

Paper 2 - Draft Lincoln Town Board communications and engagement strategy

1. Background

Lincoln is one of 101 towns who put forward a bid for up to £25m of funding from the government's Towns Fund, which is available to spend up to 2026 and support the city's long-term economic growth. In March 2021, government announced that Lincoln had been successful in its bid and awarded £19m, allowing the city to deliver a variety of projects to boost the city's long-term future

A Town Board for Lincoln was set up to oversee the development of an Investment Plan to support a bid for this funding opportunity. Under the Governance of the Town Board a Town Investment Plan (TIP) was produced in October 2020. This Plan was based on rigorous engagement and consultation, and identified the importance of continued partnership working, engagement and communication to successful delivery, testing, monitoring and evaluation of its constituent projects.

On 22 March 2021 the Heads of Terms Offer from Government was accepted and final project selection submitted on 24 May. All final selected projects are now being developed to full business case stage for approval by 22 March 2022.

The programme consists of thirteen projects, eleven of which are to be delivered by partner organisations, overseen by City of Lincoln Council.

This Communication and Engagement Plan helps set out how Lincoln Town Board will engage effectively with stakeholders, demonstrate the success of its work, ensure people understand what it does and change behaviour / perceptions where necessary. This will be done building on the Town Fund Guidance principles of:

- **Involve:** Identify and involve the people/organisations who have an interest in the projects and developments
- **Support:** Identify and show how any barriers to involvement will be overcome
- **Evidence:** Gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken
- **Design:** Agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose, and demonstrate engagement throughout the project lifetime / Town Deal Fund
- **Work together:** Agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently
- **Share information:** Ensure necessary information is communicated between the participants and everyone is looped into the information needed to make informed decisions
- **Work with others:** Work effectively with others who are already or could help with engagement for example the voluntary and community sector, social enterprises or relevant public sector bodies

- **Improve:** Consider further developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of all participants
- **Feedback:** How will you feed back the results of engagement to the wider community and agencies affected, and show the impact this engagement has had?
- **Evaluate engagement:** Monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and adjust as necessary

To oversee this Plan, a Town Board communications and engagement sub-group is proposed, made up of three Board Members and relevant supporting officers from the City of Lincoln Council.

2. Communications and engagement vision and objectives

Overarching vision statement for communications and engagement:

- **The vision** is for all members of Lincoln Town Board and Project Leads to:
 - Talk in one unified voice that aligns to the board's vision, aspirations and goals and wider Lincoln narrative as set out in the Lincoln Town Investment Plan
 - Increase awareness, understanding and engagement on the Town Deal with our audiences
 - Create a compelling, narrative for the projects to encourage everyone to tell the same powerful story about Lincoln and its positive future
 - Engage with the press, broadcast and digital media to enhance perceptions city's Town Deal Board, its responsibilities and the projects it is overseeing.

Strategic objectives: is for all members of Lincoln Town Board and Project Leads to:

- Help build a positive reputation for the city - all communications seek to address any negativity around the projects through an authentic voice and regular publication of positive content, which showcases Lincoln's present and future transformation and highlights upcoming actions taking place around the city's regeneration
- Have one unified voice - through communications, all partners will showcase the vision and positive direction the city is moving in, developing trust and belief in the messaging
- Deliver evidence of the communication and engagement taking place to satisfy any government requirements and showcase the journey being undertaken by local communities
- Ensure a consistent approach to all external communications activity relating to the work of the Board and the Lincoln Town Deal projects
- Effectively engage with all appropriate stakeholder groups

- Raise the profile of the Board and promote the Investment Plan ambition's vision and plans for Lincoln.

3. Communications approach

The City of Lincoln Council is the accountable body for Lincoln Town Deal. The Board is made up of cross-sectoral community representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors and, as such, is reflective of the 'partnership working' that is helping underpin the regeneration of Lincoln.

The proposed Lincoln Town Board communications and engagement sub-group should reflect the interests of all Board members. The Role of the sub-group will be to support the strategic objectives by identifying and agreeing:

- A clear set of procedures and protocols for issuing communications – as well as the channels via which they will be issued
- An agreed set of key messages with an authentic voice will underpin all communications and engagement activity and will be reviewed as the projects evolve
- The key milestones in each project and a programme of regular communications on agreed subjects. Once established (and developed as each project progresses, to maximise opportunities) this will enable all board members to see what activity is planned and the positive messaging that is being used
- How best to support the board to maintain relationships with key stakeholders and identify opportunities to maximise these relationships
- The Communications messaging, to showcase how the board has involved the communities of Lincoln in the projects, with the aim of highlighting a 'people-centred approach'
- All communications activity – whether delivered as a group or individually – considers the wider 'Lincoln story' and any potential reputational risks

To keep the Board up-to-date on all actions undertaken by the sub-group, a quarterly Communication Plan update will be reported to the Town Deal Board as per the template in Appendix A, to enable ongoing review and coordination during the programme.

4. Communications and engagement action plan

It will be the responsibility of this sub-group to work with this communications strategy, develop the Town Board brand, create the individual project communications plans and support project leads in delivering them.

Initial priorities of the communication and engagement sub-group

What	How	Who	By when
Identify membership of communications and engagement sub-group	At meeting of Town Board	Town Board	End of Jan '22
Agree / suggest amends of the draft communications strategy	At first communications and sub group meeting	communications and sub group	Jan '22
Identify and map out the communication and engagement channels already held– including active social media accounts, websites/webpages, stakeholder relationships and media contacts	City of Lincoln communication Manger to coordinate	communications and sub group/CoL	End of Jan '22
Begin work to create a brand for the Board and its work	Using template provided by government, set wheels in motion for brand development	Comms sub-group	Feb '22
Draft and agree a boiler plate to be used where necessary in communications	A boiler plate is a statement set in stone that should be agreed by the Board as a solid, unchangeable statement to be used by all	Comms sub-group for Town Board endorsement	Jan '22
Agree all key messages for each Project	CoLC comms/sub-group in liaison with Project Leads	communications and sub group/CoL	Feb '22
Identify the key project milestones and establish a clear timeline of communication activity that supports the work of Lincoln Town Board	CoLC comms/sub-group in liaison with Project Leads	Communications and engagement sub-group/Col	Feb '22

5. Roles and responsibilities

Lincoln Town Board chair – final sign off for all communications and engagement activity

Lincoln Town Board communications and engagement sub-group – Agree and implement the communications and engagement approach and work together to draft and issue the subsequent activity/communications products

Project comms leads – To work with the sub-group to identify project milestones, appropriate audiences, messaging and channels in advance

City of Lincoln Council communications (Steven Welsby / Kirsty Cheetham) – Can advise on the strategic communications and engagement approach and draft core communications material on behalf of the board, with input from sub-group members

Branding – City of Lincoln Council can be consulted for queries about using the brand (once developed) and its assets

Website – City of Lincoln officers to be responsible for updating Website

6. Procedures and protocols

The general approval process for media releases will need to be in compliance with the following:

- Press releases should include the descriptions detailed in government guidance - Notes to Editors. MHCLG press office will be provided with advance notice of announcements and press releases, via NewsDesk@communities.gov.uk whilst also copying in our Area Lead / FHSF Delivery Support Manager. For expedience, fully drafted press releases should be provided
- Board members retain the right to make comment and carry out media interviews in their personal capacity. However, in doing so, members should be mindful of their position on the board and how their comments could impact on the board's work and the strategic objectives set out in this strategy
- All requests for interview/comment by the media, specifically regarding the board as a whole, should be directed to the comms sub-group in the first instance. No interview should be carried out before doing this. A decision will then be made by the group on who will lead and respond to that enquiry. The response should receive final sign off by the chair and then be issued by the appropriate organisation
- A full briefing can be provided by the comms sub-group for those giving interviews/comment

- All communications activity regarding the board will be discussed and agreed by the sub-group and a recommendation made for final decision will be made by the board's chair. Communications should not be issued without the sub-group and chair's prior approval
- At the first opportunity, board members should raise potential reputation issues that could impact on the work of the board or wider regeneration of Lincoln with the sub-group so that positive action can be taken
- Key opportunities for positive communications and engagement activity will be identified by the board and comms sub-group as the projects progress and incorporated into the timeline of planned activity.

As a general rule, quotes in press releases will be attributed to the board's chair. If related to specific projects or thematic groups, a decision will be taken by the sub-group and board chair as to which board member the quote should come from and also be as follows:

1. Press release drafted by CoLC communications team or lead project communications officer, following discussions with the sub-group
2. First draft sent to comms sub-group member for comments and their subsequent approval following any amends
3. Send to City of Lincoln Council, as the accountable body, for comments and sign-off
4. Send to board chair for comments and final sign-off
5. Final draft shared with all board members and the sub-group before being issued to the media – this will be done at least two hours before issuing to the media (unless there is an exceptional circumstance which requires the comms to be issued without delay).
6. It is the chair's decision whether or not to incorporate any suggested amends/feedback given by board members into the release. If they do wish to comment, board members are asked to do this within two hours of receiving the draft to avoid delaying the process of issuing comms.

In the short term:

- All media releases issued by the board will be focused on the work planned to deliver the projects and will be agreed by the sub-group
- Press releases solely regarding the board will be issued by City of Lincoln Council communications team, with a note that it is issued on behalf of the board
- Press releases that discuss the wider Lincoln narrative but reference the board should instead incorporate the agreed boiler plate and be issued by the lead organisation (these are still subject to the comms sub-group's input and sign-off by the chair)

- Any quotes included in press releases are subject to the related organisation's own approval processes and the time to achieve this should be factored into the planning process for communications activity

Longer term

- Media relations including press releases and enquiries will be divided up based on project leads. The comms sub-group will also allocate resources based on the projects.

7. Key messages

- Lincoln is one of 101 towns who put forward a bid for funding from the government's Towns Fund, which will be available to spend up to 2026
- The bid was successful, and Lincoln is now able to deliver a variety of capital projects to help boost the city's long-term economic growth and development
- The bid was the chance for the people of Lincoln to help shape their city's future. Through discussions with the community, Lincoln Town Board has developed a vision and strategy that will shape the transformation of Lincoln over the coming years
- We need to play our part in helping transform Lincoln and we need to do it together.
- Lincoln has grown significantly in recent years and so much has already been achieved. But we now have an opportunity to carve out a new chapter in the city's history and help to ensure the city reaches its full potential.
- This is a great opportunity to help raise the standards of living for people working and living in Lincoln
- Securing this funding for Lincoln enables us to deliver against the current strategy and vision for the city and support future prosperity based on the needs and wants of Lincoln people.

8. Communication channels

Traditional media outlets have shifted content to digital platforms via mainstream media and community websites and media owned social media accounts. The pace of publishing new stories continues to increase. This requires much quicker responses and additional content (images, video, statements) to support engaging positive content.

There is the expectation that the Town Board projects will provide better content for reporters as they experience expectations on pace of publishing content.

Increasingly our audiences are also gathering news online from sites and social media aimed at specific demographics and communities around interest, lifestyle or geography/place.

We need to be where our audience is, so it is proposed that a focus is given to digital media, with the communications and engagement sub-group devising planned communications which embrace digital methods of communication.

This will include appropriate hashtags to be used, such as #LincolnTownDeal, #TownsFund, #MidlandsEngine when describing or promoting the projects, and at key milestones, to enable people to identify posts specifically related to those specifically being undertaken in Lincoln.

Tagging MHCLG in our content will also be undertaken using the handle, across all platforms, of @mhlcg on: Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Posted content will be re-tweetable by the Communities Secretary, Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government and MHCLG, allowing others to follow project development.

City of Lincoln Council:

- **Website** – A Town Deal page has been set up on City of Lincoln Council's website at: <https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/lincoln-town-deal-board-1/towns-fund-projects>

Information that can be accessed from this page includes:

- Downloadable copy of Town Investment Plan
- Description of the Town Board's role
- Summaries of Town Board meetings
- Description of the city council's role as accountable body
- Progress summaries and updates of all Town Deal Projects
- **Social media** – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Including video - Youtube, Vimeo
- **Media contacts** – local, regional and national
- **Internal** – Sharepoint and In-Brief
- **Stakeholders** – all city council member briefing, community networks and officer relationships e.g. business to business contact

Partner communications channels to be added once the communications sub-group is appointed and complete, but to include: websites, social media, internal and external newsletters, open days and evenings, focus groups, email, networks etc.

9. Our audiences

- Partner organisations

- All of the partners' workforces
- Residents of Lincoln
- Visitors to Lincoln
- Community groups
- Voluntary sector organisations/third sector
- Businesses / Business groups (ie Healthy High Streets, Bailgate Guild etc)
- Lincoln BIG
- Regional government
- National government – see item. 10
- Funding bodies
- Local, regional and national media
- Online media
- Specialist/trade media
- Representative bodies including LGA and Key Cities
- Regeneration partners
- Investors
- Developers

10. Communication with national government (MHCLG)

City of Lincoln Council, as the accountable body, along with the communications and engagement sub-group, will ensure that:

- MHCLG is given as much advance notice as possible (at least two weeks) of announcements and milestone events to allow quotes to be arranged for any media releases
- Relevant descriptions provided by MHCLG in its guidance are used in media releases
- Ministers and CLGU Area Leads / Delivery Support Managers (and other relevant policy departments such as DfT) are invited to any landmark events
- The appropriate logos provided by MHCLG are on display as set out in government guidance
- The dedicated CLGU Area Lead / Delivery Support Manager is informed of any upcoming project milestones and planned communications activity, to feed into MHCLG's monthly milestone reporting
- Ministerial quotes are provided for media releases where appropriate, following the agreed process for seeking a quote, sending draft media releases to the Area Lead/ FHSF Delivery Support Manager in the first instance
- MHCLG is notified of programmed communication events, allowing the opportunity for any Ministerial attendance if required. Ministerial departments will endeavour to tweet support or retweet our tweets when Ministerial attendance is not possible.

11. Branding

Communications should be mindful of the place brand – and therefore narrative - for Lincoln to ensure consistent messaging, in addition to the 'wider story' for the city.

A strong brand family is critical communicating cohesive narratives and core messages in a consistent and compelling way to all our audiences. The brand is more than a logo, look and feel, colour, font and style guidelines. But at the same time this use of a consistent approach is all part of creating recognition and trust.

The branding of the work being undertaken by the Town Deal Board can support other objectives for partners, most of which are firmly linked to economic development and the support you provided to local businesses. It can help promote Lincoln as a visitor destination, attract new business and inward investment and promote pride among the city's residents.

Government has produced a document which is clearly aimed at helping the Board (or the communications and engagement sub-group) create its brand.

12. Evaluation / measures

Social media metrics:

- How many people are we reaching with our messages?
- User engagement – clicks on calls to action
- Organic reach and impressions
- Increase in followers
- Shares

Websites:

- Visitor numbers and dwell time on specific priority web pages
- Email click-through acting on a call to action

Media releases and statements – coverage in and on local media

- Positive media coverage in articles – online and print
- Improved 'sentiment' – qualitative analysis where we are working on developing positive opinion on each particular project
- Resident awareness of the Board, the Deal and the projects – from council resident satisfaction survey

Engagement:

- Consultation surveys and customer feedback

13. Monitoring

City of Lincoln Council, as the accountable body, will report annually on the implementation of the communication plan as part of the ongoing assurance process.

End

