

Dorset Local Enterprise  
Partnership

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Communication & Engagement Plan

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September 2021

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This plan outlines a communications and engagement approach for Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) during 2021.
- 1.2. This plan aims to align all in-house and outsourced PR and communications activity with the following strategies, plans and workstreams/emerging workstreams:
  - The Dorset LEP Business Plan
  - The Dorset Local Industrial Strategy
  - The Dorset Investment Prospectus
  - All Dorset LEP funded programmes (e.g. Growth Deal, Dorset Gateway, Getting Building Fund, The Careers & Enterprise Company).
- 1.3. This plan also aims to ensure that there is a joined-up and comprehensive approach to communications across all of Dorset LEPs 'functions' – whether this is Dorset LEP as a corporate entity, programme, skills or business activity.
- 1.4. This plan is not intended to be a detailed plan of activity but rather a framework to allow specific activity to take place.

## 2. Context

- 2.1. Dorset LEP is responsible for setting the strategic direction of Dorset's economy and delivering a capital investment programme of around £275 million (including match funding). Working in partnership with local government, businesses, educational institutions and other public, private and community organisations, our work is focused on championing and strengthening Dorset's economy.
- 2.2. Led by an experienced and dedicated Board of public and private sector members, we aim to make Dorset the best place to do business in the UK by putting in place the building blocks to drive productivity across Dorset. Our priorities are to:
  - Secure funding for projects with long-term economic benefits
  - Retain existing jobs and create new ones
  - Attract new businesses and grow existing ones
  - Help businesses
  - Develop skills, employment and career opportunities
  - Support housing provision.
- 2.3. It is therefore crucial that the communications strategy reflects this aspiration.

## 3. Vision & Organisational Priorities

- 3.1. Dorset is an exemplar of sustainable coastal living where new ways of living and working are tackling climate change head-on; where a way to age that's fit for the 21st century forms a key economic and social opportunity.
- 3.2. Dorset LEP's modern industrial vision is to double Dorset's productivity and economic output to £35.6 billion over the next twenty years, generating 80,000 jobs, building around 78,000 new homes, and creating a local economy that is sustainable, innovative and inclusive.
- 3.3. By 2030, Dorset will be:
  - Using a [One Health](#) approach as a basis to age well and live sensitively in the environment. Dorset will be the UK lead for One Health and the aquaculture capital of the UK.

- Using opportunities of new technologies in security, lead a revolution in defence innovation and security. Dorset will be a key defence hub for the UK, and a leader in defence tech and commercialisation.
- Leading a digital and cultural transformation across all communities.

3.4. In achieving these ambitions, Dorset will also:

- Build a culture of innovation and embed a strong innovation eco-system across all industries
- Create a smarter and more productive workforce that produces more with fewer resources.
- Develop a genuinely smart place that is well-connected, allowing people to interact both in person and digitally; a place that is energy resilient, utilising local renewable energy sources
- Build national and international recognition as a 'total business environment' – combining new levels of support, leadership and skills alongside a collaborative business approach which inspires sustained growth, ambition and success in a great place to live
- Create an exemplar coastal city region for 21st Century seaside towns and coastal communities.

3.5. From a communications perspective it is critical that our vision continues to form our key messaging, given its ambition. We will tailor all external communications to align with at least one of the ambition statements.

#### 4. Key Messaging

4.1. Through all PR and communications activity, we aim to ensure that we are consistently communicating key corporate messages, place based or project/ programme-based messaging.

4.2. Project/ programme-based messaging will be created and implemented on a project by project/ programme by programme basis.

4.3. Corporate key messaging to be implemented as follows:

- Dorset is a key driver behind an ever-increasing, globally-facing UK economy
- Dorset LEP works with key partners across the private, public and education sectors; it is Dorset LEPs role to champion Dorset and our key assets
- Together with our partners, we have secured around £320 million-worth of central government and European funds for the Dorset economy.

4.4. In addition, its important skills and business functions both have the flexibility to promote their own proposition – therefore, specific key messages should be:

- Skills: Dorset LEP enables opportunities across the region, through building meaningful relationships between business and education and planning for the future skills need.
- Business: Dorset LEP supports companies to start-up, grow and locate in Dorset.

4.5. It is vitally important that – wherever possible – we use verified and robust statistics to support our narrative and key messaging. We will continue to monitor and proactively use up-to-date statistics whenever possible. Example statistics would include:

- Economy: Dorset LEP contributes £18.6bn GVA per year to the UK economy.
- Five-year business survival rate: The UK five-year survival rate for businesses born in 2014 and still active in 2019 was 43%, Dorset averaged 48%.
- Creation of new jobs: Around 3,801 new jobs have been created/safeguarded in Dorset between 2015 and the end of Q1 2021.

## 5. Plan Aims & Objectives

- 5.1. Our communications activity will prioritise communicating with relevant, identified audiences, in particular the business community in Dorset, residents of Dorset (i.e. the general public), the government (both national and local), MPs, Board members, Committee members and Dorset Ambassadors.
- 5.2. The overarching aim for the plan is to ensure all of Dorset LEPs communications activity is targeted and gives the organisation the best 'return on investment' wherever possible.
- 5.3. This plan's objectives are:
- To ensure Dorset LEPs priorities are communicated authoritatively across all channels
  - To ensure Dorset has at least an equal voice when communicating the success of all projects
  - To lead the organisation in developing a collaborative, joined-up approach – both internally and with external partners
  - To protect Dorset from threats to its reputation
  - To celebrate successes
  - To work with partners to give a loud 'voice' to Dorset
  - To ensure compliance with funding conditions regarding communications.
- 5.4. The success of our communications output will be measured and benchmarked on a monthly basis using the following metrics:

Channel	Measurement
Media relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly reach of coverage (circulation/audience reach)</li> <li>• Monthly coverage</li> <li>• Monthly percentage of coverage recorded against target outlets</li> <li>• Monthly percentage of coverage recorded against number of announcements issued</li> </ul>
Social media: (Specifically regarding our four main social media channels of Twitter, LinkedIn)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly net increase in followers</li> <li>• Monthly 'impressions' social media activity has made</li> <li>• Monthly average engagement rate</li> <li>• On-going review of engagement by demographic</li> </ul>
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New and returning visitors</li> <li>• Average monthly sessions on site</li> <li>• Average monthly 'unique' users to site</li> <li>• Average monthly page views</li> <li>• Average monthly time on site</li> <li>• Bounce rate – i.e. percentage of users leaving site after one page</li> <li>• On-going review of popular content</li> </ul>
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of event attendees</li> <li>• Number of returning event attendees</li> <li>• Feedback received following each event</li> </ul>

## 6. Audiences

- 6.1. To ensure that this strategy is successfully-implemented, we will need to engage with a range of audiences. This communications strategy acknowledges that requirement and the need for our messaging to be tailored to give the best 'return on investment'.
- 6.2. This strategy splits these audiences into two groups; primary audiences and secondary audiences. Primary audiences are those we aim to reach directly, secondary audiences allow us to connect with our primary audiences.
- 6.3. Primary audiences:
  - The business community: All businesses based both inside the county and outside the county – from sole traders to multinationals, including businesses currently based in the Dorset, and those considering moving here. This also includes those businesses with the ability to be key influencers to drive forward our Local Industrial Strategy and the emerging Dorset Investment Prospectus.
  - 'Local' communities in Dorset (i.e. the general public): All those living and/or working in the region, as well as those being educated or educating people in the county.
  - Government (both national and local): Key politicians at a national level (MPs, departments – particularly BEIS – sector champions and civil servants) and a local level (MP's, councillors and officers).
- 6.4. Secondary audiences (including – but not exclusively limited to):
  - Partner organisations (private sector, business parks, business engagement intermediaries, other LEPs and the LEP Network)
  - The media and other influencers of opinion
  - Dorset LEP board and committee members
  - Dorset LEP staff.

## 7. Strategic Approach

- 7.1. Central proposition: We will operate all of our communications across three aligned channels, namely Dorset LEP, Dorset Careers Hub (skills delivery), Dorset Gateway (business engagement). As well as bringing together all of the 'products' and services we offer, this plan aims to promote and communicate Dorset LEP as one centralised offering, 'brought to life' through unifying campaigns.
- 7.2. Spokespeople: Will continue to be identified and trained, being rehearsed in consistent messaging.
- 7.3. Thought leadership: We will continue to create thought leadership articles on topics which Dorset LEP are seen as experts. These themes will help drive communications activity (especially through PR campaigns) and help to prioritise speaking opportunities to pursue.
- 7.4. Reputation management: By becoming increasingly proactive in our communications activity, it is vital that we continue to invest in managing our reputation. This will entail identifying the key issues and reputation risks affecting the organisation, and through a system of prioritisation, we will monitor and eliminate them, or mitigate their impact. These will be recorded on the Dorset LEP risk register.

## 8. Key Activities

- 8.1. To ensure that the communications function has the scope and ability to focus on key areas of work, this strategy proposes the following strategies, plans and workstreams/emerging workstreams form the main emphasis of our efforts:
  - Key priorities as identified within the Dorset LEP business plan
  - The Dorset Local Industrial Strategy

- The Dorset Investment Prospectus
- COVID-19 and EU Transition recovery and response programmes
- All Dorset LEP funded programmes.

## 9. Channels

9.1. We will fully utilise the channels available, examples of which are illustrated below.

Channel	Activity
CRM database management	Continuing to build an effective database of contacts in-line with GDPR guidelines.
Website	Recognising that our website is our flagship communications resource, we will aim to ensure that the website provides significant engagement opportunities for our key audiences, through the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive news articles</li> <li>• Written content – both Dorset LEP-generated (thought leadership) and with partner organisations</li> <li>• Multimedia content – again, both Dorset LEP-generated (thought leadership) and with partner organisations</li> <li>• Updated imagery reflecting our extensive level of work</li> <li>• We will also ensure that our website is 'future proof' to meet relating to national assurance framework expectations and continually review compliance with national accessibility guidance.</li> </ul>
E-newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are committed to creating regular e-shots to keep our key contacts up-to-speed with developments around our work and the Dorset economy.</li> <li>• This programme of activity will also be supplemented by appropriate special editions.</li> <li>• Business newsletters are also produced on a regular basis, showcasing more tailored content.</li> </ul>
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will continue to focus on Twitter and LinkedIn initially as the key channels to engage with our identified audiences – in particular, our business community and government audiences. To reach our local communities more effectively, we will review activity across our Instagram and YouTube channels, and explore other opportunities, for instance Facebook.</li> <li>• In addition, making use of appropriate partner-driven content across Dorset LEP channels will also enrich our own channels to facilitate better engagement with the wider business audience.</li> <li>• Skills and Business have their own social media channels, again providing more tailored content for key audiences.</li> </ul>
PR / media relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will continue to build strong relationships with local, regional – and increasingly – national and trade media, which is helping it to reach target audiences.</li> <li>• This will be supported and strengthened throughout the year with a plan of activity, with priority given to campaigns, key stories and surveys that will factor in output from across both the region's city and rural areas.</li> <li>• We will also build-on the many proactive thought-leadership messages, which support the key strategic priorities of Dorset LEP.</li> </ul>
Utilising partner organisations	We will continue to collaborate with our wider network of organisations across Dorset and more nationally in order to achieve our objectives – this includes working with key PR counterparts, our local authority partners, Dorset LEP colleagues and PR colleagues working within government departments.
Events	We will continue to both create and target relevant events that provide us with the best opportunity to effectively communicate with our key audiences.
Internal communications	We will continue to develop our induction process and regularly update colleagues, so they are up-to-speed with developments, themselves acting as key advocates for our work.