



Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency
Improving Homes - Improving Lives



Communications & Outreach Strategy

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Background

At Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (Cambs HIA), our mission is to create accessible, safe, and comfortable homes for our community, with a particular focus on older adults, those with disabilities and those on low incomes. As a shared council service, we undertake repairs and adaptations in the homes of residents across the three districts of Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

Aimed at helping residents live more safely, comfortably and independently in their homes, the agency commonly undertakes works such as installing level access showers, stairlifts, ramps and accessible kitchens. We are also able to undertake a variety of customised adaptations catering to different disabilities and long-term health conditions, including facilitating larger works such as wet rooms and extensions for those assessed to require them. Cambs HIA also helps residents undertake repairs to their heating systems, to doors and windows, and other tasks necessary to keep them healthy and safe. We help residents access funding through their local councils for these works in the form of grants such as Disabled Facilities Grants and Special Purpose Assistance Grants. For those not eligible for grants, Cambs HIA can work in their homes as private clients, charging a management fee from the client.

Since 2022, Cambs HIA has delivered a progressively ambitious programme of communications, engagement and outreach in partnership with a wide variety of relevant stakeholders. In alignment with the goals envisioned in the current Corporate Plans of the three councils and importantly, those of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Health and Wellbeing and Integrated Care Strategy 2022, Cambs HIA aims to utilise its communications and outreach activities to raise awareness amongst local residents and ensure that we can maximise the impact of the agency's work by reaching those most in need. This Communications and Outreach Strategy aims to establish clear principles and approaches to guide Cambs HIA officers and help ensure a structured, coherent and effective approach towards the same.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the Communications and Outreach strategy is to enhance Cambs HIA's impact and accessibility by strategically engaging with relevant stakeholders and the local community. This will foster awareness, collaboration, and engagement, ultimately leading to a more informed, engaged, and empowered community. An important goal is to ensure that the general public, especially eligible individuals, are aware of the grants, services, and facilities offered by the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency through a strong network of allied organisations and a robust online presence.

The objectives of the communications and outreach strategy are:

- 1) Establish and maintain mechanisms for effective and timely communication to the residents in our area of operation, aimed at raising awareness about available funding and highlighting the HIA's work.
- 2) Convey information to and cultivate relationships with key stakeholders to develop a strong position for the HIA within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System through collaborative events, meetings, social media collaborations and other joint initiatives.
- 3) Empower Cambs HIA staff to be effective communicators on behalf of the council, ensuring that they have the required information, skills and opportunities to do so.
- 4) Drive engagement on social media by regularly sharing relevant and compelling content, encouraging interactions between platform stakeholders.
- 5) Implement tools to measure the reach and impact of communication efforts, analysing data to refine the strategy.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles for this Communications and Engagement Strategy are based on the goals of the Cambs HIA and aligned with the strategies of local councils listed below.

- 1) Cambs and Peterborough Integrated Care System – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Health and Wellbeing and Integrated Care Strategy.
- 2) Cambridge City Council Corporate Plan 2022-27
- 3) Huntingdonshire District Council Corporate Plan 2023-28
- 4) South Cambridgeshire District Council Business Plan 2019-24

The guiding principles derived from these documents are as below:

1. Enhance wellbeing through improved housing conditions: Highlight the positive impact of housing improvements on wellbeing, with a specific focus on supporting vulnerable residents, especially older individuals and those with disabilities.
2. Strengthen collaboration and position Cambs HIA strongly within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System: Foster collaboration and resource convergence with key partners within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System, including NHS teams, statutory bodies, council teams, charities, and citizens' groups to better position Cambs HIA within the broader health and wellbeing ecosystem.
3. Promote community engagement and development: Undertake activities that encourage community engagement and development, such as partnerships, outreach events and initiatives that bring the community together.
4. Enhance accessibility and inclusivity: Ensure accessibility and inclusivity in all communications and outreach efforts, reaching diverse audiences and addressing the needs of various community segments.
5. Advocate for energy efficiency and sustainability: Promote energy efficiency and sustainability measures to reduce the carbon footprint, aligning with broader environmental goals.

Target Audience

- 1) Residents
 - a) Residents Associations
 - b) Community Centres
 - c) People on low incomes
 - d) Older People
 - e) Children with disabilities
 - f) People with disabilities
 - g) Influential individuals

- 2) Organisational Partners
 - a) Statutory Bodies
 - i) NHS Teams
 - ii) Fire Department
 - iii) Police Department
 - b) City Council teams
 - i) Housing
 - ii) Social Care
 - iii) Think Communities
 - iv) Environmental Health
 - v) Community Development Team
 - c) County Council Teams
 - i) Public Health Team
 - ii) Integrated Care Team
 - iii) Adult Social Care
 - d) Local and National Charities
 - e) Schools
 - f) Businesses
 - i) Mobility aids companies
 - ii) Contractors
 - iii) Local Businesses

- 3) Miscellaneous
 - a) Hairdressers
 - b) Local media – Newspapers, Magazines, Radio
 - c) Community events and festival organisers
 - d) Places of Worship

Strategy

Our communications and outreach strategy revolves around three core pillars: Awareness, Partnerships and Engagement.

Awareness: Raising awareness amongst relevant stakeholders and the general public about the importance of home improvement, the impact of Cambs HIA's work and the different types of support available through Cambs HIA and other organisations.

Partnerships: Establishing effective partnerships with a diverse set of key stakeholders in the local and national context including NHS teams, Council Teams, local and national charities, community groups, and other statutory bodies, fostering collaborative initiatives for collective community wellbeing.

Engagement: Actively engage with communities and organizational partners through events, social media, and post-service interactions, cultivating a dynamic and enduring connection, feeding back into our social media content. Actively participating in local events, fairs, and gatherings to directly connect with the community.

Strategic Actions

1. Collaboration centric

Establishing strategic partnerships is extremely important for Cambs HIA to amplify its impact and reach. By collaborating with key stakeholders such as other council teams, NHS teams, charities, and community organizations, Cambs HIA can leverage collective resources, share expertise, and extend its support network. These partnerships will not only enhance the agency's visibility and credibility but also create a collaborative ecosystem focused on improving housing conditions, especially for vulnerable populations like older individuals and those with disabilities.

Collaborations with institutional partners can take the form of attending events, signposting to each other's services, social media collaborations, website features and other strategic collaborations. We also invite collaborations from our clients in being able to share their stories and being able to contribute to our mission by reaching out to others who might benefit from our work.

Collaborations are Cambs HIA's surest way to becoming a strong voice in advocating for accessible housing and resources at the local and regional levels.

2. Reaching information hubs

Engaging with information hubs is pivotal for Cambs HIA's outreach, collaborating with diverse platforms such as the Cambridge Community Advice Bureau, Turn2Us, Age UK and other services signposting residents to available support to those in need. Presence on such platforms is meant to ensure residents are seamlessly directed to Cambs HIA for their home improvement and adaptation needs.

3. Social Media Reposting

On social media, the strategy focusses on creating and leveraging partnerships to increase the visibility of our posts and our work. Content on home adaptations is not the most glamorous and attractive subject for social media. While the likes and comments on our post might not increase dramatically, the reach of our posts varies quite significantly. This is especially true when other social media pages with a much larger reach and viewership repost or reshare our content. Especially on Twitter (now X) our visibility is very strongly correlated by how many partners Retweet our posts.

Hence our strategy on social media revolves around amplifying our reach through resharing by our partners. By tagging the 3 district councils and the county council in all posts, we bring the posts to their attention and request them to repost. Foundations should also be strategically tagged in relevant posts. In case there are other partners such as other charities, specific NHS teams or any other relevant organisations, they should be contacted, tagged and requested to reshare, to increase visibility.

4. Engagement with public and with clients

Direct engagement with clients and residents is critical to the success of our work. Engaging with residents at events and through social media can help us understand their needs, challenges and any issues faced by them in accessing our services. Engaging with clients can help us find ways to improve our processes, communication or other aspects of our work. It also gives us an opportunity to create success stories of our work and feature our actual work on social media, which is content that does very well on social media.

5. Targeted Leaflet Drops

Leaflet drops in areas of high deprivation allow Cambs HIA to deliver relevant information directly to the homes of residents that may be eligible for grants and benefit from our work. Directly targeting non-council houses in these areas has been an effective way of reaching our target demographic.

Social Media Campaigns

The Social Media campaigns are central to the Communications and Outreach Strategy of Cambs HIA. These campaigns enable us to conceptualise and produce different types of content quickly. The campaigns are meant to help Cambs HIA staff ideate posts and ensure that the social media content comprehensively covers all the themes that we wish to cover.

- 1) Cambs HIA – We Care: A campaign that highlights the efforts taken by our staff, the long years of service and instances where we have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help residents of Cambridgeshire. Also showcasing positive reviews by clients.
- 2) Save the Date: This campaign signifies Cambs HIA's commitment to commemorating meaningful days and festivals related to disabilities, accessibility and other relevant themes, giving us an opportunity to also tie up with larger social media accounts, campaigns and movements.
- 3) Spread the Word – Make a Difference: Most of our work is aimed at people with disabilities, people on low incomes and older people, groups which may be hard to reach directly on social media. This campaign encourages different social media user groups to think about who might benefit from our work and pass the information on to them.
- 4) We're in this Together – This campaign highlights the collaborative work undertaken by Cambs HIA and is aimed at sharing resources, events and other information delivered either jointly with Cambs HIA or by one of our partners.
- 5) Energy Efficiency and Environmental Sustainability: This campaign raises awareness about the importance of and Cambs HIA's efforts to be environmentally sustainable in its work and promote energy efficiency amongst residents.
- 6) Home Improvement Advice: Practical advice and tips for residents to improve their living environment at home, especially in terms of safety and saving money on energy.

Post Timings and Frequency

Effective social media engagement is key to reaching and connecting with our community. It is also an effective medium to showcase Cambs HIA's work and impact to relevant stakeholders within local councils and other bodies such as Foundations. However, we also recognize the reality of limited resources and the importance of making each post count. Thus, below are some pointers regarding the timing and frequency of our posts, with reference to available literature about best social media practices for charities in the UK.

Frequency: Online guides for social media recommend posting 4-5 times a day for increased engagement and a big presence. Needless to say, that is unfeasible for us, both in terms of bandwidth and content. Instead, we invest our time and energy into crafting meaningful, impactful content that truly resonates with our audience. With our limited bandwidth, we've found that posting 2-3 times a week on average to be an optimum frequency of posts. This frequency will vary, depending upon events that we organise, national/international occasions that are marked and other aspects of our work which may require special posts and specific timing.

Timing: Since a lot of our social media content is aimed at and relies on reposting by institutional partners (such as the councils, foundations, other organisations), the best times to post on social media are between Tuesday and Thursday and early in the day before 11 am. Doing 2 posts a week, early on Tuesday and early on Thursday should be aimed for at the very least. Ideally, posts aimed at institutional partners should be posted early on Tuesdays. On every alternate week, the Thursday post can be posted in the late afternoon, aimed at the general public.

Analytics and Adaptation: We have also been vigilant when it comes to tracking our social media analytics. We use the data to adapt our posting schedule. If we see a particular time or day generating higher engagement, we adjust our strategy accordingly.

Here are a couple of articles giving an overview of social media practices for charities. However, it is important to take their recommendations and adapt them to what is feasible for us.

[Skylark Media | The best times to post on social media](#)

[The Best Times to Post on Social Media in 2023 \[New Data\] \(hubspot.com\)](#) – Note what they say about non-profits.

Tools

- 1) Canva – Canva is a user-friendly design tool which helps us create visually compelling graphics, infographics, videos, presentations and other communication materials. It has the advantage of being a one stop solution, enabling one to create almost all written or visual materials on the same platform. It also offers a repository of images to use and many useful Artificial Intelligence tools such as text to image, background remover and advanced photo editor.

Links: www.canva.com

- 2) Large Language Models - These models enable efficient ideation, content creation, and messaging refinement, saving time and resources. Large Language Models are a great tool when coming up with ideas, create first drafts and check for any errors in grammar and punctuation. These tools can help save an immense amount of time and effort.

Links: www.chat.openai.com www.bing.com www.bard.google.com

- 3) Freepik/Unsplash/Canva – It is important to be careful about the stock images used on our social media. Free image repositories can help improve the visual appeal of our posts while ensuring compliance with copyright and attribution regulations, giving one a vast selection of high quality, royalty free images.

Links: www.freepik.com www.unsplash.com

- 4) Performance Tracking – Each of Instagram, Facebook and Twitter offer analytics on their own platform that one can access once logged in. These features can be used to analyse the performance of each post and tailor content accordingly.

- 5) Hashtag Trackers - You can use hashtag trackers to find the top performing hashtags related to your post. You can also use the tool to analyse the performance of each hashtag to see its popularity. It would be beneficial to use the most popular hashtags since they maximise our chances of reaching a wider audience.

Links: www.hashtagify.me www.brandmentions.com

Challenges and Risks

1. **Reputational Hazard:** Being more visible on social media and through our communication poses the risk related to greater scrutiny of our content. Thus, mistakes on social media will pose a reputational risk to the agency and in particular, the behaviour of accounts we are associated with might affect our reputation. Hence proper due diligence should be conducted before establishing partnerships and engaging with other social media accounts.
2. **Navigating Sensitive Topics:** Our work and our social media content delves into complex and sensitive topics such as people's disabilities, death and other associated topic. It is extremely important to be sensitive while dealing with these topics and stay updated about the appropriate language to engage with them.
3. **Low Rates of Engagement:** Content based around home improvements is certainly not the most popular category of content on social media hence it is hard to get people to engage with the content. However, while the likes may not increase dramatically, there is considerable scope to increase reach.
4. **Balancing Digital and Traditional Outreach:** It is important to ensure a good balance between digital outreach methods and traditional outreach methods. Collaborations with other organisations should also focus on finding opportunities to be present at a variety of in-person events to interact with residents.
5. **Resource Constraints for Dedicated Social Media Management:** Without a dedicated social media team, the social media responsibilities have to be divided amongst the team with certain point persons. It is important to play to each person's strength, cooperate and use automation tools intelligently to effectively manage social media activities.