

About me

- Communications, engagement and public affairs lead for local government reform in Dorset (2015-2018)
- Communications lead for the creation and launch of BCP Council, including brand creation and implementation, internal and change comms and programme communications strategy (2018-2019)
- Established communications function for vesting day readiness for BCP (Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole) Council (2018-2019)
- Freelance communications and engagement consultant and experienced LGA Associate / Peer Reviewer (since 2022)

A structured approach to change in Dorset

- Four phases –
 1. Options appraisal (“Reshaping your councils”)
 2. Detailed evidence and case for change (“Future Dorset”)
 3. Creating the new councils (BCP Council and Dorset Council)
 4. Organisational redesign / transformation / service alignment / culture and change
- Programme Board stood up - chief execs plus leads for finance, governance, comms & engagement, IT and HR
- Strategic visibility of engagement planning and delivery – who can influence, be involved or needs to know about what, why, when, how and who from

Role of comms and engagement lead

- Contribution to decision-making at programme level including budget requirements for comms and engagement activity
- Single narrative – crafting and consensus
- Co-ordinate sign off of statements, media responses and key content
- Mobilise / chair comms and engagement group – allocate leads (e.g. service comms, internal comms)
- Overarching view of stakeholder engagement
- Specify and QA consultation
- Vision, brand and launch of new council
- Day one readiness and service alignment – comms is first!

Engagement principles

- Followed Gunning Principles – proportional and fair:
 1. Undertake engagement at formative stage, before decisions are made
 2. Allow sufficient time for participation and response
 3. Provide enough background for informed and critical consideration
 4. Properly consider views prior to decision-making
- Mapped our stakeholders – including relationship managers
- Why do they care? (WIIFM?)

“Reshaping your councils”

AIM: determine the best proposal for the area

- Single communication and call to action:
 - Current structures
 - Rationale and context for change
 - Key features of four options being considered
 - Option ruled out and why
 - Why have your say
 - How to have your say

Engagement themes during Reshaping your councils

Comms covered:

- Democratic accountability
- Quality of services
- Local identity
- Access to services
- Value for money

Survey focused on:

- whether to change and, if change takes place;
- which option is preferred

Engagement programme for Reshaping your councils

Stakeholders and partners, residents and communities

- Open quantitative survey
- Statistically valid household survey (20,000 homes)
- Town and parish councils survey
- Deliberative in-person workshops
- Depth interviews with largest employers / key economic sectors
- EDI integral to engagement implementation and reporting

“Future Dorset” – the evidence base

AIM: SoS approves proposal

- Formal case for change
- Benefits in context of government’s criteria
- Engagement findings throughout
- Stakeholder endorsement from key sectors – economy & infrastructure, education & skills, culture & identity, public and third sector partners

Creating the councils - readiness and reassurance

- Process and timelines
- Decision-making and accountabilities
- Tackle disinformation
- Service continuity
- Internal comms and culture
- The pain of a name!

Vesting day readiness

- Visibility – safe and legal
- Service continuity and resident reassurance
- Single comms presence – brand and channels
- Elections and democracy