

Evidence for the Transparency Commission

How the Council's Corporate Communications function can support the transparency agenda

Communications activity which already supports transparency:

- We build good relationships with local, regional and national journalists by briefing them either over the phone, at events or face to face about key policies and initiatives;
- We commit to meet journalists' deadlines when dealing with their media enquiries;
- We keep our web and intranet pages updated regularly and we are currently improving the council's website to make it more accessible and mobile friendly;
- We host regular Local Media Briefings where the media can ask the mayor questions on any topic and have the opportunity to do one to one interviews (we have done two since Mayor Biggs was elected on June 11);
- We have active social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook where people can engage with us in real time and receive responses to their queries in a timely manner;
- We advertise public meetings in East End Life, which is delivered to 83,000 households in the borough each week;
- We promote public consultation via all of our communications channels;
- We host roadshows, stalls, engagement events (open days, community fun days) to shape and promote council services;
- We promote opportunities to train, empower, build resilience and upskill our residents, such as Budget Roadshows, NEET Jobs Fairs, Skillsmatch;
- We have one of the busiest press desks in London and we respond accurately, fairly and in a timely manner. We inform our senior managers about all high profile enquiries and operate a 24/7 media line, 365 days a year. We also provide a media headlines service for senior managers and members;
- We publicise the work of the council via our press releases which are all uploaded onto the website for the public to read.

Planned Communications activity to further improve transparency:

- In addition to issuing press releases we also plan to produce short videos at photocalls/launches with sound bites from key officers/members. This will make our news more engaging and accessible;
- We can produce short videos illustrating an executive summary for reports so they are much easier to digest;
- We would like to live tweet from council meetings to give residents immediate access to decisions;
- We have held one successful Q&A session on Twitter and plan to hold more with senior staff about issues which matter most to residents such as rubbish collection and parking.
- We could have a section on the council's website which demystifies how council decisions are made, such as what is the process from when a proposal is made through to implementation, how do all of the different statutory meetings work, what do they do and how is membership decided, how does a submission for a grant then actually make it to fruition – maybe a flow chart would work best for this.
- We plan to have more infographics to explain complex policy on our website;

- We would like to be more active in Public Affairs and lobbying the government on changes to benefit the borough. We are part of the London Councils' Parliamentary and Public Affairs Group;
- We can commission independent surveys on our services to tie in with national news to achieve a higher uptake of regional, national or trade coverage.

The council is reviewing its communications activity during October 2015 and a key part of this work will be to explore how we engage with residents in an effective and open way, especially in light of the proposed changes to East End Life.

As part of this process, we will be seeking feedback from partners and stakeholders within the council and externally, with a view to building a communications approach that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of local people.

Communications
October 2015