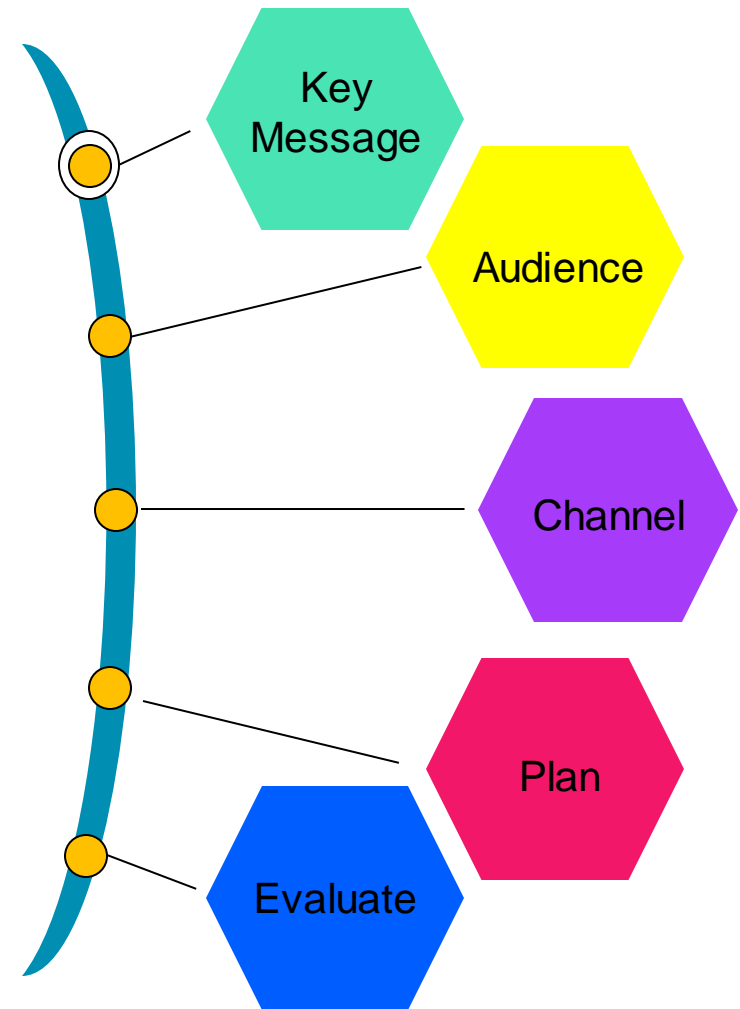




Fit for the Future Integrated Communications Approach

Purpose

Integrated communications will ensure we deliver consistent message across channels and to residents, staff, members and stakeholders to support the programme objectives, take people on the Fit for the Future journey with us and build trust and loyalty.



Key Messages

- The cost-of-living crisis, alongside the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and rising energy costs have placed significant pressure (of around £6.262 million over the next three years) on the council's budget.
- Our response to this financial challenge must be radical; to close the budget gap and future proof our organisation, we will need to reduce our operating costs by 25 percent over the next three years.
- Colchester City Council has a strong track record of financial management, having saved nearly £16million since 2018, from its net budget of £26million.
- Colchester is not alone in dealing with these pressures. Most councils are facing the same problems. We are in a better position than some, but (like most other councils) we have a substantial structural deficit in our revenue budget.
- Continuing as we are, is not an option. We are working to reset and transform the council to become a leaner, more efficient organisation, doing everything we can to find ways to improve the way we work and deliver services to ensure a stable and secure financial future. This work is called 'Fit for the Future'.

Full list of important messages

- The scale of the financial challenge we face is huge (around £6.262 million over the next three years). The cost-of-living crisis, alongside the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and rising energy costs have placed significant pressure on our budgets and we simply cannot continue to operate as we are.
- Colchester City Council has a strong track record of financial management, having saved nearly £16million since 2018, from its net budget of £26million.
- Colchester is not alone in dealing with these pressures. Most councils are facing the same problems.
- Colchester is in a better position than some, but (like most other councils) we have a substantial structural deficit in our revenue budget. This is why the transformation programme is so important. It will see us reduce our spend, size and scope, making sure we are not overspending.
- Our response to this financial challenge must be radical; to close the budget gap and future proof our organisation, we will need to reduce our operating costs by 25 percent over the next three years.
- To achieve this, we are working to reset and transform the Council to become a leaner, more efficient organisation, doing everything we can to find ways to improve the way we work and deliver services to ensure a stable and secure financial future. The 'Fit for the Future' programme will make sure that we are exactly that; fit for the future of our city, of our organisation and of our communities.
- Whilst this work will help to align us with the Medium-Term Financial Forecast and ensure we are closing the budget gap identified, it will also prepare us for the longer-term financial challenges that lie ahead.
- The programme of work will involve a significant change to many of our residents, communities and partners. The changes we make will have a very visible impact across the city, and we will work to support our residents and businesses through the changes.
- As is our duty, and at the heart of what we do as a local authority, we will continue to do all we can to protect those residents who are the most vulnerable and do what we can to mitigate the impact changes may have on them.
- We will do all that can to support our people through this change, ensuring we live and breathe our core values.

Narrative

Colchester City Council budget pressures explained

We are working to transform our services to ensure we can continue to deliver high-quality services for the people of Colchester.

Like every resident and business in the UK, the cost-of-living crisis, alongside the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, rising energy costs, and the current economic climate, is placing an unprecedented pressure on local authority budgets, and Colchester is no exception.

We are experiencing pressures on our budgets, more than normal

Colchester is not alone in dealing with these pressures. Most councils are facing the same problems. We have a strong track record of financial management, having saved nearly £16million since 2018, from its net budget of £26million.

We have had to identify £5.26million in savings this financial year, with a further estimated £6.262million in savings to over the next three years to ensure our budgets are met. This is something we are legally required to do.

What are the numbers?

The cost-of-living crisis, alongside the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and rising energy costs have placed significant pressure (of around £6.262million) on the council's budget.

These pressures are on top of limited government support and the rise in inflation (peaking at around 11% in 2023) and recent increases to the National Living Wage.

We have had to identify £5.26 million in savings this financial year (2023-24), with a further estimated £6.262million in savings to over the next three years.

Finance officers will continue to review the updated position, and this is a figure that could grow. Cont...

What is the consequence?

Colchester is in a better position than some local authorities, but (like most other councils) we have a substantial structural deficit in our revenue budget.

The scale of the pressures we are facing cannot be met by reducing costs, making efficiencies or raising council tax, like we have in the past. Continuing as we are, is not an option. We need to make some big changes to ensure we can balance the budget. We must transform the way we work.

If we don't transform our organisation, to make sure we are spending within our means, we may, in future, be in a similar position to Thurrock and Birmingham councils and may have to issue a S114 Notice, to let the Government know we will be unable to balance our budget. The issuing of a S114 notice bans all new spending with the exception of protecting vulnerable people and statutory services and pre-existing commitments.

We hope not to get anywhere near that point.

Transformation is our long-term plan

We have already begun to reduce non-essential spending and are working hard to reduce the councils overspend and begin to put the council on the right track for the future.

We have some money in our reserves (like a savings account) that will help us in the short term, but the most important thing is that we are proactively working to ensure we live within our means moving forward.

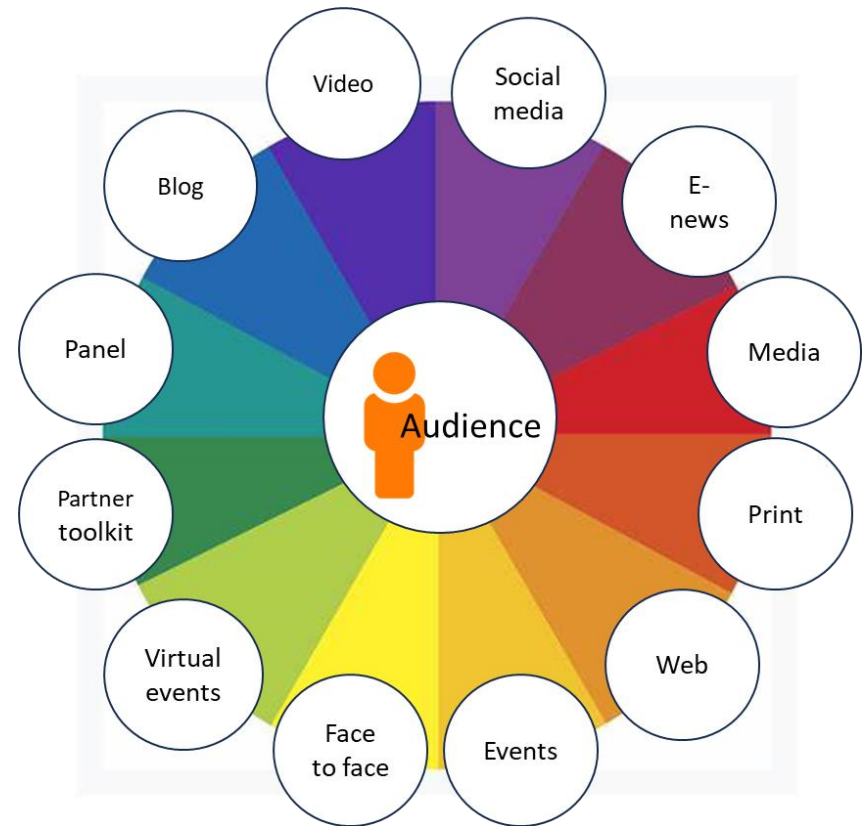
To achieve this, we are working to reset and transform the Council to become a leaner, more efficient organisation, doing everything we can to find ways to improve the way we work and deliver services to ensure a stable and secure financial future. The 'Fit for the Future' programme will make sure that we are exactly that; fit for the future of our city, of our organisation and of our communities.

The plans for how we are going to do this is set out in the Fit for the Future proposals report that is due to be discussed at Cabinet in February 2024.

Approach

This integrated comms approach for Fit for the Future shows you:

- who we are talking to
- why we are talking to them
- how and when we will talk to them
- what form of communication the content should take
- what channels we should use to share it



Audience

Key Messages

Approach

External

The budget situation of the organisation, how we are acting through the Fit for the Future programme to make sure we are living within our means and make sure our services are fit for the future.

- Full communications plan.
- Mix of channels appropriate to message, including media, social media, e-news, website and residents' panel.

Internal

What changes are happening through the Fit for the Future programme to make sure we are living within our means, impact to services and staff, ensuring up to date / timely messages with the ability to ask questions and feed into the process and support for staff.

- Full communications plan with monthly focus on work streams.
- Mix of channels appropriate to audience e.g. desk based/frontline.
- Clear feedback routes.

Members

What changes are happening through the Fit for the Future programme to make sure we are living within our means, impact to services and residents, ensuring up to date and timely messages.

- Mix of channels appropriate to audience, including networking events, new member induction, regular updates from CEO and Leader and toolkits.

Stakeholders

What changes are happening through the Fit for the Future programme to make sure we are living within our means and impact to services.

- In person stakeholder briefings for key partners to the council by SLB/SLT/Cabinet
- Regular meetings already attended by SLB/SLT/Cabinet.

Communication Goal	Communication Method	Audience	Frequency	Owner
Narrative and positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website PR / Open Letters Gazette Cabinet interview Homepage banner Infographics Residents Panel Members toolkit key messages Annual Report, with Council Tax main billing Local radio and TV, ensuring they are aware we are keen to talk about budget situation Webinars 	<p>Residents Stakeholders Members Staff</p> <p>Residents Members Staff</p> <p>Local radio journalists / Residents</p> <p>Members</p>	<p>One off update, with review every 3 months. Gazette Cabinet meeting – quarterly.</p> <p>Annual report is annual.</p> <p>As needed</p>	<p>Comms, supported by SLT, Leader and Finance.</p> <p>Comms, supported by organisation.</p> <p>Comms</p> <p>SLB, Transformation leads</p>
<p>Regular and timely focused budget updates</p> <p>Raising awareness of budget gap and seps to close it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website Press release E-news Social media (where appropriate) Local Government publications Residents Panel 	<p>Residents Members Staff</p>	<p>As arise. Then planned approach to PR once information is available.</p>	<p>Comms, supported by Finance and transformation theme leads.</p>

Communication Goal	Communication Method	Audience	Frequency	Owner
<p>Repetition of key messages</p> <p>Transformation streams as timelines get confirmed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press release (non-budget focused) where appropriate. • Leaders Column in Gazette • Community events / face to face. Tagging into events already happening. Providing toolkit to staff or CEO / Leader to join. • Actual Radio/BBC Essex ask if there is an appetite for a regular budget chat • Cllr King updates to Members 	<p>Residents Members Staff</p> <p>Readers of the Gazette and its website</p> <p>Residents</p> <p>Residents</p> <p>Members</p>	<p>As arise</p> <p>TBC (fortnightly)</p> <p>As arise</p> <p>As needed</p>	<p>Comms</p> <p>Leader</p> <p>Organisation, CEO, Leader</p> <p>Comms</p> <p>Leader</p>
<p>Promote sign up to City News</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homepage banner • Other e-newsletters • Process forms • Social media • Mentions in press releases • Residents Panel • Members / T&P Council 	<p>Residents Businesses</p>	<p>Regularly</p>	<p>Comms</p>

Communication Goal	Communication Method	Audience	Frequency	Owner
Promotion of Residents Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homepage banners • City News • Mention in press releases • Members / T&P Councils • Video 	Residents	Regularly	Comms & Research Team
Monthly FFF focus topic (determined by FFF timeline)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COLIN content • Webinars • Guest blog once a month • Listen, Learn, Lead topic lead • Regular short videos from SLB and topic leads • SUN meetings • Frontline service roadshows • Manager engagement toolkit • Publish a quarterly financial update against key milestones • Support Wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with People team to promote benefits of working for the council • Continue to embed and embrace company values • Full visual calendar of planned comms 	Staff Some content can be used for Members too	Regularly	Comms team, SLB, Heads of Service and HR

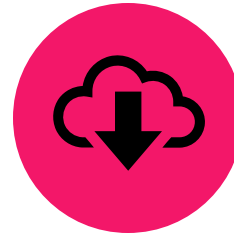
Communication Goal	Communication Method	Audience	Frequency	Owner
Fit for the Future drop-in session/innovation festivals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In person at Rowan House, invite to all staff and Members 	Staff Members	<p>Twice a year</p> <p>Further event can be planned at critical points in the timeline as needed</p>	Heads of Service with support from Comms
Essex wide approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBC 	Essex residents	TBC	ECC, supported by CCC comms
<p>Reinforcement of how we are we doing well</p> <p>e.g. city centre doing well, new business in Colchester</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Press release Social media Partnership working BID and others 	Residents Members Staff	As arise, will be listed on the forward plan	Comms, supported by organisation
<p>Myth busting, Guerrilla marketing</p> <p>Idea needs forming depending on FFF content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media 	Residents		Comms, supported by organisation

Insight and Evaluation

Evaluation enables us to measure the impact of our work and provides the evidence and insight to show what works and what doesn't, so enabling us to improve and shape the strategy and delivery of future activity under the Fit for the Future programme.

The Future of Colchester survey report and other key research and insight will be used to shape message and approach.

Insight from a recent Internal Comms Survey has been used to shape the communications approach for staff. Continuing to gain insight and adapting our approach is key to ensuring staff engagement.



Evaluation and insight tools and techniques

	External	Internal	Members	Stakeholders
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media listening • Residents' Panel discussion and feedback • Customer Services feedback • Public meetings 'have your say' • Feedback from staff and partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak Up Now group insight • Live pulse check ins through webinars • Listen, Learn, Lead insight (Leadership and Managers) • SLB to attend team meetings • Anonymous feedback and question form on COLIN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion at internal meetings • Discussion at public meetings • Discussion between members and the Leader and CEO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion at meetings • Feedback to SLB and HoS.
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media coverage • Social media engagement/reach • Website page views • Subscribers and open rate for City News e-newsletter • Number of Resident Panel members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webinar attendance • Event attendance • COLIN page views • Listen, learn, lead take up • Video views 		

Delivery

The Communications Plan will work in harmony with the Workforce Development Strategy and Governance programme.

Internal and External Communication Plans have been created and will continue to be live documents that will continue to grow and be shaped as the Fit for the Future programme progresses.

