vision can be broken down into these three themes to guide the recovery communications:

- Creating a stronger and more resilient town.
- Creating, taking and opening up opportunities.
- Being prepared for the future.

Communication activity will centre on these four priorities:

- Looking after yourself and others (prevention and lockdown communications page 4)
- Building resilience and strength.
- Supporting residents and businesses, particularly those who are vulnerable.
- Reopening of council services and services provided by HTS.

Key messages:

- We will help you look after and protect yourself and others from COVID-19.
- We will take and create opportunities which will secure the future of the town and improve the lives of all.
- We will help you be prepared for the future.
- We will help keep the Harlow pound in our town.
- We will continue to be here for you.
- Together we will build a stronger more resilient Harlow as a result of its response to this pandemic.

## **Using data and insight**

Work to identify and gather data on those impacted by coronavirus and an analysis of calls into Contact Harlow and the hub, use of our website and social media engagement will be invaluable for this strategy and shaping the priorities within it. Data from regular business surveys will also help inform this strategy and evaluate ongoing communication activity with businesses.

An independent residents' survey would help to identify the priorities and concerns of residents, which would guide the recovery plan going forward. A survey of this nature could also be used to identify how people now get information, what information they trust and how they would like to receive information. This would help identify and improve our communication channels. Potentially residents' views could be gathered or a survey promoted in the winter edition of Harlow Times.

## **Overall communications approach**

There will be a need to communicate the council's recovery plan and progress to the wider population and there are some existing communication channels for doing this (see appendix 1). The starting point for recovery communications is to publish a summary of the plan and how residents, businesses and organisations can play their part.

However, the overall communications approach should also be audience-led so that specific support schemes, information and action emerging from the recovery action plan are targeted at the right audiences.

These audiences will be guided and reviewed by the work taking place to analyse and gather data as part of the work streams. Particular focus will be given to defining disadvantaged groups and groups disadvantaged by the pandemic.

Examples of audiences:

Council tax payers	Business rate payers
Council tax support scheme claimants	Licensed premises
Residents claiming benefit support	SME businesses
Council tenants	Discover Harlow ambassadors
Council leaseholders	Chamber of Commerce, SELEP, EZ board
Supported housing tenants	Community and volunteer sector
Residents living in HMO and permitted dev	Faith leaders and faith groups
Families	Police, Hospital, Fire and ambulance
Residents living in private rented homes	County Councillors and Youth Councillors
Vulnerable/isolated/shielding residents	Schools and Harlow College
Young people and older residents	HMO landlords
Residents with protected characteristics under the equality act: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civic partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation	

## Communications channels

Councils have a vital role as official sources of information and need to reach audiences directly without always relying on other intermediaries.

An action as part of this strategy is to investigate new ways of communicating with different audiences, in particular hard to reach groups. It is worth noting that a weekly local newspaper going directly into homes would play an important part in communicating with a wide range of residents. As we no longer have one, this doesn't present a challenge for the council and as a result we have to use as many of the existing communication resources we have and develop new ways of communicating. At appendix 1 is a table of current communication channels the council uses and channels which could be utilised more.

Information will also be collected from partner and community organisations on what channels they have which can be used or developed to specifically target different groups. Sometimes these channels can also be trusted sources of information.

## **Hard-to-reach groups:**

A community forum has been set up which includes community representatives, representatives from BAME communities and residents with disabilities which will help the council identify and communicate with traditional hard-to-reach groups.

Hard-to-reach groups include residents who are not accessing or cannot access information online, those who are unlikely to engage with the council or can't speak or read English. One of the principles in the council's community engagement strategy is – "seeking to reach those communities and individuals not yet engaged i.e. hard to reach and marginalised groups."

**We will ensure that no one is further disadvantaged or isolated from the impact of the pandemic, so communication materials must also be accessible.**

For example: materials must follow RNIB guidelines if information is specifically targeting people with disabilities such as sight impairments or older residents and where appropriate materials should be available in different languages or offer a translation service if information is targeting residents who don't speak English including our BAME communities. As part of the work of the Essex Resilience Forum a BAME coronavirus advice leaflet has been produced in different languages <https://www.essex.gov.uk/advice-for-people-from-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-backgrounds>.

All content regardless of audience should also be clear and use plain English and avoid jargon. We will keep content simple, targeted, human, respectful and two-way where possible. All images on social media posts and the website will follow accessibility rules including using ALT descriptions (describing what the image is and what the image says) for those with screen reading software.

Our recovery is about opening up opportunity so therefore our communication must not become a barrier in allowing people to access or find information.

## **Prevention and lockdown communications**

The top communications priority in this strategy is "protecting yourself and others" so there will be a plan of prevention messages to help avoid local lockdowns and keep infection rates down.

Essex County Council under its public health responsibilities has developed a [local outbreak control plan](#) which includes its communications approach around prevention, management of outbreaks, local action and support - see appendix 2.

Through the work of the Essex Resilience Forum the council has already helped to get out preventative messages and also localised messages as part of the town's response. This strategy will see work stepped up in this area with public health messages sent out across the council's communication channels on a more regular basis. This will be supported by communication assets produced by government for example – hands, face and space campaign - and that the County Council provides as part of their work monitoring infection rates. This includes general messages targeted at specific groups. Therefore we will be sharing national, county and localised messages aimed at helping to limit the spread of the virus.

In an event of a lockdown our role would be to support the County Council and help share communication messages. The work which will take place on identifying new communication channels could be invaluable in helping the County Council get local messages out to the right people at the right time. It is expected that the County Council and Government would look to use different communication channels to get across public health messages. This could include for example local traffic boards, banners at key sites around the town, adverts on back of buses, radio and internet advertising and social media advertising.

Local protocols are being developed as part of the business and economy work stream for communication actions where there are increasing infections.

## **Communications activity plan**

Prior to lockdown the council had a communications activity plan which was realigned to its existing priorities. During lockdown much of the council's communication activity focused on the town's response to the pandemic and making residents and businesses aware of the support available and changes in service provision.

This strategy will be delivered through an updated communications activity plan, which will focus on recovery. The Communications Team will support the four work streams and work has started to identify the communication opportunities and issues arising from the recovery action plan. There are activities in the action plan as well as existing council projects and schemes which support recovery and will form the content of the plan.

Wherever possible communications activity across the four work streams will be joined up to avoid duplication and maximise the impact and value of promotional work. As discussed by the Recovery Working Group at a previous meeting the communications plan can help consider the potential public relations impact of communicating activities that could conflict with each other (for example debt management versus supporting those in debt). The action plans presents communication opportunities, but also potential communication issues which will need to sensitively communicating with the public relations implications considered.

Examples of activity based on the four recovery communication priorities are (these activities will change in line with recovery action plan and work under existing priorities):

### **Looking after yourself and others**

- Public health guidance
- Better health campaign
- Mental health awareness
- Domestic abuse awareness
- Prevention of second wave
- Health and wellbeing initiatives

### **Building resilience and strength**

- Sharing and recognising local success stories – business, community, hospital, education
- Community forum

- Business awards scheme
- Investment in town's infrastructure
- Regeneration projects and schemes
- Town Centre future high streets fund
- Town Deal and growth board
- Public health science campus
- Housebuilding projects
- Discover Harlow inward investment campaign
- Paddling Pools improvements
- Cycle Tracks
- Climate change initiatives
- Harlow & Gilston Garden Town
- Local Development Plan

### **Supporting residents and business and opening up opportunities**

- Settled housing for those moved to temporary accommodation during pandemic
- Culture and arts summer school
- Support to BAME and disabled young people impacted by COVID
- Develop social media platform for businesses
- Temporary Business advice centre
- Meet the buyers event
- Promote use of town centre and neighbourhood areas
- Digital skills programme
- Question time event for businesses

### **Reopening of council services and services provided by HTS**

- Reinstating full tenant support for supported housing tenants and reopening communal areas
- Promoting new ways of working for the benefit of residents and businesses
- HTS landscape programme review
- Income recovery

## Appendix 1 - existing communication channels

Channel	Description	Audiences
Local and regional media	<p>Local media: Your Harlow Harlow Guardian newspaper CM17 connection magazine Everything Harlow Axis magazine</p> <p>Regional media:  BBC Essex radio and online BBC Look East ITV Anglia Heart Essex Radio Radio Essex Essex Live Essex TV news</p>	Residents, businesses, stakeholders, opinion formers
Harlow Times	Residents' magazine distributed four times a year to every household via Royal Mail. Recovery content to be prioritised	Residents – no current updated readership information exists but audiences likely to be older residents, those not online or accessing services online and families with young children
Digital	<p>Main website <a href="http://www.harlow.gov.uk">www.harlow.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Coronavirus web page already set up including on support available to residents and businesses</p> <p>Other council and council supported websites:  <a href="http://www.harlowez.org.uk">www.harlowez.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.harlowtowncentre.co.uk">www.harlowtowncentre.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.harlowplayhouse.com">www.harlowplayhouse.com</a> <a href="http://www.harlowsciencepark.com">www.harlowsciencepark.com</a> <a href="http://www.htsgroupltd.co.uk">www.htsgroupltd.co.uk</a></p>	Residents, businesses, community organisations and visitors
Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Linked-in and You Tube	<p>Council has a range of social media channels which can be used to target relevant content to specific audiences.</p> <p>There are also a range of Facebook groups which can also be used to target specific</p>	<p>Each page will have its own specific audiences and interests</p> <p>Facebook advertising can be used to target specific ages or interests</p> <p>Facebook – tends to be more residents and community interest groups,</p>

	<p>groups</p> <p>Council channels and council supported channels include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harlow Council</li> <li>• Harlow Playhouse</li> <li>• Pets' Corner</li> <li>• Harlow Museum</li> <li>• Harlow &amp; Gilston Garden Town</li> <li>• Harlow Town Centre</li> <li>• Harlow Enterprise Zone</li> <li>• Harlow Science Park</li> <li>• Youth Council</li> <li>• Active Harlow Council</li> <li>• Discover Harlow</li> </ul>	<p>campaign groups, but there are some business support group</p> <p>Linked-in – solely for businesses and organisations, networking and for individuals seeking job</p> <p>Instagram – tends to be more residents and community groups and younger residents and some businesses</p> <p>Twitter – businesses, media/journalists, residents, campaign groups</p>
Direct Mail	<p>Leaflets and information within:</p> <p>Council Tax bills, council tax support scheme bills, business rate bills, tenant rent statements, leaseholders service charge statements, commercial tenant mailings, licensed premises mailings, Latton Bush tenants</p>	<p>Council bill payers</p> <p>Council tax support scheme</p> <p>Business rate payers</p> <p>Licensed premises</p> <p>Commercial tenants</p> <p>Council tenants</p> <p>Council leaseholders</p>
Face-to-face communication (in person or virtually)	<p>Community Forum</p> <p>Tenant and leaseholder panels</p> <p>Tenant forums</p> <p>Leaseholder forums</p> <p>Housing Standards Board</p> <p>Safer Harlow Partnership meetings</p> <p>Business question time events</p>	<p>Hard-to-reach groups</p> <p>Council tenants and leaseholders</p>
Email	<p>Using existing databases to send out targeted information</p>	<p>Licensed premises database</p> <p>Residents Associations</p> <p>Discover Harlow ambassadors</p> <p>School readiness</p> <p>Businesses</p>
Harlow Stories	<p>Quarterly magazine for businesses – 500 printed copies and available online</p> <p>Distributed to public places and business areas</p>	<p>Businesses</p> <p>Discover Harlow ambassadors</p>
Discover Harlow e-newsletter	<p>Monthly sent to around 430 Harlow ambassadors every month</p>	<p>Businesses and local stakeholders</p>

Discover Harlow events	Quarterly ambassador events (face to face meetings on hold for now) Attendance at last event 102	Discover Harlow ambassadors – businesses, community groups
Posters, leaflets, banners and signs	Community noticeboards  Council venues – Civic Centre, Latton Bush Centre, Playhouse, Town Park, town centre, shopping hatches and shopping centres, outside schools	Residents and businesses

## Appendix 2 – communications approach from Essex local outbreak plan

### 5. Communications approach

The Government will be providing lots of information and resources to support local authorities to communicate with residents about Test and Trace. Our approach will be to take that content, localise it where needed, and then share through every channel available to us. Of importance will be using the data available to us to identify communities we need to target (both geographical, demographic etc), and how best to tailor this messaging. This insight will be crucial to ensure we are targeting where we are seeing emerging issues and areas that are not adhering to social distancing measures.

Communications approaches will be tailored to different audiences and centre around four key pillars:

- 1. Prevention** -Our strategy to prevent the spread of the virus and encourage them to use track and trace. For this activity we should use PHE assets as much as possible and localise if required. Widespread “push” messages should be disseminated out across all owned channels, both from ECC and partners. We will also look at opportunities for “earned” content through, for example, media opportunities, partnerships, paid for opportunities. This will be supplemented by targeted activity which will be determined through insight and data.
- 2. Management of Outbreaks** – Our strategy when an outbreak occurs. For this activity communications will be two-fold – firstly direct and targeted communications to support the outbreak. This will align to the process/protocols put in place by Public Health colleagues for each scenario. Much like the process/protocol, there will be a generic approach which will be tailored to the relevant audience. It is anticipated that template guidance for communication will be issued by PHE which we should follow and adapt where appropriate (schools protocol being issued w/c 8th June which will include template letters for staff/parents for example). In these instances the setting will be provided with these templates and supported with finalising and issuing these via established channels. The second element would be any wider communications required in relation to local outbreaks, for example managing public/media interest and scrutiny around local outbreaks.
- 3. Local action in response to outbreaks/R number/additional insight** – Our strategy for implementing local action to further prevent the spread of infection. Activity will focus on communicating clearly the process around how decisions are made around local action, and communicating what decisions are made and impact of these.
- 4. Support** – Our strategy for people who need to isolate. Activity will focus on providing those who need to isolate with effective support and guidance of how best to support themselves during a period of isolation (including financial support/guidance around sick pay), including, where appropriate, directing to Essex Welfare Service.

For each above scenario, a separate plan has been created which will allow for detailed scenario planning and templates to be developed.