South Derbyshire District Council

2025-2028

Communications and Engagement Strategy





South Derbyshire District Council

SHAPE | TRANSFORM | SUPPORT DRIVE | LISTEN | SHARE

Shaping the way we communicate and engage with our workforce, residents, Members, partners and the wider community

- Driven by the needs of the District's residents, visitors, workforce and partners
- A Strategy to ensure we share and receive feedback on the vision, values and key priorities in the Council Plan 2024-28
- An opportunity to present a modern, forward-thinking organisation, that celebrates the heritage of the District, while showcasing the progress of South Derbyshire District Council, its services and plans for the future.

southderbyshire.gov.uk

INFORM and ENGAGE

Introduction

The Communications and Engagement Strategy outlines our approach to increasing awareness of the Council, its priorities and services; through listening, informing and engaging.

It outlines how we will enhance engagement with residents, encourage participation in our activities and decision-making, as well as our approach to building trust in the Council and driving confidence in its effectiveness.

We want to consistently engage with our residents, strengthen relationships with key stakeholders, and build strong internal communications and connections, to help make us collectively more resilient to an ever-changing environment.

It's important that we celebrate and showcase the work we do, either through our workforce, with partners, or within our District.

THE CONTEXT

Good communications and engagement are essential to how the Council will deliver its priorities. Following our new Council Plan 2024-2028, the Council is committed to an ambitious programme of work to support its Vision to:

- **Shape** our environment,
- **Drive** our economy,
- **Support** our communities,
- **Transform** our Council.

We are a Council that puts our community first, through delivering local services, and building and nurturing local relationships, is how we choose to work. We must communicate effectively and engage our residents, workforce and partners in our work. Our Communications and Engagement Strategy will ensure we continue to build our profile and reputation and receive recognition for our work, and how we deliver services in South Derbyshire.

OUR VALUES

The Council has seven values that describe how we work to achieve our Vision. These Values are embedded into everything we do.

- Working together: working as a team to serve our residents.
- Accountability: taking ownership of the service that we deliver.
- Respect: we value and listen to each other.
- Fairness: offering equal opportunities for all.
- Being Responsive: we have a ‘can do’ attitude and respond to the needs of others quickly, positively and appropriately.
- Innovative: looking for new solutions.
- Excellence: delivering our services to the highest possible standards.

Our Communications and Engagement Action Plan will be reviewed every year to take account of progress, new demands on our services, and any further action required. We will update on progress and keep everyone informed as we go along. We expect the Strategy to evolve, and we will use data and insight to help ensure our plans remain fit for purpose and focused on the future.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Our approach to developing this Strategy is to ensure it:

- ✓ Meets the specific needs of our residents, workforce, Members and partners.
- ✓ Aligns with the Council’s vision, values, and the new Council Plan and priorities.
- ✓ Is ambitious, high-quality, informed by data and outcome focused.
- ✓ Grows the Council’s reach and reputation.
- ✓ Builds advocacy and recognition for the Council's work.
- ✓ Creates a more informed, engaged, and inclusive community.
- ✓ Implements regular internal updates, platforms for employee feedback, and team-building activities.

How do we shape up?

THE OPPORTUNITIES

The need for a Communications and Engagement service that is consistently evolving and improving, is clear to enable the delivery of the Council Plan.
The Communications and Engagement service will work closely with Leadership Team to provide a strategically driven resource, showcasing the day-to-day priority services, while supporting some of those 'big ticket' programmes of work, which are part of the new transformative approach.

OUR TEAM

Comms & Engagement Manager

Senior Comms & Engagement Officer

Communications & Engagement Officers X 1.5

OUR CHANNELS

The Council has effective communication channels and strong social media engagement. It is important that we make the best use of the social media channels we currently use, and keep an eye on the emerging trends. This Strategy and subsequent Forward Plan will help us build our profile and reputation, engage people in what we do, and ensure we receive recognition for our successes and achievements.

Delivering high-quality communications and promptly addressing resident concerns will enhance the Council's reputation. Ensuring inclusive and accessible communications will increase engagement levels. Externally, there are many opportunities now for using digital and social media to complement traditional methods of communicating; interactive platforms, Ai and new technologies to increase insights and give us better analytics.

The Council is committed to building a strategic and well-resourced Communications and Engagement Service, with some external support for design/photography/web and digital where required.

Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

THE CHALLENGES

For some time, the Communications and Engagement service has been mostly reactive, with limited experience of strategic communications. This has been borne out of resourcing constraints, however that is no longer the case, thanks to a restructure of the team and the creation of new posts to drive forward the Council's reputation management. There are some hurdles to get over:

- The Council's brand and messaging is inconsistent, and there is a need to present a more coherent, recognisable and modern 'face' of the Council.
- We must improve how we measure the impact of communications and engagement activities, aligning work with the Council Plan.
- We need to work across service areas to create a more consistent tone of voice for all customer touchpoints, whether that be in-person, over the phone or through digital platforms
- As we embark on Local Government Reorganisation, we must maintain regular engagement with our workforce, Members and stakeholders, taking people on the journey with us.

KEY PRIORITIES

Our five priorities for the Communications and Engagement Strategy are as follows:

- ✓ Increasing awareness of the Council and its priorities and services.
- ✓ Enhancing engagement with residents and encouraging participation in activities and decision-making.
- ✓ Building trust in the Council, confidence in its effectiveness, and improving feedback from residents.
- ✓ Growing the profile of the Council and strengthening relationships with key stakeholders.
- ✓ Developing internal communications and employee engagement.

These priorities will help create a more informed, engaged, and inclusive District, enhancing the Council's effectiveness, responsiveness and reputation.

The Top Five

Increasing awareness of the Council, its priorities and services

HOW?

- Having a joined-up approach to News inside and outside the Council, so we share consistent stories about our key activities across various channels including social media, the Council's website, local forums and events.
- Creating informational campaigns highlighting the Council's key priorities and services.
- Creating and supporting community events and opportunities to showcase the Council's work and engage directly with residents
- Working alongside our key assets – the people who work for the Council – to 'humanise' the services we provide and creating a more relatable service.

Enhancing engagement with residents and encouraging active participation in activities and decision-making

HOW?

- Working with service areas to ask the right questions, to the right groups
- Creating surveys and other engagement channels to gather input and feedback from residents.
- Finding regular ways to measure resident satisfaction
- Hosting regular interest group surveys and focus groups to discuss community issues and gather public opinion.
- Using new technologies such as Ai to increase our insights and analytics.

Building trust in the Council, confidence in its effectiveness, and improving feedback from residents

HOW?

- Ensuring regular communication with consistent messages regarding the Council Plan, decisions and actions.
- Publishing regular, resident- friendly information and updates on key projects and initiatives – 'faces, spaces and important places'.
- Creating social media accounts that are relatable, that break through the 'organisation' barriers and show the humans behind them.
- Establishing multiple feedback channels, including online surveys, suggestion channels (or similar outlets), and community meetings.
- Analysing feedback data to identify trends and areas for improvement.
- Reporting back to the community and our employees on how their feedback is being used to make improvements.

Growing the profile of the Council and strengthening relationships with key stakeholders

HOW?

- Assessing our current stakeholder engagement and use this to develop a stakeholder engagement map, that ensures regular communications and updates and relationships are built.
- Fostering partnerships with local businesses, the media, voluntary and community sector and educational institutions.
- Creating feedback mechanisms, such as stakeholder meetings and forums to discuss progress and gather insights.
- Using digital platforms to enhance engagement and accessibility.
- Building relationships with key media to ensure accurate and consistent coverage of Council initiatives, key projects and developments.

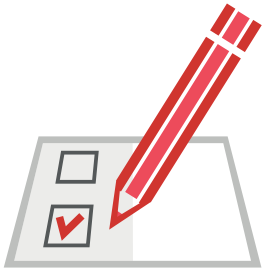
Developing internal communications and employee engagement

HOW?

- Working with colleagues to develop an integrated approach to employee engagement with shared actions.
- Conducting regular ‘pulse’ surveys and feedback sessions to understand employee needs and concerns.
- Organising informal sessions around the Council Plan priorities and values, to ensure we embed them into the way we work
- Using different channels and techniques to keep employees informed about Council activities and decisions.
- Encouraging staff to share ideas and feedback directly with leadership.

Key Audiences

Residents



Elected Members

Employees

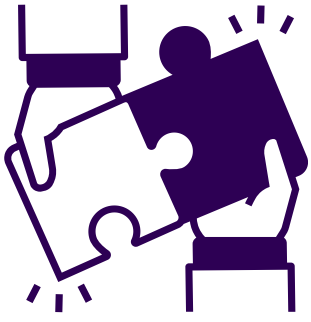
Media

Local businesses

Community Leaders/groups

Schools/colleges

Voluntary & third sector



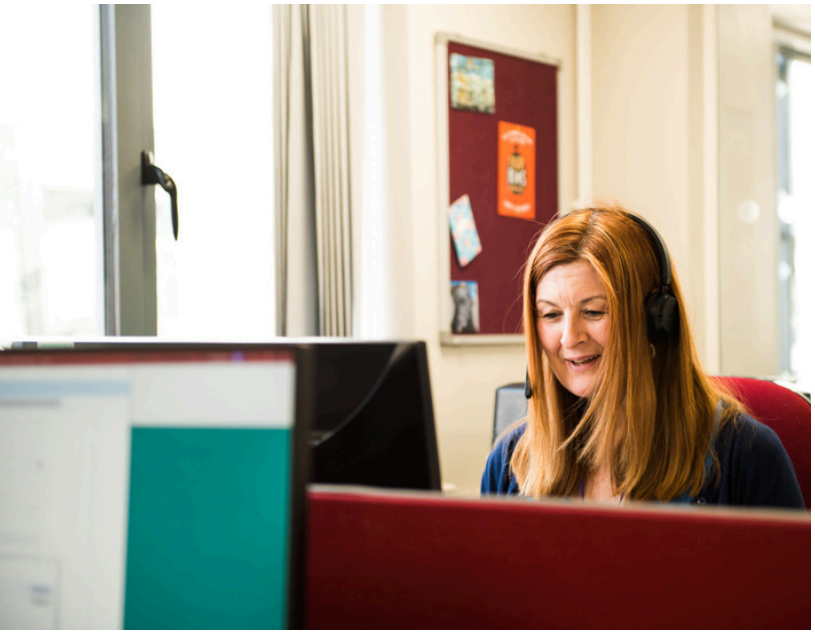
Partners, ie Derbyshire County Council, East Midlands Freeport

Government agencies

CONCLUSION

‘Humanise’ and ‘Modernise’

We need to prioritise our key proactive communications, to ensure consistent and effective communication and engagement on the services and projects that will have the greatest impact on the lives of our community. This Strategy emphasises the importance of a two-way dialogue between the Council and the community, enabling us to better understand and respond to the needs and concerns of our residents.



‘Humanise’

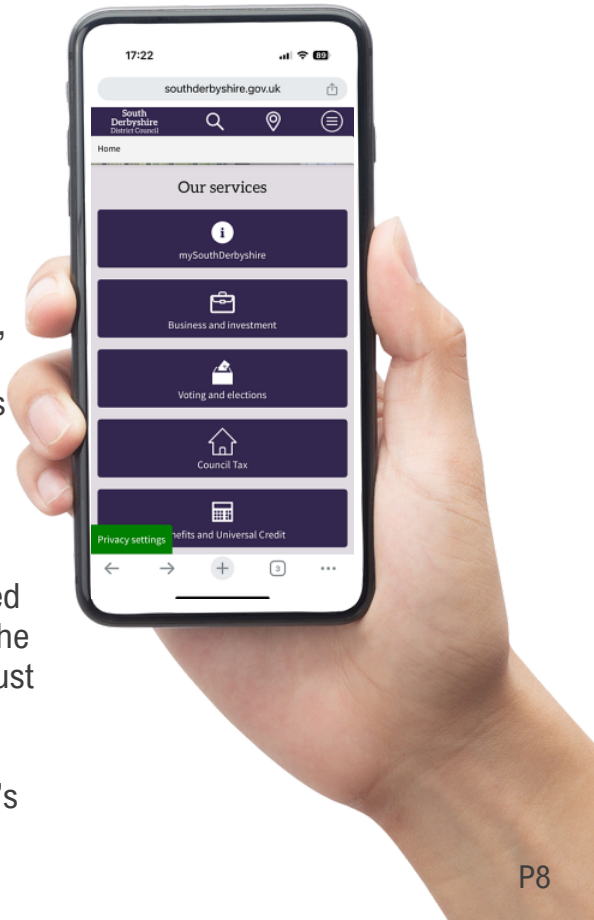
To build trust, we need to make sure we know ‘who’ we’re building trust in, not ‘what’. We need to give a face to the Council, to show the people behind the services.

It is important that in our proactive communication, we consider sharing the positive work being done by our teams across the Council. It’s also important to raise the profile of the decision-makers, bringing Leading Members and the Leadership Team to the fore.

‘

‘Modernise’

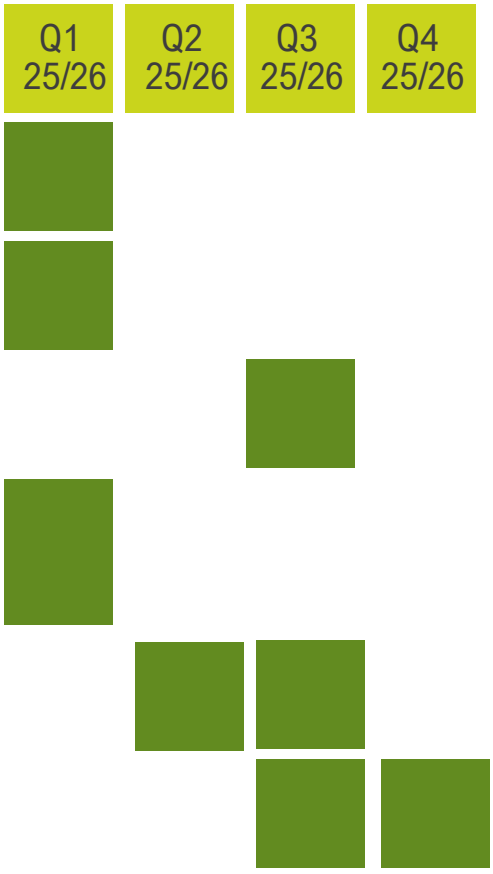
Using modern communication tools and platforms will allow us to reach a broader audience, enhancing accessibility of information, to include those who may be less engaged with traditional methods. We must recognise the diversity of our residents, workforce and partners, when considering the channels of communication we use. By embracing digital channels, social media, and community forums, we can foster a more dynamic and interactive relationship with our residents. This not only enhances transparency, but also encourages more immediate and meaningful feedback, allowing all employees to adapt and improve in real-time.



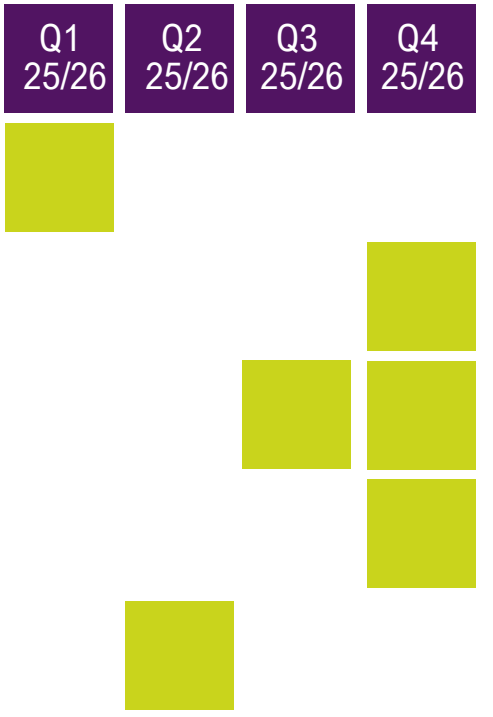
The success of this Strategy hinges on the active participation of all Council employees and effective partnership-working with our Elected Members. By fostering a culture of openness and inclusivity within the Council, we can ensure that our internal communications are as robust as our external efforts. Regular updates, feedback mechanisms, and training programmes will equip and empower our teams with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively communicate the Council’s vision and initiatives.

Action Plan 2025/26

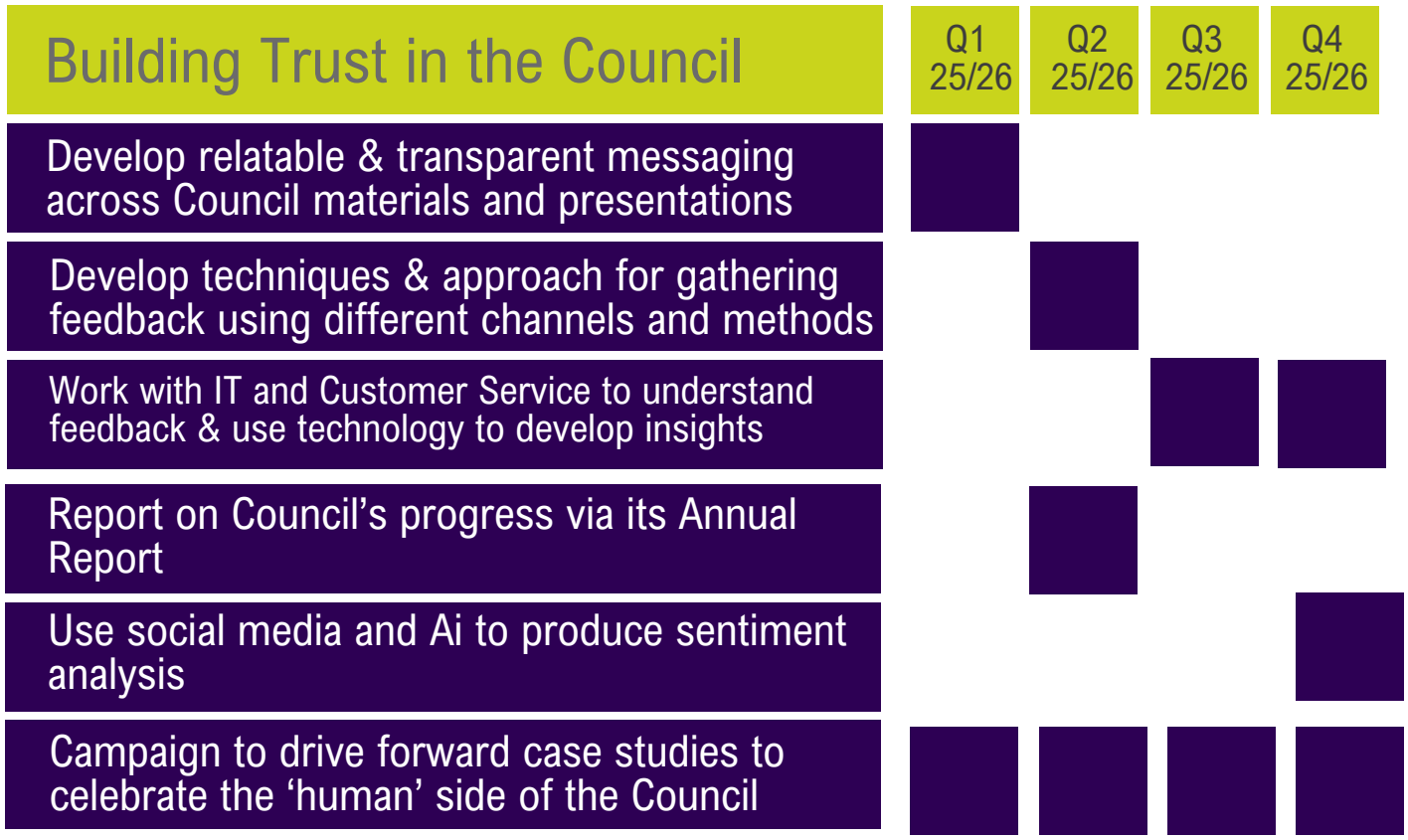
Increasing Awareness

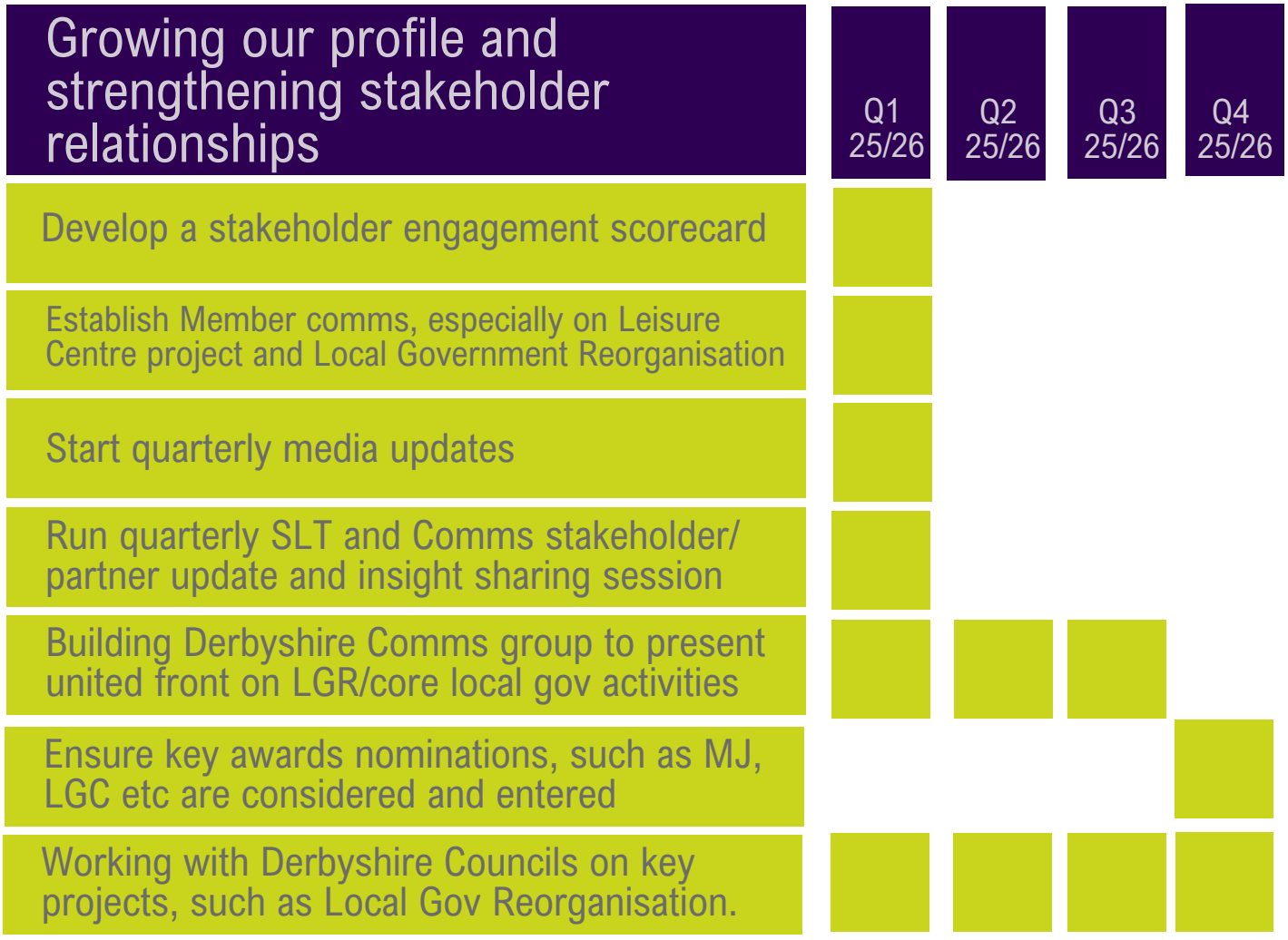


Enhancing Engagement

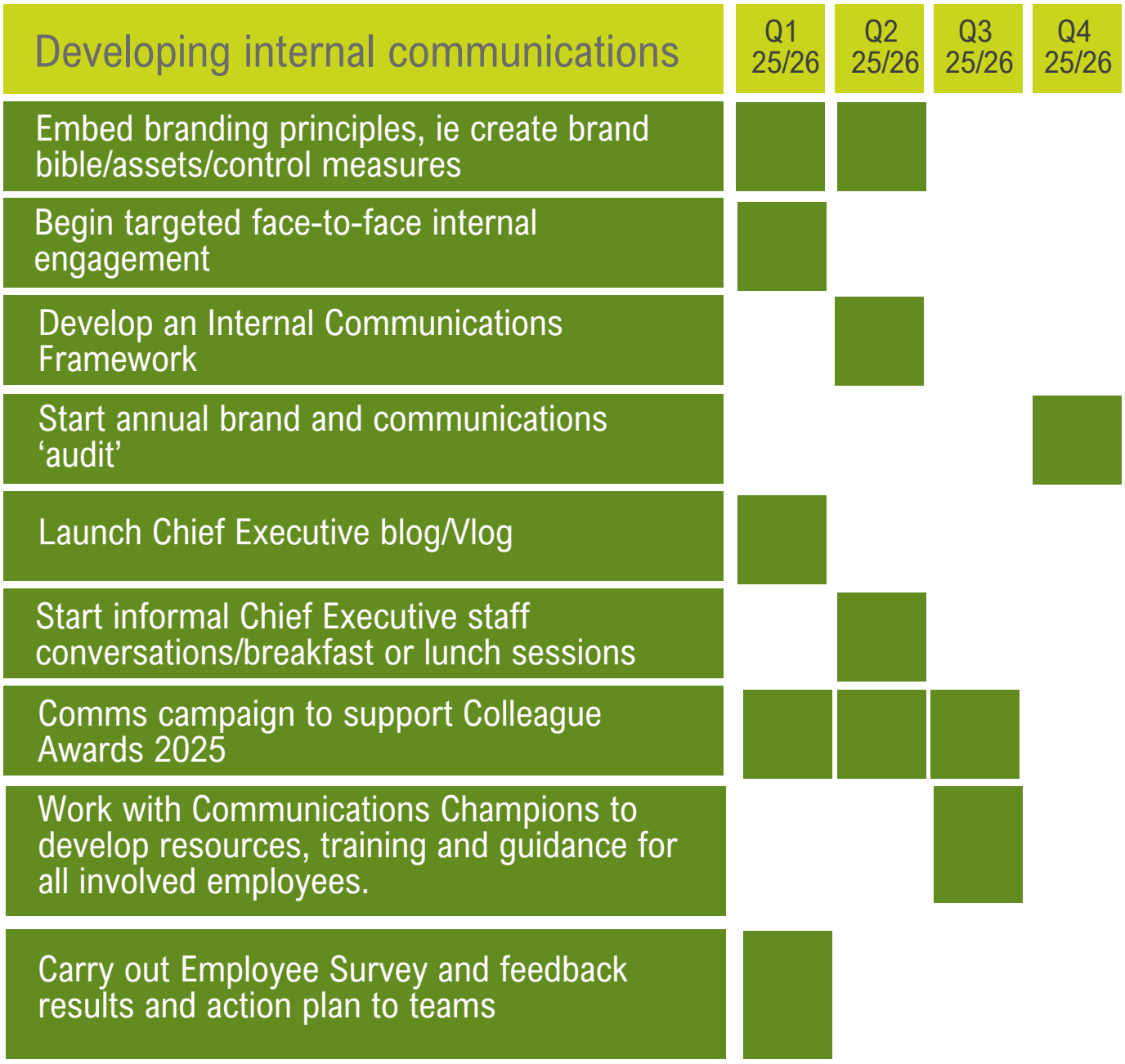


Action Plan 2025/26





Action Plan 2025/26



Stabilising, shaping and shifting

This first year of our Action Plan will involve a great deal of 'behind the scenes' work to enable a more efficient, effective and modern service.

Projects will include getting the team up to full strength, improving existing tools and resources, a thorough audit of the website and existing digital communications channels. We also need to look to empower colleagues and teams across the Council, building our Communications Champions network and building trust, to enhance efficiency, and enable the Communications team to focus on 'big picture' campaigns, providing the right support, driving greater engagement and two-way communication.