



**dlr**  
communications  
strategy  
2024-2028

connect —● listen —● respond



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# introduction and context

This communications strategy is set within the context of the dlr Corporate Plan 2020-2024 and the next Corporate Plan from 2025, which outlines an ambitious vision for Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown: a progressive, vibrant county that is attractive, inclusive and accessible, with connected communities in a clean environment, underpinned by a strong economy for all.

The Corporate Plan is guided by four themes focusing on enriching quality of life through vibrant communities, housing and amenities, leading in environmental protection and climate action, supporting and fostering a resilient local economy and embracing change while delivering excellent public service. These themes will be achieved through its mission; **‘working together to provide a quality public service’**.

vibrant communities, housing and amenities  
inclusive and accessible  
environmental protection resilient local economy



As a council, the dlr operational environment is set against a backdrop of change and challenges:

- The digital first agenda and transformation of service delivery to communities.
- Adapting to new approaches to service delivery through the hybrid working model.
- The ongoing development of new technologies, new media channels and their impact.
- Addressing feedback on dlr communications from extensive public and internal consultation surveys and meetings, as well as associated feedback from other internal policy-devising processes.
- Expectations that stakeholder engagement should be 'live', consistent, accessible, inclusive and timely.

new approaches  
feedback  
consultation

## 1.1 corporate communications function

Corporate Communications reflects the breadth and depth of the Council's remit and activities. The Council's services support over 233,000 residents<sup>1</sup> along with businesses, who employ over 85,878 employees<sup>2</sup> in the county. It articulates the extent of the organisation's functions as a service provider, facilitator/provider of infrastructure, regulator, and enabler of economic and community development. Communicating and interpreting the nature of the Council's work, from policy to practice to a variety of internal and external audiences in a clear and accessible manner, is at the heart of our role.

- 1 O'Donoghue Hynes, B., and Delaney, D. (2022) Census 2022 Population Increase by Local Authority: A Review of Preliminary Data Dublin: Local Government Management Agency
- 2 2016 census

## 1.2 corporate communications focus

In communicating with our various stakeholders, internal and external, through the media and other channels, we aim to ensure that:

- Corporate messages will be evidence-based, clear and factual, with inclusive, accessible language, devised to meet the needs of our elected members, dlr staff, our citizens, and visitors to the county.
- Corporate messages will clearly communicate the services that the organisation delivers.
- dlr will be a listening organisation; courteous and empathetic but assertive when/if dealing with aggressive communications from stakeholders.

## 1.3 desired outcomes

### Short term

All relevant stakeholders will have a clear knowledge and understanding of DLR; what it does, the services it provides, the extent of its responsibilities, its vision, its approach to its work, how to access its services and how to contact relevant staff.

### Medium term

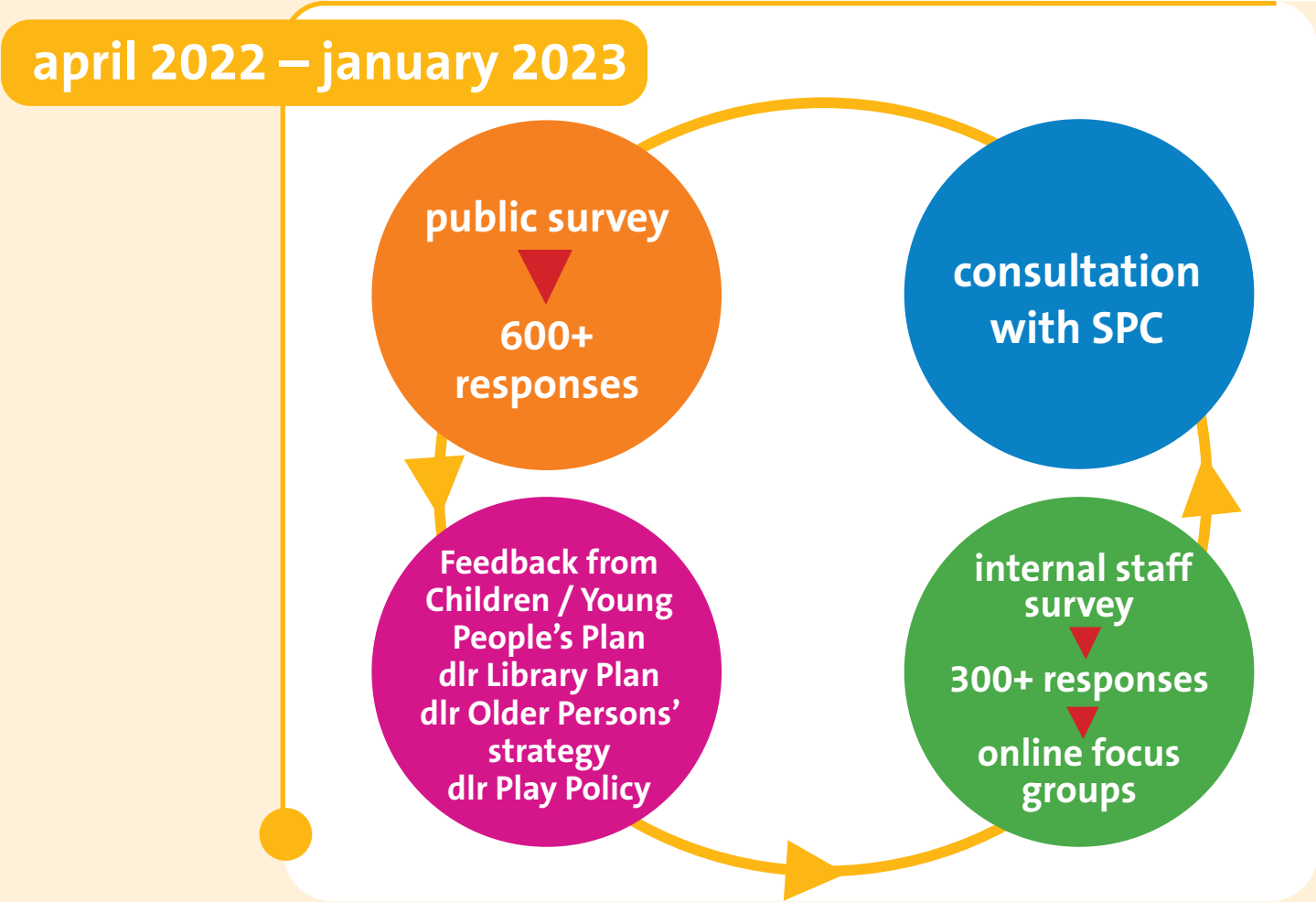
Sustainable systems, processes and skills development will be in place to ensure a consistently high quality of communications between the organisation and its stakeholders.

### Long term

A culture where excellence in communications is integral to everything that the organisation does.



# 1.4 the consultation process<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> An extensive consultation report was presented in March 2023, showing feedback from public and internal surveys as well as outputs from all meetings. This has formed the basis of the Communications Strategy. See appendix 1.

## 2 dlr communications strategy 2024-2028

### 2.1 our vision

Create, facilitate and deliver high value, effective communication and engagement with our staff and our citizens.

### 2.2 our mission

Shine a light on the work of the organisation through:

- Ensuring clear, consistent, timely, inclusive and accessible corporate messages delivered via a range and variety of channels,
- Maintaining a strong focus on citizen engagement,
- Creating clarity of understanding among staff, residents and visitors throughout the county.

clarity of understanding  
effective communication and engagement

## 2.3 our values

Our values reflect those of our corporate goals:

### ● Excellence

We will proactively promote the organisation and deliver an exceptional communications service to our internal and external stakeholders.

### ● Trustworthy

We will be open and transparent, acting ethically, respectfully and with integrity in our communications, engagement and decision making.

### ● Climate First

We will support and facilitate a climate-first approach in our processes and messaging.

### ● Collaborative

We will communicate effectively through engagement with internal and external stakeholders.

### ● Cost Conscious

We will invest wisely in our communications processes to ensure value and opportunity are maximised for the organisation.



proactive promotion  
transparent  
climate-first approach

## 2.4 implementation and review

This strategy is supported by targeted external and internal communications goals and objectives drawn from an extensive consultation process.

**2.4.1** Actions to be implemented externally will be drawn from learnings to date, feedback received from the external consultation and available resources.

**2.4.2** Recommendations for improving internal communications will also be drawn from feedback received at the extensive round of consultation meetings held by the team, and by the CE at subsequent meetings with indoor and outdoor staff.

**2.4.3** Progress on these actions will be monitored via an implementation plan detailing actions, timings and key responsibilities.

**2.4.4** Implementing the strategy will demand additional specialist communications' resources.

targeted goals and objectives  
implementation plan

## 3 external communications goals

Enhance dlr Co Council's reputation and strengthen its brand among all of those who live, work and visit in the county.

Engage, consult and communicate inclusively and accessibly to enhance local democratic processes.

### 3.1 build dlr reputation and brand

Enhance the dlr reputation and strengthen its brand among all of those who live, work and visit in the county.

The dramatic transfer to remote service delivery during the Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated the agility and capacity of dlr to meet the needs of our citizens. It enabled us to strengthen our brand and communicate our key messages to our residents across a variety of platforms and services, lessening social isolation and ensuring more inclusion in our communities. The way we communicate with residents has also been influenced by the growth in technology, with more than 98% of premises already having access broadband in excess of 30Mb<sup>4</sup>, and through the dlr Digital Strategy (2021-2024), which has transformed the way services are delivered across the county.

### 3.1 build dlr reputation and brand cont/d

Nevertheless, we are acutely aware that some people prefer in person encounters with us; therefore, we also engage in extensive in person consultation with our residents via physical meetings in community halls, libraries and other local centres. These meetings are advertised by posters in local areas or promoted on local radio. For example, our active travel schemes are advertised digitally and via posters too, even where the poster encourages the public to engage with us digitally. Consultation for local area plans and other corporate plans is carried out in person and through online consultation to ensure that residents optimise opportunities for engagement with their local authority.

**3.1.1** Our elected members are a valued source of communication with residents and represent the views of constituents on the Council's proposals and initiatives. In turn, councillors pass this feedback on through their engagement at council committees and meetings. These structures form part of our public engagement process. The role of the elected member is also a means by which we address digital exclusion.

**3.1.2** Achieving digital inclusion is a core corporate objective and we have committed to a number of actions specifically, and in collaboration with other agencies to ensure that everybody has the confidence, skills and literacy to engage in a fully digital society. Access to computers and training is available in local libraries and through various partner initiatives undertaken by our Community and Cultural Development department. Additionally, our digital public consultations use plain English and are designed to be as easy to engage with as possible.

5 [Digital for Good: Ireland's Digital Inclusion Roadmap.](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/267401/a898d78c-e234-465f-bedd-7ccd0655b7d2.pdf#page=null)  
<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/267401/a898d78c-e234-465f-bedd-7ccd0655b7d2.pdf#page=null>

## 3.1 build dlr reputation and brand cont/d

**3.1.3** The **dlr Civic Hub** is our core customer-service portal, capturing, measuring and analysing how dlr interacts with the public. Public consultation for this strategy highlighted that more than 50% of our residents favour digital communication, while there were also expressions of interest for access to information via the more conventional platforms..

**3.1.4** The **dlr Economic and Community Monitor** is a localised data tool that provides detailed socio-economic data for the county. Drawing on both national census and local dlr data, the monitor is publicly available for use by dlr staff, citizens, elected members or researchers via the dlr website. It provides data visualisations across 15 key themes including population, housing, health and employment. The data provides users with an evidence-based assessment of how the county is performing nationally, regionally and locally.

The Monitor also displays up-to-date information about dlr annual expenditure, with a user-friendly and searchable dashboard of the Council's most recent annual accounts. It shows how a culture of open data within the organisation enhances accessibility and transparency, allowing the public to conveniently assess the county's performance.

customer service portal

community monitor

## 3.1 build dlr reputation and brand cont/d

**3.1.5** The **dlr Public Participation Network** (PPN) is the main framework for public engagement and participation and connects with the community, social inclusion and environmental sectors. The dlr PPN facilitates and enables the public and organisations to voice their views and interests within the local government system at in person and online meetings.

**3.1.6** The **dlr Hub na nÓg** supports the involvement of children and young people in our decision-making processes. Our **citizens' consultation hub** on **dlrcoco.ie** provides an opportunity for citizens to engage and to be consulted on issues that affect their future.

**3.1.7** The **dlr Local Community Development Committee** is an opportunity for us to communicate with other statutory stakeholders, while the **dlr Local Enterprise Office** communicates with, promotes and develops local businesses connecting them to further opportunity.

**3.1.8** **Our Corporate Plan 2020-2024**, the new corporate plan from 2025 and each of our policies are underpinned by extensive consultation with stakeholders, enabling us to articulate, communicate with, listen to and reinforce our corporate objectives. Our **policy formulation** ranges from public surveys on **dlrcoco.ie** to focus groups to 1/1 conversations. We also communicate with residents and visitors to the county via our public facing services such as the Roads department, Housing and Environment sections, transport and active travel, Parks and recreation, libraries, the Arts Office and a wide range of community-based services. Each of these services and facilities provides us with an opportunity to connect and engage with local communities, businesses, workers, visitors and tourists to strengthen and enhance our key messages and county brand.

involve young people in our decision-making  
connect and engage with local communities



## 3.2 citizen engagement

### Engage, consult and communicate inclusively and accessibly to enhance local democratic processes<sup>6</sup>

Citizen engagement in the dlr context is a local authority-initiated, formal process designed to improve public services, policies, and programmes. We engage with our citizens in many ways. Our **dlr elected members** represent the voice of the people in our local authority structures. Our **departmental executive teams** engage with the public through our **dlr customer service hub**, and through implementing our various policies emanating from our corporate plan to meet the county's economic, social and environmental requirements.

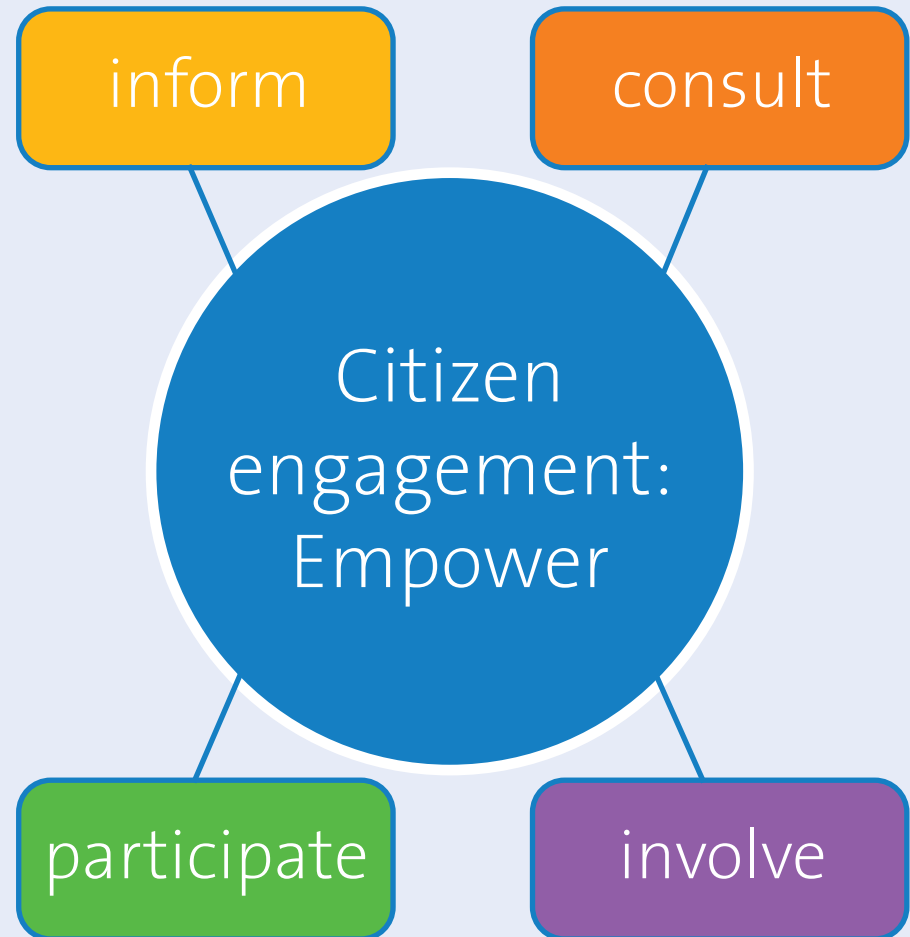
We aim to gather and value the opinions of citizens in dlr by providing the **tools and resources** for effective two-way communications, so that people understand how their county and their council work. We listen, talk, and build confidence in a friendly, safe, and inclusive environment through problem-solving and brainstorming. By doing that, everybody's contribution is valued - no matter how small, or whatever their backgrounds. Our **dlr Times**, which is circulated to more than **70,000 households** across the county supports the dissemination of our corporate objectives and maintains open and transparent channels of information about Council business.

### 3.2 citizen engagement : our approach

We endeavour to give feedback to everybody so that they have a better understanding of the issues and enable them to feel respected. We aim to be honest in our answers so that we build confidence in the engagement process, where people will re-engage, and as a result, encourage others to engage. This enables them to increase their participation in any decision-making that affects their futures and enhances local democratic processes.

Through our citizen's consultation hub, [www.dlrcoco.citizenspace.com](http://www.dlrcoco.citizenspace.com), we can elicit responses from our citizens in different ways: asking questions, receiving feedback, disseminating information, influencing, building profile, and measuring impact. This allows us to understand the diversity of our audiences so that we can shape our communications about the Council's services and policies to meet targeted needs.

dlr engagement wheel



increase participation in decision-making  
understand the diversity of our audiences

### 3.2.1 External communications objectives

The communications strategy sets the following objectives in the delivery of effective **external** communications:

- a. Strengthen DLR's reputation and brand as a progressive and vibrant county that is attractive, inclusive and accessible.
- b. Target, engage with and inform key audiences through the delivery of messages re DLR core corporate priorities.<sup>7</sup>
- c. Leverage the potential of a range of communications channels to support effective and efficient service delivery via the DLR Customer Service Hub and other platforms.
- d. Promote DLR programmes of events across the county showing the range and impact of the Council's work.
- e. Enable improved citizen engagement and participation by communicating clearly and consistently, ensuring that people understand the breadth and depth of dlr services and activities.

Delivering on these key objectives will entail:

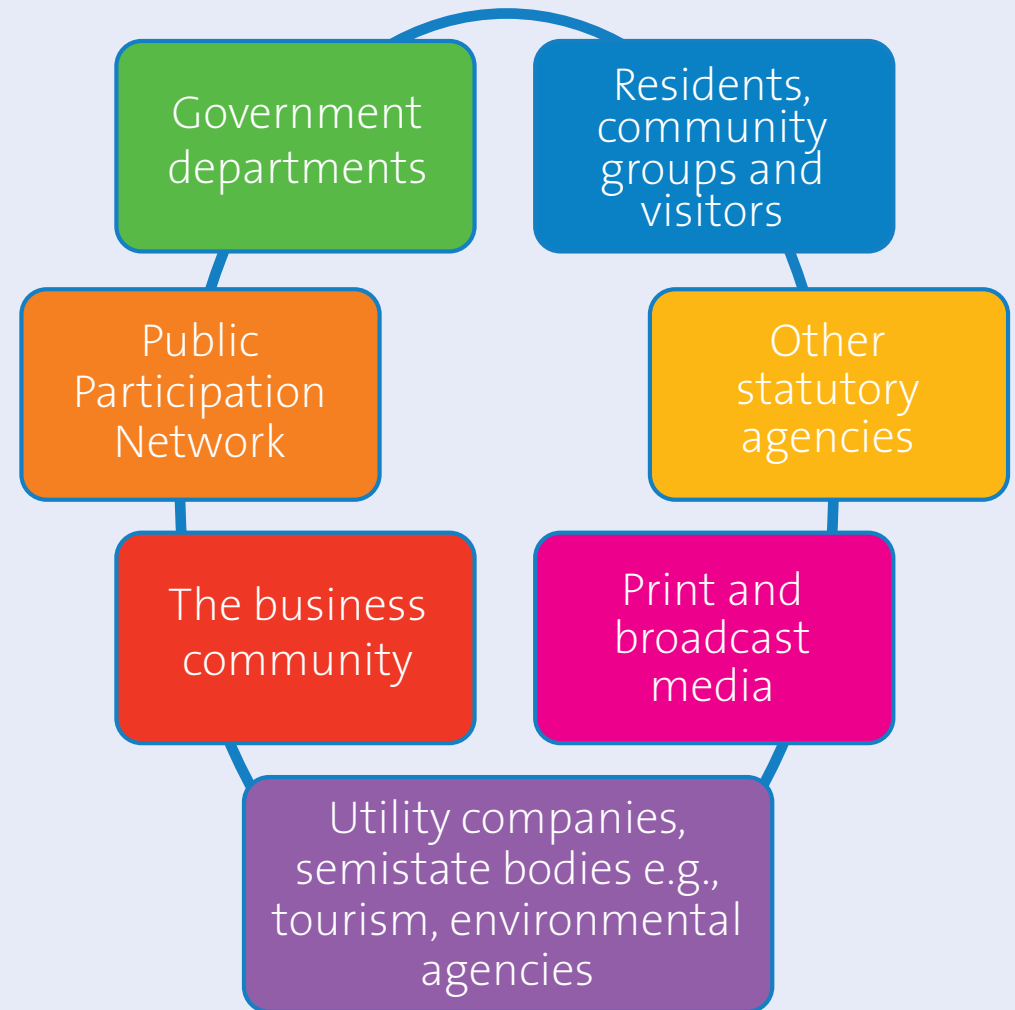
- Providing information to assist people in understanding problems/issues of concern, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- Consulting with, listening to and acknowledging people's concerns and aspirations, and through the elected members, the Public Participation Network and other fora providing feedback on how public input can influence decision-making.
- Encouraging participation by incorporating feedback of those we consult with and in formulating solutions to issues raised.
- By increasing access to information, consultation and participation opportunities, dlr can enhance its brand, win the confidence of its communities and earn more legitimacy.

## 3.2 citizen engagement cont/d

### 3.2.2 External audiences and stakeholders

DLR plays an important leadership role in facilitating and building positive stakeholder relationships with a wide range of interests and players on national, regional and local platforms. It holds the key to many essential services. It is one of the first ports of call in a crisis. Therefore, its messages must adapt to individual audience needs and must be targeted, consistent, timely and accessible.

... messages must adapt to individual audience needs and must be targeted, consistent, timely and accessible.



building positive stakeholder relationships

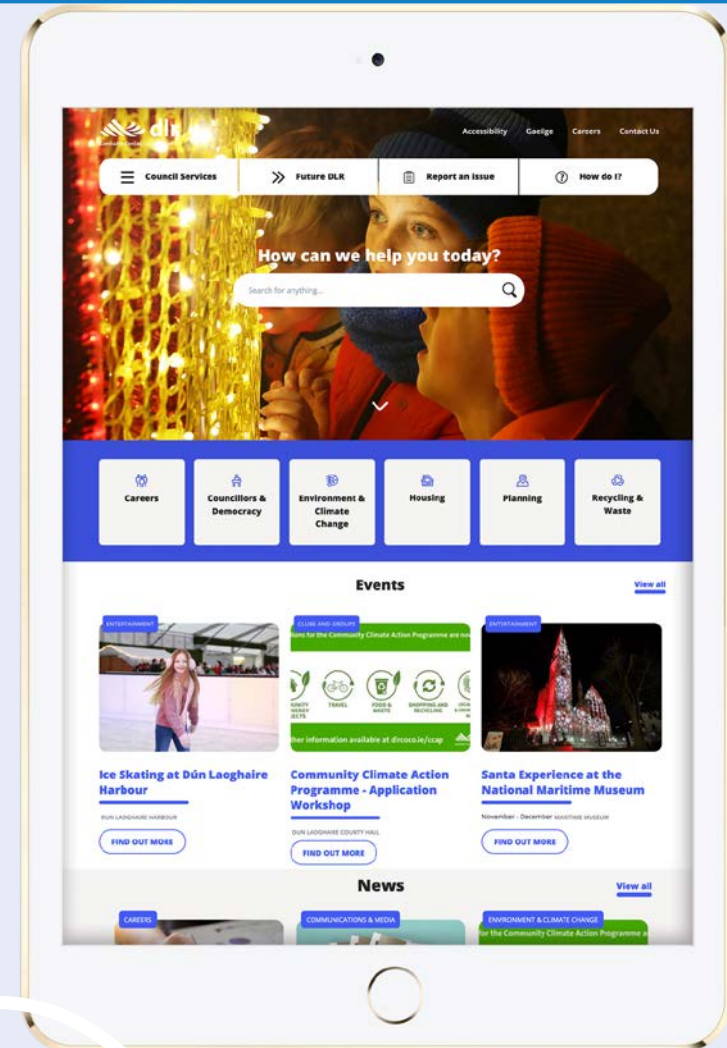
### 3.2.3 External communications channels

The Communications Office is responsible for sharing all service content on all suitable channels to ensure our key messages are effectively communicated with all our audiences. We continually review the choice of channels to ensure the maximum exposure for our messages. Current dlr communications channels include:

#### Media

- We work with local and national media outlets through regular, timely and accurate use of media statements, press releases and media-focused frequently asked questions (FAQs) and, where appropriate, media interviews. We maintain professional relationships with journalists and media outlets to maximise the levels of their understanding of our services.
- Online news sites and outlets are regarded as mainstream media and new sites/outlets are monitored on a regular basis. This includes press cuttings and local government news.

maintain professional relationships  
with media outlets



## 3.2 citizen engagement cont/d

### Social Media

- We have social media accounts for Twitter, Facebook, You tube, and Instagram. We will utilise appropriate forms of new media in line with our protocols.

### Website

- dlrcoco.ie is our core communications tool. All our websites will be utilised as a primary tool in sharing content about our services to our stakeholders; in terms of our services, activities and events, and for emergency purposes/crisis communications. Our websites will become the most up-to-date form of information for the public in relation to service-related information and will be available for use 24/7/365.

### dlr Times

- The *dlr Times* is printed four times per year and distributed to every household in the County. It highlights services and events and provides important information throughout the year.



## 4 internal communications goals

Lead clear, consistent and accessible communication across the organisation, encouraging a strong dialogue approach within all departments in the Council, and with our external audiences.

Promote and raise awareness about dlr and its corporate objectives among our internal audiences, including our elected members.

The first deliverable in the dlr Corporate Plan is to promote a communications culture in the organisation. Maintaining strong internal communications channels is essential to ensure that everyone working for DLR is kept aware of its mission, key messages, core values and corporate objectives, and their role in achieving them.

Creating good internal communications also means facilitating effective conversations between all the people within dlr to identify blockages, allow for the successful 2-way flow of information between teams and facilitate a culture of full and open communication, particularly in relation to key decisions. This constant dialogue together with regular assessment and monitoring of communication effectiveness, enhances morale and builds additional organisational social capital.

strong internal communications channels  
constant dialogue

## 4 internal communication cont/d

Prioritising communications also contributes to the development of the Council's people through knowledge sharing, training and development opportunities. Effective internal communication requires clarity around roles and responsibilities; the development and roll out of the PMDS programme in dlr is regarded as a cornerstone of effective internal communications, impacting on performance and morale.

### 4.1 Internal Communications Objectives

The communications strategy sets the following objectives in the delivery of effective **internal** communications:

- a. Communicate key messages in a timely, consistent and accessible manner.
- b. Support us to achieve our overall organisational objectives.
- c. Provide direction, clarity and engage effectively with teams across the organisation, both indoor and outdoor.
- d. Encourage exchange of views and accept feedback.
- e. Demonstrate the success of our internal work and the extent of our external engagement to our staff.

encourage exchange of views  
accept feedback

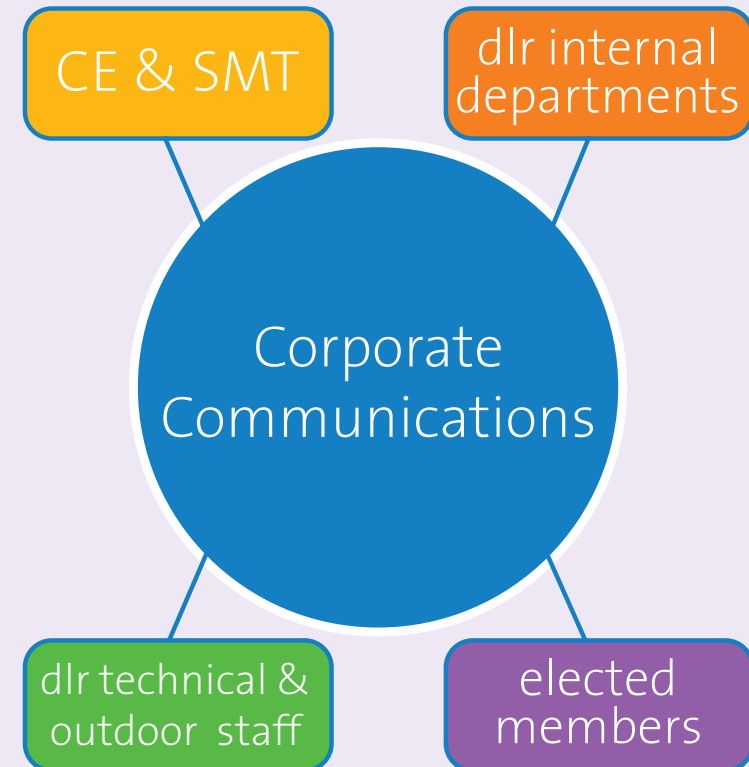


## 4.1 internal communications objectives cont/d

Delivering on these objectives will entail:

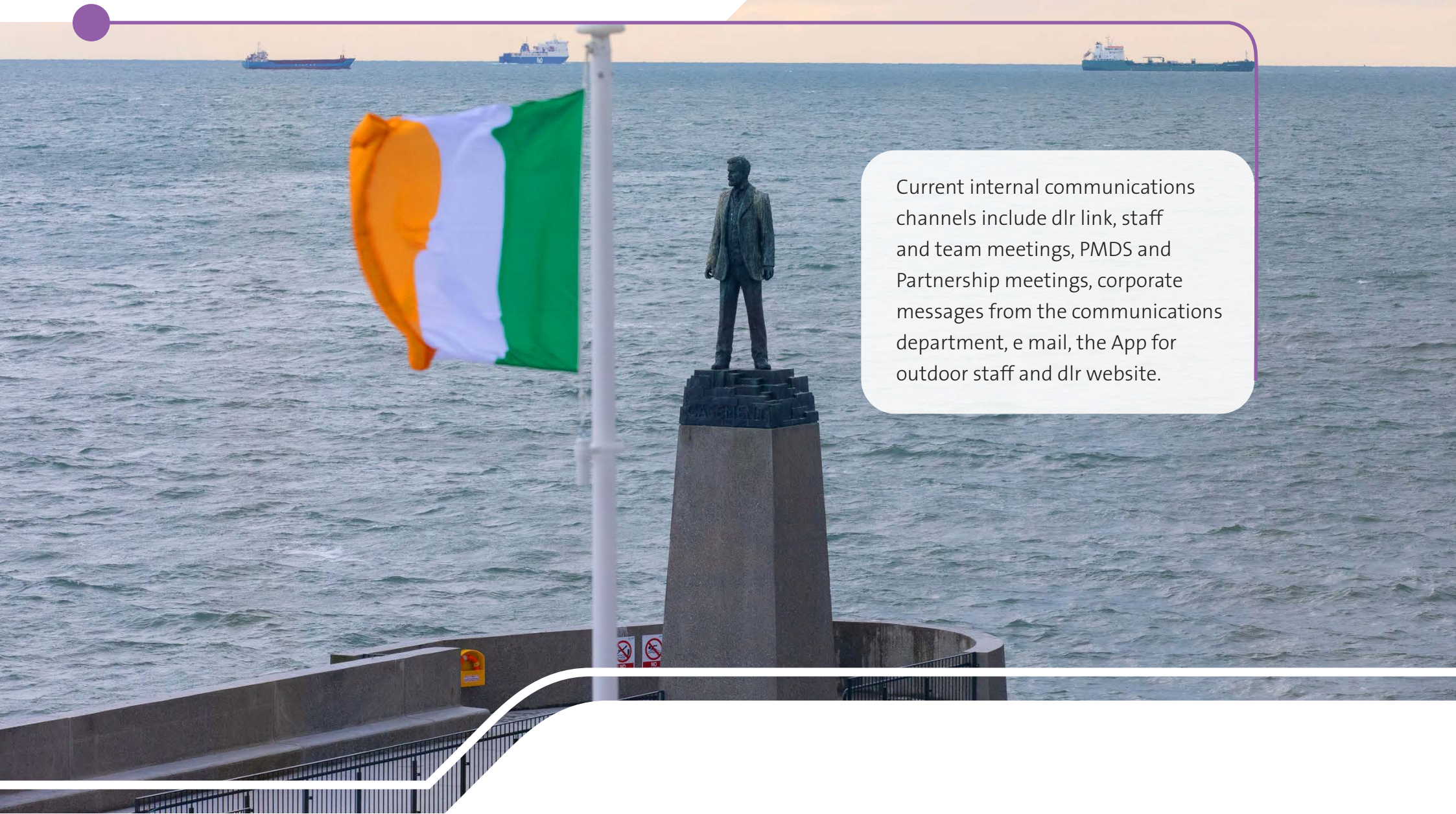
- Providing information in a clear accessible and timely manner to assist staff in understanding issues relating to their own departments and the broader organisation.
- Engaging in a two-way dialogue and receiving regular feedback about organisational issues and opportunities.
- Enabling inter-departmental networking through service launches and events cross-departmental group.
- Providing communications training to staff across the organisation to facilitate articulation of key corporate and departmental messages.
- Ensuring that staff are kept informed about key initiatives and actions taken internally and externally by the Council, particularly those that are likely to impact on their work, or that may elicit a negative public reaction.

### 4.1.2 Internal stakeholders



ensure staff are kept informed  
two-way dialogue

### 4.1.3 internal communications channels



Current internal communications channels include dlr link, staff and team meetings, PMDS and Partnership meetings, corporate messages from the communications department, e mail, the App for outdoor staff and dlr website.

## 5 protocols and policies

### 5.1 media management

**5.1.1** Safeguarding the good reputation of the Council, its staff and its services is essential to maintain public confidence in our work. The dlr Communications Office is the designated central point of contact for all media activity in order to ensure the greatest degree of consistency and co-ordination of corporate content for the general public via the media. Therefore, in the first instance, all queries from the media should be directed to the Communications Office. Statements, comments and communication with the media are centralised through the Communications Office and approved for release by the Communications Office, prior to dissemination to the media.

**5.1.2** In the event of any media query, in writing or verbally, staff should direct the journalists to the Communications Office and advise them that the matter is being referred to the Communications Office for their attention. Staff should not offer any comment outside of their referral of the matter to the Communications Office. Following the receipt of any query, the Communications Office, working with each line department will determine the response to the query.

**5.1.3** The Communications officer will handle media queries in a professional, timely and courteous manner and adhere to the values in this Communications Strategy. The Communications Office shall, from time to time, put forward a spokesperson to speak on behalf of dlr and shall assist spokespeople in the areas of preparation and training prior to their engagement with the media.

SAMUEL BECKETT CIVIC CAMPUS

## 5.2 dlr digital communications policy

**5.2.1** The rapid acceleration in the use of digital engagement channels presents opportunities and challenges in civic engagement for dlr. It provides an opportunity to build our audience numbers and drive engagement with our programmes and services. The correct use of social media can support this. With an increase in online traffic and the use of mobile devices to access content, we engage daily with our audiences. Digital engagement allows us to listen to our citizens and understand their needs, ask questions and gain feedback on ideas, gauge influence and build our public profile and disseminate information about Council services and policy.

The Digital Communications policy aims to:

- Define the protocols and expectations of dlr regarding the use of digital platforms by dlr employees, representatives and third parties acting on behalf of dlr
- Assist dlr in adopting a responsible approach to managing the usage of digital platforms
- Highlight the potential risks associated with digital engagement by dlr employees
- Ensure that dlr data and information is not compromised through the use of digital platforms.
- Provide dlr employees with good practice standards in digital platforms in business, and in their personal capacity in line with existing dlr policies, guidelines, and relevant legislation.

engage daily with our audiences  
build our public profile

## 5.2.1 digital communications policy cont/d

The Communications Office is responsible for the ownership and management of the Council's social media accounts. Social media activity is integrated with the Council's corporate communications strategy. The Communications Office will monitor dlr's digital platforms and their content to ensure that content is appropriate. Only those employees officially designated as spokespersons shall use social media sites to speak on behalf of dlr County Council.

ensure content is appropriate

## 6 communication team goals 2023

### communication goals

- a** Enhance dlr Co Council's reputation and strengthen its brand among all of those who live, work and visit in the county.
- b** Engage, consult and communicate inclusively and accessibly to enhance local democratic processes.
- c** Lead clear, consistent and accessible communication across the organisation, encouraging a strong dialogue approach within all departments in the council, and with external audiences.
- d** Promote and raise awareness about dlr and its corporate objectives among its internal audiences, including its elected members.

clear, consistent, accessible  
communication

# appendix



## appendix 1

● **1.1** Consultation for the dlr Communications strategy took place between April 2022 and January 2023. It comprised an extensive external consultation which included a public survey, to which there were more than 560 responses.

● **1.2** Views of the public were also sought around dlr communications protocols in other strategy development public consultations, including the Children and Young People's Plan, the dlr Library Plan, the dlr Older Persons' strategy and the dlr Play Policy, while internally, an evaluation of communications within the organisation also formed part of the dlr IT and HR strategies.

● **1.3** In addition, an internal staff survey was held, eliciting almost 300 responses. The process entailed facilitated consultation via a series of online focus groups with each department in the organisation. This overlapped with a wider organisation review and goal setting in-person facilitated engagement between the Chief Executive and internal and outdoor staff, which ran alongside the communications consultation, and where communications formed an integral part of the discussion.

● **1.4** A special communications consultation meeting was held with elected members of the SPC. This was preceded by an SPC meeting dedicated to the topic of citizen engagement, which covered many aspects of how dlr County Council communicates and engages with its communities, and what community expectations are in this regard.