Internal communications & engagement

Cotswold District Council

First produced in April 2025, updated in August 2025

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Background

In 2024, the transition of staff from Publica meant that Cotswold District Council (CDC) significantly increased its directly employed headcount. Through 2025, more services and more staff will be repatriated from Publica to the council, increasing headcount further.

Following the transition, a People & Culture Strategy has been developed, setting out how colleagues at CDC can work together – along with colleagues at Publica, and Gloucestershire's other councils - to achieve the vision of making our community a better place to live, work, and visit. It aims to build a high-performing, inclusive council that values openness, customer focus and collaboration.

The transition and the employment and cultural responsibilities it places on the council comes at a time when more change is on the horizon, in both the short and medium term.

Local government reorganisation, as set out in the government's Devolution Whitepaper, is likely to spell the end of the two-tier local authority system in Gloucestershire – with local councils combining to form either one or two unitary authorities. For staff, this presents opportunity but is also a source of anxiety and concern.

Ongoing pressures to local government finance also require new, innovative ways of working; a transformative approach to service delivery which requires an engaged, inspired workforce.

These elements require a robust and comprehensive internal communications strategy that inspires, informs and educates council staff – all while fostering a culture of pride, belonging and dedication.

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Key inputs

- People & Culture Strategy

- Corporate Plan

- Business manager input

- Key milestones / events / dates

- Internal comms channel data

Analysis & developing a baseline

This analysis covers pre-April 2025, the period prior to launching this strategy

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Channels & internal comms tools (as of March 2025)

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The Portal

An intranet for posting news and updates and hosting key employee / departmental information

Briefings

CEO briefings for all staff

Publica

The Portal

Manager newsletters

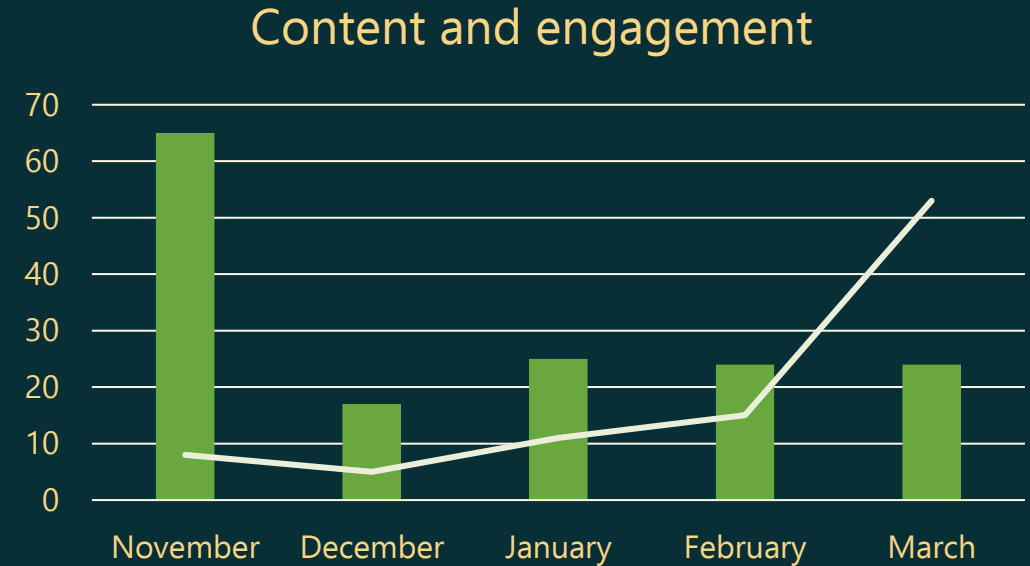### Softer events (Publica Picnics, Christmas Quiz)

Briefings

Keeping You Connected newsletter

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The Portal – a snapshot

Engagement and visitors increasing

Visitors

60% with access to The Portal are visiting each month

5,188 Portal page views in **March, 5,499** in **February, 5,800** in **January**

The number of people visiting/accessing the portal each month has been trending upwards since launch – but this appears to be plateauing

Content and engagement

Pieces of content — Engagement

Regular content, engagement trending upwards

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Most-viewed posts/news articles

People/human interest related stories are also popular. The Daisy post was evidently a little different (other SoY stories haven't done so well). Using people to engage people is key to success.

News item	Views
Devo whitepaper	396
Leader standing down	354
LGR briefing (Feb)	307
Spotlight on Daisy	259
Phase 2 Publica transition	230
Culture Club Making A Difference	170
Red Nose Day – Wear Red	136

Unsurprisingly, important updates (like LGR and Publica transition) have achieved the most views. This demonstrates an appetite for ongoing updates on these topics

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Posts with most engagement

Engagement on The Portal is gradually increasing, but it is particularly high on people-related or human-interest posts. We can infer from this that where engagement is sought on internal communications content, positioning stories with people or causes at the heart is important. This is important when building culture. March is the first time that engagement has been in double-figures.

News item	Likes	Comments	Total
Spotlight on Daisy	3	4	7
Can we get to £400 RND	3	4	7
RND Wear it Red and cake sale	4	2	6
RND We did it!	1	4	5
Culture Club	4	0	4
William's parachute jump challenge	3	0	3

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Least viewed posts/articles

News item	Views
iHASCO updated	9
How to check your State pension forecast	7
Spaces still available on First Aid course	7
Trinity Road office closed Saturday	7
Member briefing on the economy	5
Farming to Reverse Climate & Ecology Crisis	2
We can Move district funding	3

These posts have had very few views. It could be because they weren't also shared by email. It could also be topic type, and therefore interest/perceived relevance.

This isn't to say that we shouldn't include these sorts of updates. Rather, it could be that they can be positioned differently. It also creates a contrast between those updates that are most-viewed – which are people-centric and perceived relevant.

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The Portal content gaps…

Department news

There is currently nothing on The Portal that shares updates about what different departments are working on, successes etc.

New starters

With lots of new people joining the business, new starters – or info on new starters – isn't currently shared.

Alignment on Corporate Plan

The Portal offers an opportunity to share content that reinforces and clearly articulates/highlights progress against the Council's corporate plan

A manager zone

There isn't currently an area for managers only – a view can/should be taken as to whether that is necessary.

Greater promotion needed

In some cases, vlogs and other stories are being shared, but these aren't promoted. So unless staff go looking for new stories, they won't find them

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CEO Briefings

Since October 2024, there have been six leadership-led all-staff briefings/events:

October
Meet & greet
(RW)

November
Meet & greet
(RW)

February (3)
LGR briefing
(RW)

February (14)
All-employee
(FW)

April
Meet The Chief
(RW)

July
All-staff briefing
(JP)

These have been well-attended, with good questions and engagement.

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Meet the Chief: pilot

On Tuesday 1 April, CDC ran its first Meet the Chief session. The feedback is split by those who attended and those who didn't. This is to understand what might have increased participation.

24 respondents

54% didn't attend

46% did attend

74% didn't attend because they had calendar clashes/invites weren't issued with enough notice

33% would have attended had invites been issued with more notice

An extra **4** people would have attended were the event hybrid/virtual

Meet 'the leadership'/senior team might have been better

43% left the session feeling 'informed'

Overall rating of **4.27 out of 5**

82% said there was nothing they disliked about the sessions

There was very even split on what people liked the most, including **a forum to ask Rob questions**, hearing more about the **People & Culture Strategy** and **being able to submit questions in advance**

Only **58%** said they would attend the next one

Fewer shout outs, more focus on a small number of individuals

More speakers from different departments

Shorter presentation

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Other work in progress...

Development of People & Culture Strategy

This has encompassed two-way engagement, through focus-groups and consultation surveys

Initial meetings of CDC Colleague Culture Club

This is a team of volunteers, brainstorming ideas on how to develop culture. There have been three meetings so far.

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Takeaways

Portal doing heavy-lifting

The Portal is currently the central internal comms tool – hosting content and sharing information. It is a good resource, which is constantly improving. Visits, views and engagement is on the up. This contradicts anecdotal feedback we've had that 'no one looks at The Portal'… they do, but only when it's interesting or relevant. So an IC strategy needs to be interesting and relevant…

Portal data points to human-interest

Though limited, it can be inferred that the team is responding positively to human-interest/people stories. This isn't dissimilar to the sort of content that scores best on social media. It's clear, too, that updates on important/high impact programmes (like Publica transition and LGR) are in demand.

Meet the Chief

'Meet the Chief' – a Culture Club suggestion – served a good purpose during the Publica transition, but its purpose can be covered through other comms initiatives.

There's big potential for briefings

The work of the Culture Club, high engagement of people/human interest stories on The Portal, and the demand for leadership-led information mean there's an opportunity to do more with briefings.

There's lots more to try…

There isn't a huge amount of baseline data to draw from. But that affords opportunity for the strategy to adopt new approaches, on which feedback can be requested later. But we can look at what's working well on The Portal, and broaden that out.

Gaps to plug and new areas to cover

This is covered on page 10. But an IC strategy has the potential to cover more areas and bring in more 'channels'.

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Taking internal communications forward

Internal communications & engagement strategy

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Our communications & engagement strategy: Principles & objectives

In line with the People & Culture Strategy – and in particular the **Connecting With Us** year-one priority – the internal communications & engagement strategy will foster a **culture of transparency** and **open dialogue**, to **enhance trust** and **encourage collaboration**.

The programme of work will **inform**, **educate** and **inspire** staff around key issues, **champion success** and **facilitate recognition**.

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Our communications & engagement strategy: Adopting P&CS ways of working & values

Our internal communications and engagement strategy must be underpinned by the central facets of the People & Culture Strategy, which will guide our approach, tactics and plans.

One team

- Valuing and respecting each other
- Working as one team and breaking down silos
- Celebrating each other, feeling valued and creating a sense of belonging
- Recognising achievements

Set up for success

- Upholding high standards and taking accountability
- Taking pride & a 'can do' approach
- Working collaboratively
- Developing a wider understanding of what we all do
- Encouraging growth

Community first

- Care, empathy and respect.
- Responsive to feedback, with pace, agility & adaptability
- Listening and communicating
- Setting goals
- Empowering each other to make decisions that align with community needs and CDC objectives

Business focussed

- Challenge assumptions and innovate
- Work collectively and combining diverse perspectives to align around objectives
- Deliver high quality solutions
- Plan & manage projects effectively
- Capitalise on new opportunities

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Our communications & engagement strategy: Core principles

These core principles have been developed to ensure this strategy meets the communication needs of the council and its employees now, while ensuring that plans and output adhere to and promote the P&CS behaviours at every point.

Regularity

This means ensuring there is a constant flow of information: through regular briefings and Q&As, regular Portal posts, regular newsletters and more

Consistency

This means ensuring consistency of message, in all comms formats – but also across different council services, with partner councils, and Publica, too.

Empowerment

Effective internal comms isn't just about news stories and briefings... managers, in particular, need to be empowered to communicate with their teams consistently and with confidence

Multi-channel

In a busy environment, comms fragmentation is inevitable – so ensuring key messages are pushed at multiple touchpoints is essential

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Our communications & engagement strategy: Core principles

High quality

Output must be high quality. Wherever possible it must be people-centric and easy to understand – whatever the format

Two-way

Q&As, comment boxes, engagement surveys ensure that communication is two-way, not broadcast

Measurable

Looking at data and getting feedback means we can track the effectiveness of internal communication – and adapt strategy accordingly

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Key considerations (2025 – 2026)

Corporate Plan

Delivery of the Corporate Plan, which is being updated in mid-2025

Implementing People & Culture Strategy

Creating a great environment for work as staff move into council employment – regular, consistent communication is key to this

Transformation

Important 'change' programme based on financial constraints. With key design principles.

Local Government Reorganisation

Proposals being submitted in November 2025 – an aligned and consistent internal comms programme will be developed with partner councils around this.

These are four of the major considerations that will govern approach and delivery around internal communications in 2025

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Our internal comms toolkit

This section sets out the best methods for internal comms at CDC, which deliver against those six core principles, while also being cost effective and proportionate.

With each of these 'methods' emphasis is on ensuring that content is of the same high quality that's expected from external communications.

High quality content key to using all of these tools...

None of these tools will succeed without great content. This means great readability and visuals, but more importantly, really clear, relatable messages.

Internal communications & engagement strategy

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The Portal: a key tool

The Portal is our most important internal communications tool, aligned with so many of the core principle areas that will drive effective engagement.

- It facilitates regular news and updates, with immediacy.
- It can host multimedia, rich and engaging.
- It enables for consistency with other councils in the Publica partnership.
- It is a repository for news and updates, which means we can link to it from other channels.
- We know that personable/human interest stories/updates perform well on the platform – which can drive culture.
- It can facilitate two-way engagement via commenting and a Communities functionality that we have not yet activated.
- It is measurable – we can track views and engagement

Core principle area	Met by The Portal?
Regularity	✓
Consistent	✓
Empowering	✓
Multi-channel	✓
High quality	✓
Two-way	✓
Measurable	✓
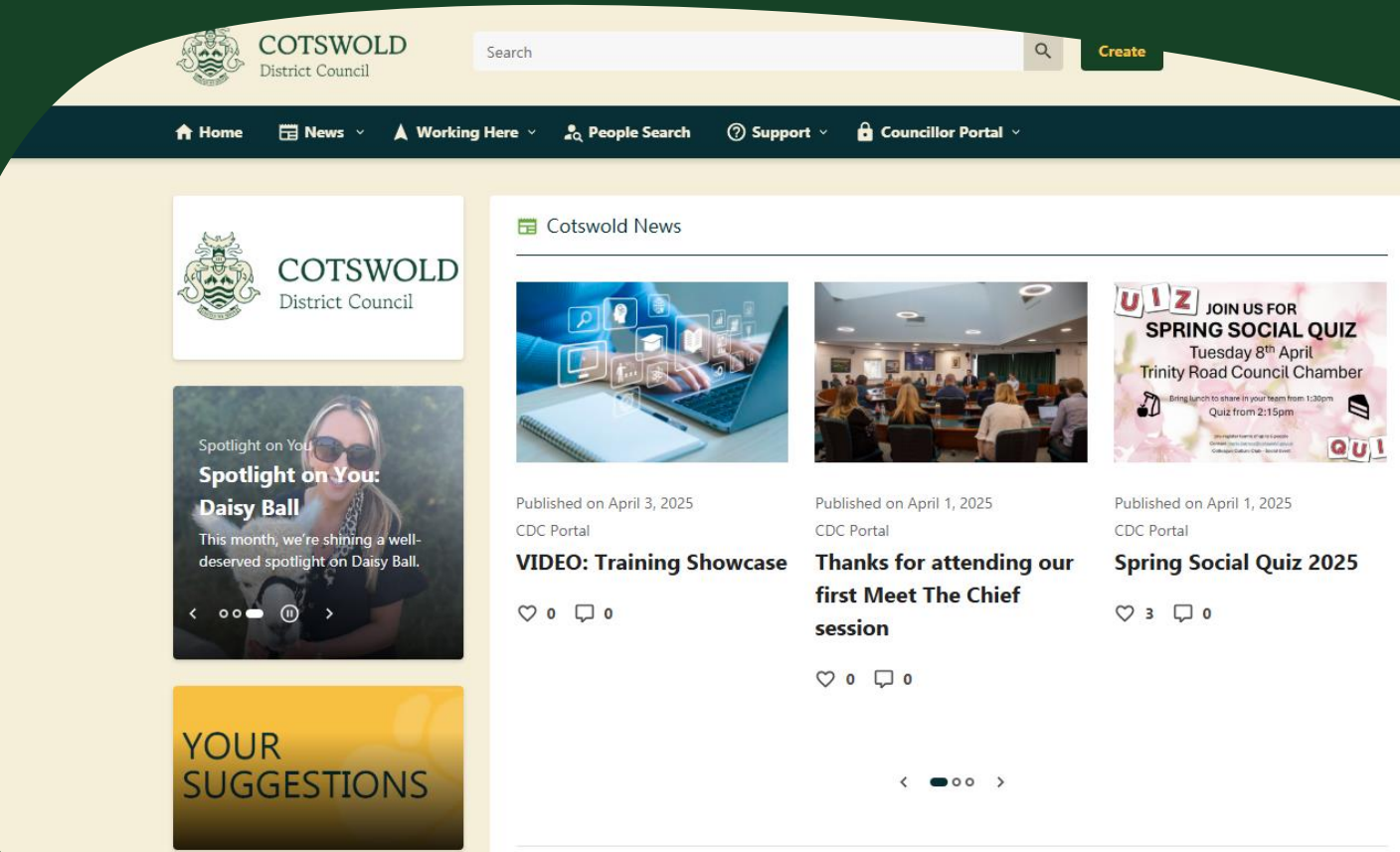
The Portal

How we'll use it:

- For all kinds of news updates - taking a digital first approach to share and post news with immediacy

- For sharing human interest and 'people-stories', similar to those previously shared in The Grapevine

- Create a calendar that maps awareness days, to ensure we're creating content that is relevant and resonates

- Develop an area dedicated to LGR

- Create a 'Cotswold community' - a place for staff to post messages, advertise social events, share updates or give shoutouts to colleagues

- Continue to give due consideration to ensuring content is engaging and accessible.

- Measure effectiveness – constantly, and learn from the data

- But critically, keep it simple! To manage and to use.

Making enhancements:

- Drive more people to use and view The Portal:
    - Create a weekly round-up newsletter, topped with a short message from leader
    - Ensure new posts are emailed out
    - Encourage managers to get people engaging with The Portal
    - Use other IC tools – like QR codes on posters

- Create a 'community' area for staff – and 'publicise' it

- Develop an area dedicated to LGR

- Building out new sections: an area for 'human interest' stories... an online "Grapevine" – **this will be done through a proactive content plan**

- We will gather feedback on The Portal in internal engagement surveys

- Consider creating a section that is locked out to managers, empowering them to communicate better with staff

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The Portal content pillars

Life beyond Trinity Road
Proactive

- Significant events for staff outside of work (Births, marriages)
- Good causes being supported
- Exceptional achievements

Aligned with One Team value: fosters respect, celebration of success, shows the human-side of colleagues, and helps to break down silos.

Weekly CEO blog and leadership updates
Proactive

- Blogs and vlogs from a variety of CDC leaders – particularly senior management team
- Sharing updates on key initiatives / projects
- Giving their thoughts on current events and their impact

Central to **'Communicating with us'** in the People & Culture Strategy. Ensures regular updates and leadership visibility.

Culture Club / Social Club
Proactive

- Promoting upcoming events
- Sharing reports / highlights from events that have taken place

Aligned with One Team value: fosters respect, celebration of success, shows the human-side of colleagues, and helps to break down silos, promoting events.

Shout outs / Spotlight on You
Proactive

- Regularly highlighting staff successes – by asking managers to nominate

Aligned with One Team value: celebrates success, rewards and recognises achievements

News/ announcements
Reactive

- News pieces on stories/updates as and when they happen (which don't fall into the pillars listed)
- Alignment with awareness days

LGR updates
Proactive/ Reactive

- An area dedicated to the constantly evolving LGR picture
- FAQs Documents

Publica updates
Reactive/ proactive

- Stories / initiatives led by Publica which require visibility on the CDC portal

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Events & briefings

Core principle area	Met by events?
Regularity	✓
Consistent	✓
Empowering	✓
Multi-channel	✓
High quality	✓
Two-way	✓
Measurable	✓

Events gather a captive audience. There are relatively simple devices (great slides, mixture of voices) that can make them highly engaging. And they offer a perfect chance to share updates and provide leadership visibility. When it comes to the P&CS behaviours, events can break down silos, foster collaboration and enhance an understanding of what different teams/colleagues do. They can also sharpen business focus.

The strategy proposes at least two different types of events, led by leadership, hosted regularly but in conjunction with key campaign plans. See slide 20 onwards for proposed dates and topics.

Manager briefings

Under the One Team and Set Up For Success behaviours, managers and leaders have a core responsibility to communicate clearly, break down silos, and drive alignment. These sessions, held at suitable points in the year and around key milestones, are designed to equip managers with the information they need to embed culture and manage effectively.

One Team updates

These should be central to our IC strategy. Led by the CEO, but bringing in other voices, done well they have the potential to recognise success, ensure people are informed and have the latest updates, and for departments to share current priorities and work. This would represent CDC living its behaviours. *Held every six weeks, for 90 minutes.*

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Mock event agendas

One Team update
90mins | Bimonthly | Hybrid

- **CEO intro**

- **Update / launch of key initiative** (i.e LGR, Corporate plan etc)

- **Service sharing** (a segment dedicated to services giving updates [on rotation] around what they're working on)

- **An update from the Culture Club** (to share upcoming events/initiatives)

- **Recognition and reward** (new starters, long service, Birthdays, shout outs)

- **Q&A:** with anonymous questions sent in advance

Manager briefings
90mins | quarterly | hybrid/in-person

- **CEO intro**

- **Detailed updates on new initiatives** (i.e budget process) and what teams need to know

- **P&CS focus:** drilling into the different behaviours and values

- **HR update:** training, systems etc.

- **Q&A**

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Display media

Display media – such as screensavers and posters – have the potential to positively influence workplace environment and employee behaviour. This medium isn't currently being exploited by the council at all. There are some posters displaying H&S messages, but nothing that shares CDC values or behaviours. This presents a substantial opportunity if implemented in the right way. They can also include QR codes which maximise use of The Portal and signpost people to that resource. This would give a degree of measurability.

There are two ways CDC could do this:

Using login/lock screens to display changeable messages digitally

Press Ctrl+Alt+Delete to unlock
12:38
Tuesday, January 19

- This will require some link up with IT, but it means that before anyone logs in they see a well-designed visual with a key message – centrally controlled

- These can be changed frequently

- Managed by Comms with IT's help

Core principle area	Met by display?
Regularity	✓
Consistent	✓
Empowering	-
Multi-channel	✓
High quality	✓
Two-way	-
Measurable	✓

Making content visual, snappy and engaging is key!

Strategically located posters

- Using posters (sparingly) means that key messages can be conveyed in high traffic areas, or where there is a captive audience: kitchens, toilets etc. **We have identified several key locations in workspace areas.**

- Posters need to be used sensibly, with due consideration for messages, but they offer great potential to amplify key messages for IC campaigns

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Indicative calendar (2025)

	2025							
	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Events								
Manager briefings				Budget				
One Team updates (every 6 weeks)			7th	18th	30th		11th	16th
Meet The Chief								
Meet & Greet / Publica Picnic								
2025 campaigns (more detail in comms plan tabs)								
People & Culture Strategy								
LGR			Engagement survey				28th - submission	
Display media								
On rotation throughout the year								
Newsletter								
Weekly (Wednesday)								
Portal content								
CEO blog (Weekly, Wednesday)								
Life Beyond Trinity Road								
Shout outs								
LGR content (fortnightly, Wednesday)								

Internal communications strategy

Measuring effectiveness
KPIs and objectives

Success may look different from campaign to campaign (i.e – we may want to think about metrics/feedback specific to the launch of the P&CS or Corporate Plan). But there are some general metrics that can be applied which will measure the effectiveness of internal engagement at CDC. *These metrics are based on baseline data presented within this document. They cover – where applicable – core principle areas. Delivery will be through specific campaigns and day-to-day activity.*

Regularity

Minimum of **7** events before January 2026

Average of **30** Portal posts/stories per month before January 2026 – with good mix of story types

Develop at least **20** display media assets

Participation

Ensure a minimum of **350** people are visiting the portal every month

Achieve average of **6,000** Portal page views per month before January 2026

Ensure all One Team briefings have a minimum of **100** attendees

Engagement

Achieve an average of **50** engagements per month before January 2026

Develop a Portal 'community' for CDC staff

Ensure there are questions at **all** events

Use Comms to drive an average **50%+** survey completion rate for all surveys

Feedback

Assess the **effectiveness of internal communications** in an employee engagement survey before end of 2025

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Action plan

Internal communications strategy

Delivering against this strategy

- 🟢 Complete
- 🔴 On hold
- 🟡 In progress
- ⚫ Not started

Action	Target date	Owner	Status	Notes
Share draft with EMT & Culture Club for feedback	April 25	MA	🟢	Feedback received, amends made
Roll out of The Portal content pillars – call for participation and set out approach. **This includes weekly CEO blog.**	May 25	KW/CW/RW	🟢	New content being continually rolled out – incl. weekly CEO blog, leadership updates, features on staff, shout outs – content plan populated monthly
Launch internal newsletter	June 25	KW/CW/RW	🟢	Newsletter launched, shared weekly on Wednesday via email
Create schedule of hybrid One Team briefings	July 25	MA	🟢	Six-weekly all-staff briefings scheduled until December 25. First held in July, successfully – with first hybrid session on August 19th
Develop LGR page on The Portal	July 25	MA/RW	🟢	LGR page with latest slides, dates and FAQs, being updated regularly
Launch 'Communities' section on The Portal	May 25	MA/RW	🔴	On hold, awaiting further feedback and consideration
Create schedule of manager briefings	May 25	MA	🟡	First briefing arranged in August on budgets – more to follow based on appetite of CLT
Develop plan for annual engagement survey	Dec 25	AC/MA/CT	🟡	Work underway to set target timeframe and develop questions
Work with Glos comms colleagues on LGR internal comms action plan	Aug 25	MA	🟡	Work underway to develop action plan with comms colleagues – various activity delivered already
Roll out display media	May 25	MA	🔴	On hold while finalising technicalities – ready for P&CS launch
First report on progress / effectiveness	Autumn 25	MA	🟡	Pulse survey / metrics to be reviewed in autumn