



Council-In-Committee Meeting – September 09, 2025

Subject: Communications, Marketing and Engagement Strategy
Report Number: CS-25-125
Division: Corporate Services
Department: Customer Service and Communications
Ward: All Wards
Purpose: For Decision

Recommendation(s):

That Staff report CS-25-125 Communications, Marketing and Engagement Strategy be received as information; and

That Council endorse the Communications, Marketing and Engagement Strategy as presented.

Executive Summary

Norfolk County's *Communication, Marketing and Engagement Strategy* was developed to improve transparency, build public trust and ensure residents receive timely, accurate and accessible information. The strategy outlines a coordinated, proactive approach to communication across all internal divisions and public platforms, with a strong emphasis on inclusion, responsiveness and strategic alignment with Council priorities.

Discussion

The *Communications, Marketing and Engagement Strategy* outlines a comprehensive, multi-year plan to improve how Norfolk County communicates with the community. It responds to growing public expectations for transparency, accessibility and responsiveness, and addresses the increasing complexity of municipal communications, including the rise of misinformation and disinformation, the increasingly uncivil dialogue on social media, limited staff capacity and the need for cross-departmental coordination.

Strategic direction

The strategy defines the vision for Norfolk's communications, marketing and engagement as: well-informed and engaged staff and community members able to easily access the municipal information and services they need.

It defines the mission of the Communications team as being a strategic partner that leads and supports Norfolk County divisions in achieving their communication goals through proactive guidance and cost-effective, high-impact tactics that engage and inform our audiences.

The strategy establishes the following set of guiding principles that will shape how Norfolk County communicates with our community:

- Timely and relevant
- Consistent and coordinated
- Collaborative
- Accurate
- Transparent
- Inclusive
- Measured

The strategic action items below have been grouped into four overarching pillars that reflect the key themes that emerged through research, consultation and internal collaboration:

Proactive planning and strategic alignment:

1. Develop a content calendar
2. Proactive planning with departments
3. Identify priorities using analytics and feedback
4. Develop, review or update policies and procedures
5. Use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve communication
6. Recruit co-op and summer student placements
7. Retain an agency of record for additional support
8. Complete a social media audit

Culture and capacity building:

9. Build an internal communications culture
10. Build a community communications culture
11. Launch a Community Ambassador Program (CAP)
12. Continue with a centralized delivery model
13. Use tools, templates and processes to increase efficiency
14. Balance traditional and digital tactics

Audience engagement and inclusion:

15. Expand social media content with human-centred, “living in Norfolk” and educational content
16. Strengthen in-person communication and engagement
17. Build and strengthen partnership
18. Prioritize visual communication
19. Refresh Norfolk County’s brand and visual identity
20. Enhance accessibility and inclusion

Issues management and trust building:

21. Enhance issues management and response
22. Strengthen media relations and messaging clarity
23. Promote transparency through Council communications
24. Develop and share an *Annual Report to the Community*
25. Refine risk and contingency planning

Media monitoring tool

Adopting a media monitoring tool will help staff to detect misinformation and disinformation, track public sentiment and emerging issues across publicly available news and social media, enabling a more proactive response.

The need for this tool is underscored by the strategy's SCOT analysis, which identifies misinformation and declining trust in government as significant threats. The strategy also includes a detailed escalation protocol for online incivility and misinformation, which relies on timely detection and response, something that cannot be achieved without dedicated monitoring technology.

The media monitoring tool will also support Norfolk's goal of becoming its own newsroom, enabling the County to shape its narrative, correct inaccuracies, and build public confidence in its communications.

Community Ambassador Program

To support a stronger community communications culture, Norfolk County will launch a Community Ambassador Program (CAP). This initiative will engage trusted community members to help share accurate information, counter misinformation, and foster respectful dialogue, especially on social media and in everyday conversations. Ambassadors will represent diverse groups across Norfolk and receive training, toolkits, and ongoing support from the Communications team. Their feedback will help shape future messaging, and their contributions will be recognized through features and updates shared with Council and the public.

Roles and responsibilities

Delivering this strategy is a shared effort across Norfolk County. The Communications team leads the work, but success depends on support from Council, senior leadership, staff, and community partners. Council can help share messages and provide feedback, while leadership ensures alignment and flags emerging issues. Staff across departments contribute content, help plan communications, and work with the Communications team to keep messages clear, timely, and accessible. Community members and partners also play a role by staying informed, sharing accurate information, and participating in engagement efforts.

Timeline and metrics summary

Implementation timeline

- **Phase 1: Foundation and alignment (Sept 2025 – Mar 2026)**
Launch foundational initiatives including liaison roles, internal culture campaign, media monitoring, and Council meeting summaries.
- **Phase 2: Tools, training and policy updates (Apr – Sept 2026)**
Includes the roll out of tools, training, and policy updates; begin planning the Annual Report.
- **Phase 3: Community engagement and partnerships (Oct 2026 – Mar 2027)**
Includes expand community engagement, investigation into branding, and publish the Annual Report.
- **Phase 4: Optimization and evaluation (Apr – Aug 2027)**
Includes evaluation of effectiveness, refining tools and tactics, and updating planning documents such as the content calendar.

Metrics

Tracking metrics is essential to ensure the strategy is working, to guide improvements, and to demonstrate accountability. Communications will measure progress in key areas such as how consistently planned content is delivered to the community, how well residents engage with surveys and platforms like Engage Norfolk, and the level of effectiveness of internal communications. Other focus areas include accessibility compliance, department-level planning, staff awareness of tools, use of visual content like video, and the reach of public education campaigns. These results will be reviewed regularly and shared.

Finance Comments:

The Communications, Marketing, and Engagement Strategy outlined in this report, together with the Community Engagement Framework presented in Report CS-25-106 on July 8, identify specific tools—such as a media monitoring tool—and the need for materials to support effective, meaningful and interactive community engagement.

The aforementioned expenses will be included in the 2026 Budget. Any additional financial requirements identified during the implementation of the strategy and framework will be brought forward in future budget processes.

Interdepartmental Implications:

As per the strategy, all Divisions will need to appoint a Divisional Communications Liaison who will act as the conduit between Communications and the Division.

The strategy also calls for a social media audit which may recommend changes to departmental social media accounts.

Consultation(s):

The Communication, Marketing and Engagement Strategy was developed through extensive research and consultation, including:

- Interviews with staff, Council, and community partners
- A community communications survey with over 900 responses
- Best practices from comparable municipalities
- Internal audits of Norfolk's communications channels and materials

Strategic Plan Linkage:

This report aligns with the 2022-2026 Council Strategic Priority Serving Norfolk - Ensuring a fiscally responsible organization with engaged employees who value excellent service.

Explanation: This strategy will help to strengthen communication and service delivery to the community, both digitally and in-person.

Conclusion:

The *Communications, Marketing and Engagement Strategy* provides a clear roadmap for improving how Norfolk County communicates with residents and interest holders. A media monitoring tool is an important component of this strategy, enabling staff to respond quickly and effectively to misinformation and emerging issues. Staff recommend that Council endorse the strategy and approve funding for the media monitoring tool.

Attachment(s):

- Communications, Marketing and Engagement Strategy

Approval:

Approved By:
Al Meneses, Chief Administrative Officer

Reviewed By:
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Prepared By:
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