



EXCELLENT EMAILS  
IN THE UK PUBLIC SECTOR  
**(AND WHY THEY'RE GREAT)**



# INTRODUCTION

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## EMAIL IS (STILL) THE NUMBER ONE CHANNEL FOR GOVERNMENT OUTREACH

As the leading provider of communications solutions for the public sector, we deliver over one billion digital messages per quarter on behalf of more than 1,800 government organisations in the UK and US.

Our technologies and services empower communication across a range of platforms with 150 million citizens worldwide, and it is with this experience that we've come to a definitive conclusion: email remains the most effective vehicle for external promotion.

Email is the most widely used channel across all sectors' communications strategies, and we know from our customers that it has the power to inform, educate and move citizens to take action. The public sector now has benchmarks for measuring the success of digital messages (see [Digital Communications In The Public Sector: Improving Metrics That Matter](#)).

But what does an effective email look like? How can elements of design and messaging affect the impact of your emails? Read this guide for 10 examples of excellent emails in the public sector.

# CATEGORIES

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Due to the natural difference in messaging between the public and the private sectors, email categories can differ too. For example, traditional email marketing campaigns are often seeking to sell a product or service. In the public sector, more often you're seeking to inform and encourage action around civic engagement. Nevertheless, email has the power to inform, educate, inspire, sell, and drive action in both sectors.

Email campaigns in the public sector generally fall into one of the following categories:



## WELCOME

These messages are important to confirm to your audience's subscription, set expectations and provide an opportunity to promote key pieces of content.



## INFORMATIONAL

These types of messages are used to inform constituents about something they care about, or to communicate news that will affect them.



## CALLS TO ACTION

Call-to-action emails prompt people to do something. They instruct or encourage an audience to get involved and take action, for example, pay a bill.



## NEW INITIATIVE/ SERVICE LAUNCH

These types of messages announce something new to readers, like a programme or service.



## REQUESTS FOR FEEDBACK

This type of message ensures readers know that they will be heard and that their input is valued by the sender.



## REMINDERS

Automated reminders have a number of benefits, including being quick and targeted. Reminders help increase audience participation, converting awareness into action.



# WELCOME

These messages are important to confirm your audience's subscription or interest in a service or event. They set expectations and provide you with an opportunity to promote important content. Welcome messages often set the tone for a subscription, build a positive first impression, and answer questions around when and why your readers will hear from you.

## EXAMPLE 1

### LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY COUNCIL

#### WHY IT'S GREAT:

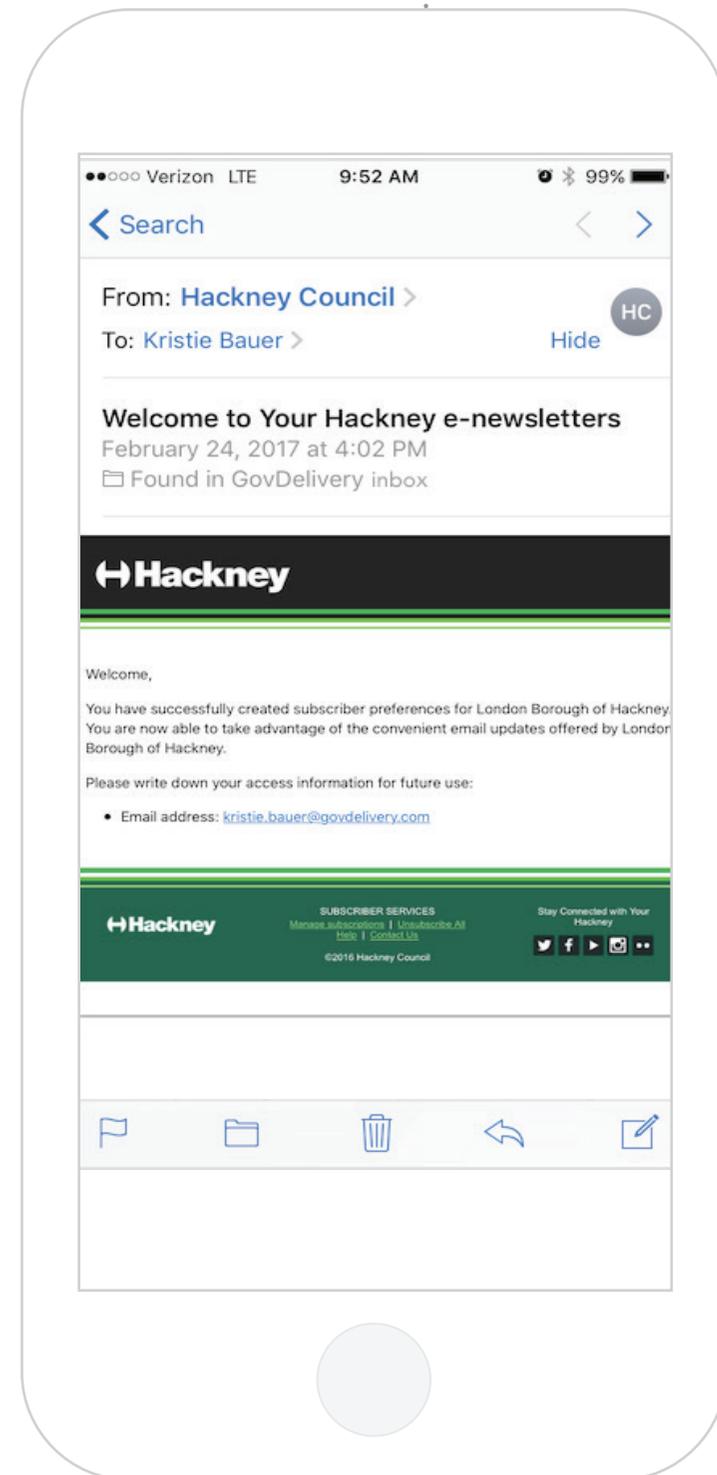
**KEEPS IT SHORT:** As word counts go up, readership goes down. Messages should be brief, scannable and and to-the-point.

#### PROVIDES FURTHER POINTS OF CONTACT:

Welcome messages should have a friendly tone and are a great opportunity to signpost people to other relevant content or connection points. Definitely include social media links, other subscription topics that may be of interest, and account management options. This puts power in the subscriber's hands.

**ADOPTS ORGANISATION'S BRANDING:** Many subscribers will have subscribed via a sign-up option on Hackney's website or other collateral, therefore it's important to make the customer experience as seamless as possible by adopting your brand's style guidelines throughout the transaction.

The branded banners add credibility and can help build trust between the organisation and subscribers. Good quality intuitive design helps set a great first impression!





# INFORMATIONAL

Informational messages are used to inform constituents about something they care about or that might affect them. The majority of public sector emails are informational messages, which convey service updates.



# EXAMPLE 2

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## WHY IT'S GREAT:

**USES HIGH-IMPACT, RELATABLE IMAGERY:** This message is a great example of high-quality, high-impact imagery that leaves no mystery about where an audience's attention should be.

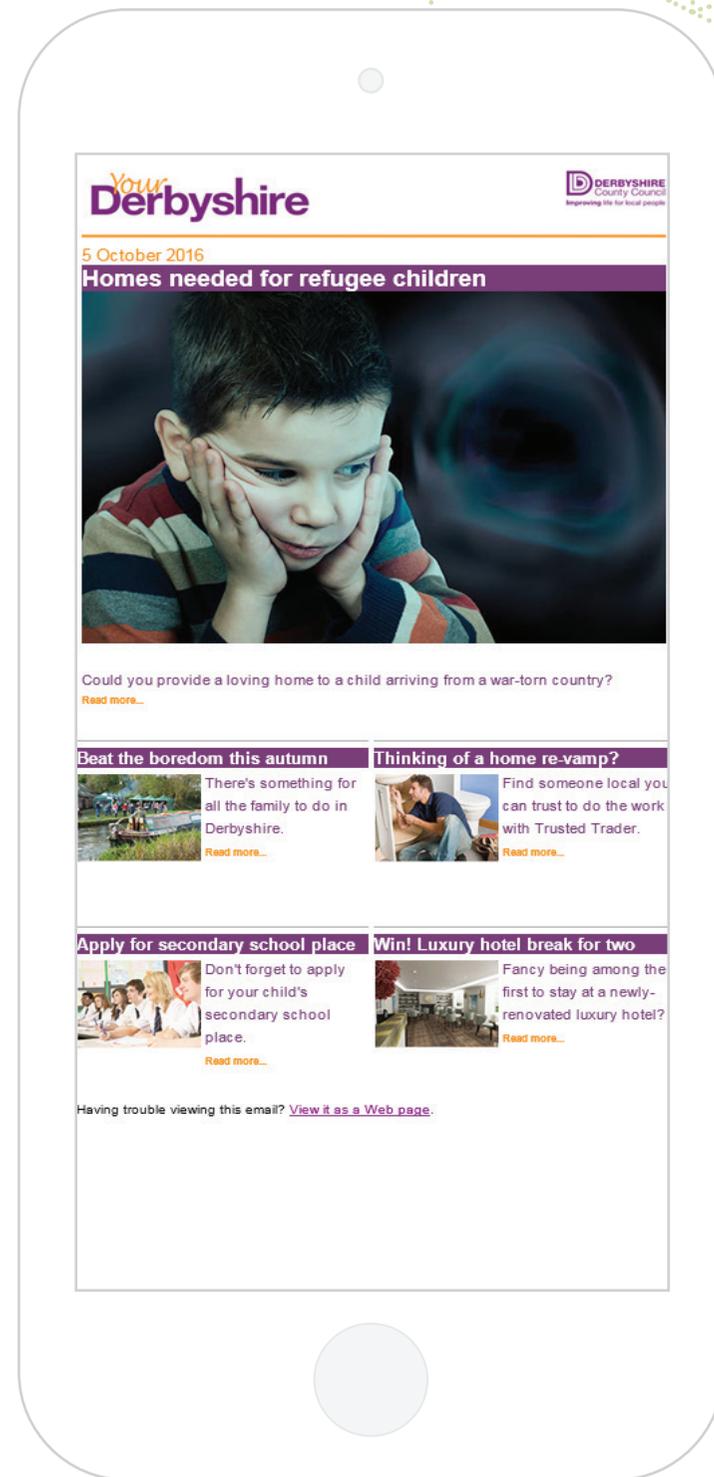
**USES STRAIGHT AND CONSISTENT FORMATTING:** Messages that are neat and consistent in their use of character counts and image / text / call to action placement are easy for a reader to follow and digest.

**When people hear information, they're likely to remember only 10 per cent of that information three days later. If a relevant image is paired with that same information, however, people retain 65 percent of the information three days later.**

(Source: Life Learn)



STAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



# EXAMPLE 3

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

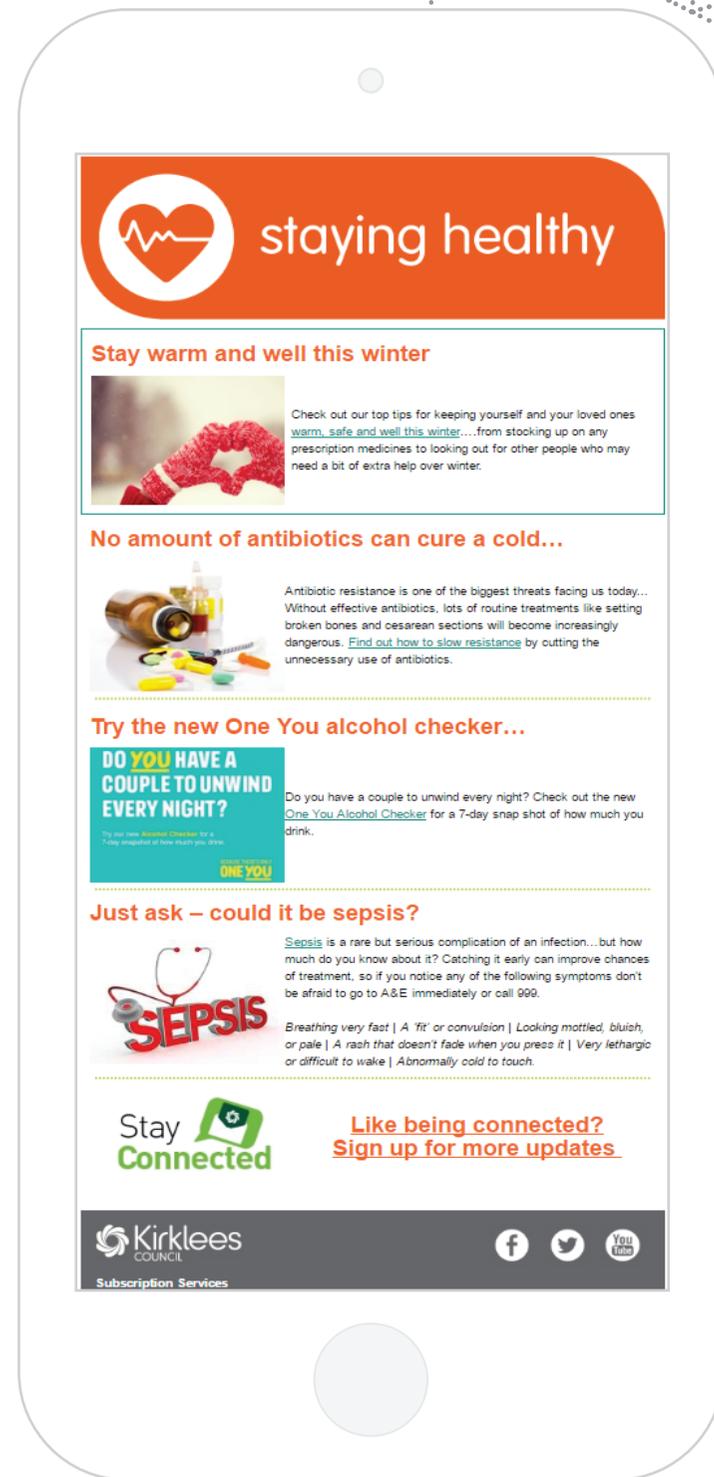
## WHY IT'S GREAT:

### **SIMPLE IMAGERY THAT CONNECTS WITH HEADLINES:**

When selecting imagery to support your messages in emails, remember many recipients will be viewing your message on their phones or tablets. Avoid busy imagery with lots of detail; this can be distracting and difficult to understand quickly, particularly on small screens. Kirklees has used simple images, some with a single high-impact word to reinforce the message.

**PRIORITISES MESSAGES WELL:** For emails with multiple messages or calls to action, you should lead with the most important item. What one thing should someone know if they don't scroll down to view the rest of the email? Given that each year there is a spike in deaths associated with the impacts of winter conditions, Kirklees does a great job here of prioritising some health and safety advice.

**PROVIDES JUST ENOUGH DETAIL:** Informational emails should be upfront about what subscribers need to know, particularly as many readers quickly scan the messages. Here, a short amount of "teaser" text explains the main message of each item, while enticing readers to click through for more detail online.





**NOW!**

# CALLS TO ACTION (CTA)

Email is the most effective communication tool for inspiring action and helping the public sector achieve its goals. Logistically, CTAs are what drive this action – whether it's by increasing transactions for a revenue-generating service or event, or increasing the take-up of a new opportunity (for example adult education class enrolments).

# EXAMPLE 4

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY (FSA)

## WHY IT'S GREAT:

**USES A STRONG CALL TO ACTION:** The call to action is reinforced in key areas of this message: the subject line, the headline, and the single coloured hyperlink to more info. This email focuses on one topic and repeats key words like "freezer", "food" and "waste" to help make the message more "sticky".

**USES PERSONAL PRONOUNS AND THE ACTIVE VOICE:** The FSA has used plain English and the active voice to improve readability. Avoid jargon and convoluted language which are barriers to readers' understanding. Use personal pronouns like "we" and "you" to appeal directly to your readers, making it clear exactly what they're being encouraged to do next.

**You are six times more likely to get a click-through from an email campaign than you are from a tweet.**  
(Source: Campaign Monitor)



STAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

### Reduce food waste with FSA Freezer Fairy this Christmas

Did you know wasting food costs the average household £470 a year?

We are particularly wasteful over Christmas as we tend to cook for more. To help you manage food waste this festive season, our Freezer Fairy is sharing advice on how to use your freezer to make food go further safely.

Visit [www.food.gov.uk/freezerfairy](http://www.food.gov.uk/freezerfairy) for tips, advice and some great ideas for leftovers recipes.

You can also follow the #FreezerFairy tips on Twitter by following us @foodgov and help us to spread the word by re-tweeting.

*Freezer Fairy says...* 

**Prepare some of your Christmas meal in advance and store in the freezer to help reduce stress on the day.**

#FreezerFairy 

# EXAMPLE 5

## CARE QUALITY COMMISSION (CQC)

### WHY IT'S GREAT:

**KEEPS TEXT TO A MINIMUM:** The CQC lets readers know what it is they're being invited to download, without overwhelming them with unnecessary extra detail. Brevity is key to engaging your audience.

**SIGNPOSTS READERS TO OTHER RELEVANT CONTENT:** Segmenting your audience the moment they subscribe (by providing different sign-up options) helps set audience expectations. Here the CQC provides links to other resources they know this audience is likely to find useful. Offering other relevant content links is a great way to add value to your brand and your email service. Careful you don't overload people, and do always lead with the primary call to action.

**Including a call to action button instead of a text link can increase conversion rates by as much as 28 per cent.**

(Source: Campaign Monitor)



STAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



The independent regulator of health and social care in England

### Monitoring the Mental Health Act in 2015/16

This year's report available for download now.



### Use of the Mental Health Act in 2015/16

Monitoring the Mental Health Act in 2015/16, our annual report on the use of the Mental Health Act (MHA), looks at how providers are caring for patients, and whether patient's rights are being protected.

Download your copy now



[Read the full report](#)



[Download our infographic](#)



See also: [State of Care 2015/16](#)

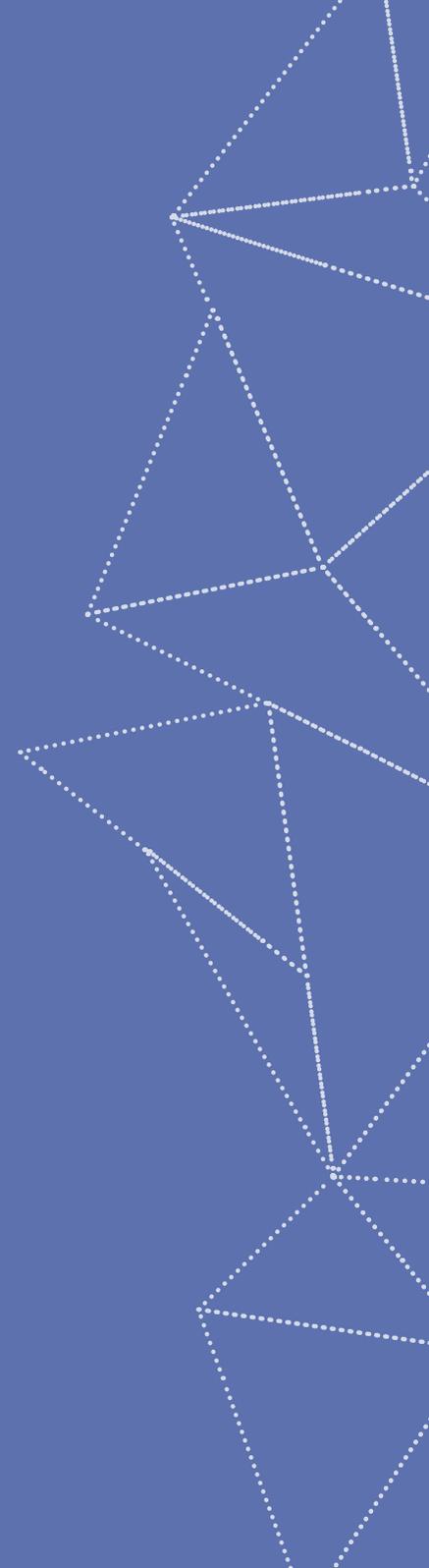


# NEW INITIATIVE / SERVICE LAUNCH

Slightly different from informational messages, new initiative or service launch messages announce something new to readers and are more closely tied to timing.

Organisations that interact with each constituent in terms that are relevant to him or her find it easier to cultivate affinity and support. With email, your organisation can protect the relevance of a message by communicating close to or exactly at the time of a launch.

If you're struggling to get positive messages out to citizens via your local press, email alerts can be a great way to tell "the story" in a different way. Be proactive about communicating news to the people affected, and you'll find this can positively influence public perceptions of your organisation. Take more control over news about your organisation and what it can do for citizens.



# EXAMPLE 6

## BOURNEMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

### WHY IT'S GREAT:

**IS WELL-DESIGNED AND ATTRACTIVE:** Bournemouth uses (brand) colour to frame the body of the message and draw attention to the call to action. The six images complement the message by giving a snapshot of the type of content subscribers can expect.

**IS A CLICK-THROUGH DREAM:** This message does a great job of providing several ways to subscribe to the new service. Bold call to action buttons are great, but don't forget to also hyperlink keywords in the body of your email which tell the reader what it is they are going to be able to do. Avoid hyperlinking meaningless phrases like "click here". Remember, links should make sense when read out of context: this will help anyone skimming through your message with or without a screen reader.

**Email marketing drives more conversions than any other marketing channel, including search and social.**

(Source: Monetate)



**STAT YOU SHOULD KNOW**

**Bournemouth**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# YOU'RE INVITED

**Subscribe to our email news service and keep up to date with what matters most to you!**

**SIGN UP**

**Topics to choose from include:** News & Information, What's On, Library News, Roads & Travel, Jobs, Children & Education, Recycling & Waste, Business News, Health & Wellbeing, Boscombe Community News and West Howe Community News.

Subscribe to as many or as few topics as you like and easily unsubscribe at any time.

Please note that this is the last email we will send you, but you can choose to sign up to the service at anytime in the future.

# EXAMPLE 7

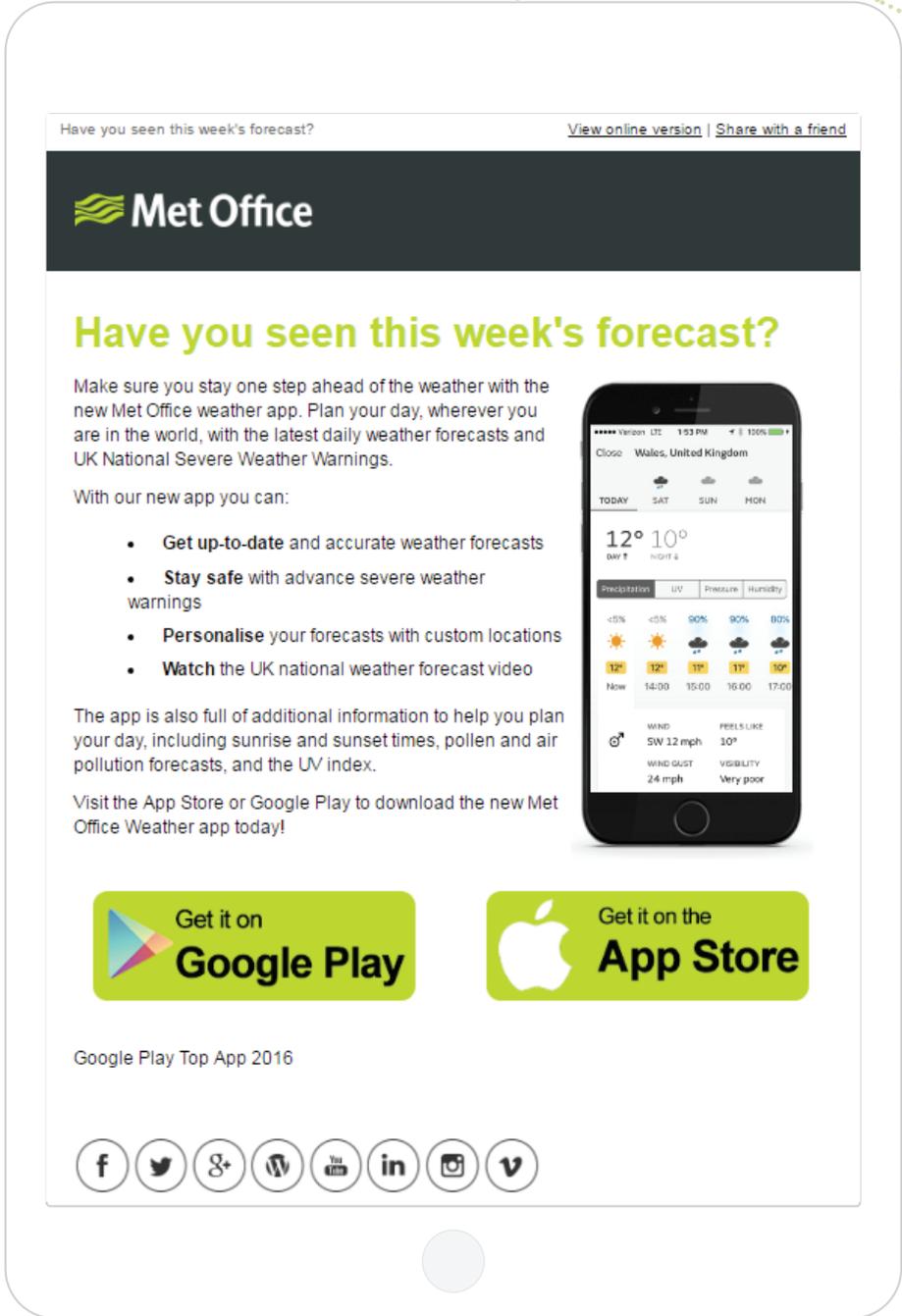
MET OFFICE

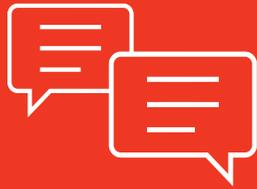
## WHY IT'S GREAT:

**NEWS IS ANNOUNCED UP FRONT:** The average person's attention span with email is less than 10 seconds, so prioritising content is crucial. This example immediately tells readers why they should stay engaged.

**MAKES GOOD USE OF THE PRE-HEADER:** The Met Office sets "Have you seen this week's forecast?" as the pre-header of the email. The pre-header appears below the subject line in most inboxes, so it's a perfect opportunity to boost opens by including a call to action, or by using it as an extension of your subject line. Be aware that depending on the email client your recipients are using, some will see the first line of the plain text version of your multipart email instead, so always ensure you've verified the quality of your plain text version too.

**KEPT IT SHORT, WITH OPTION FOR MORE:** Messages should be brief, scannable and high-level, with trackable links offering access to more detail. This example does a great job of letting people know what they'll gain from downloading the app. Bullet points draw attention to the main benefits and set customers' expectations.





# REQUESTS FOR FEEDBACK

While calls to action seek to inspire some level of engagement, messages that request feedback are of a slightly different nature. This type of message has a different tone – one that ensures readers know that they will be heard and their input is valued by the sender. Requests for feedback can be a great way to monitor what is working and what you can adjust in your communications strategy to achieve better results.

# EXAMPLE 8

## CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### WHY IT'S GREAT:

**LETS READERS KNOW YOU VALUE THEIR INPUT:** Let your audience know why you're asking for their opinion and how their contribution will be used to inform a decision or improve a service. Being open about the purpose of your message and using a friendly but professional tone help to build trust.

**USES RELEVANT IMAGERY:** Using good quality and uncomplicated imagery can help make your messages more emotive, persuasive and memorable. This photo isn't overly stylised or contrived. This can help the audience "see" themselves or people they know in the picture. Always use imagery and language that will resonate with your audience.

**USES A STRONG CALL TO ACTION:** When you are encouraging a reader to do something, start your call to action button with a verb to make the desired action as clear as possible.



### Have your say on childcare

Caerphilly County Borough Council wants parents and carers to have their say on childcare throughout the county borough.

By completing the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment survey you help us gather information which could help shape the future of childcare services in the county borough,

Since 2013, as a result of the survey, over 350 new childcare places have been established along with additional childcare support for children aged 11-14 in secondary schools.

Each completed survey will be entered into a **prize draw for £50 of high street vouchers.**

The survey will remain open for another two weeks but we would like your views as soon as possible.

Call 01443 863232 to request a hard copy or for further information.

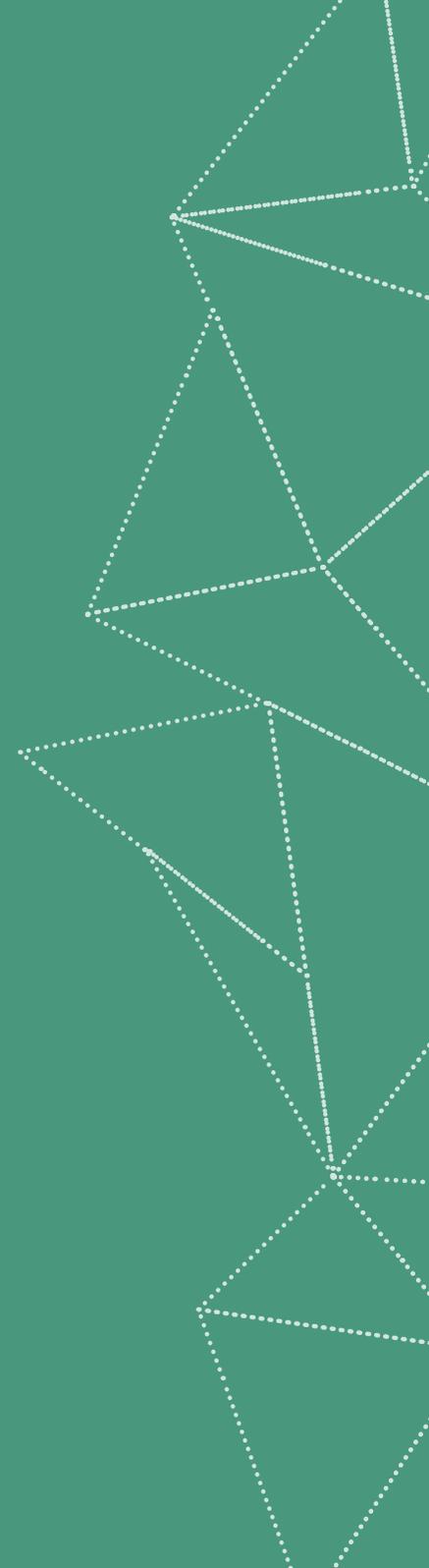
**Select the link below to take part in the survey.**

[Take the survey](#)



# REMINDERS

Reminders have one of the highest open rates of all email categories. They stand out in an inbox because rather than seeing a sales pitch, customers see information on upcoming deadlines. With better access to information and the convenience of timely online communications, people are able to register, renew or attend something more easily than ever before.



## EXAMPLE 9

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

WHY IT'S GREAT:

**DELIVERS A CLEAR AND CONCISE MESSAGE:** Kirklees does a great job of preempting readers' questions and provides all the information they need to know about date, time and location, plus guidance on what can be recycled and what to do if you're moving house. Immediately convey the essential information readers need to know, and provide links to further details for those interested.

**IS VISUALLY COMPELLING:** Kirklees uses relevant colour and imagery to reinforce the message about recycling. When inserting images, always provide image alt-text that will make sense to the reader if the image does not load. Check your spelling and use alt-text as an opportunity to repeat the call to action.

Sometimes it may be better to send reminder emails without images; a plain text email might achieve a higher engagement rate for example. Use automated A/B testing (available with the **GovDelivery Advanced Package for Communications Cloud**) to test two versions of your message to learn what drives the best results.



REMEMBER TO TEST

**bin collection reminder**

Don't forget to put your Green Recycling Bin out for collection tomorrow.

Please put it out by 7am and take it back again as soon as possible after it's been emptied.

Items that go in your green recycling bin should be loose, clean and dry - please don't put them in plastic bags

newspapers  
magazines  
cardboard  
books  
plastic bottles  
aerosols  
food tins  
drinks cans

You can take old clothes, garden waste, batteries, shoes, glass and electrical items to your nearest recycling centre.

**Kirklees COUNCIL**

Subscription Services  
Moving house? Make sure you [unsubscribe](#) from this alert and [sign up for a different address](#).  
[Manage your preferences](#) | [Help with your account](#) | [www.kirklees.gov.uk](#)

This email was sent to Email Address using GovDelivery, on behalf of: Kirklees Council - 2nd Floor - Civic Centre  
3 - Market Street - Huddersfield - HD1 2YZ

powered by **govDELIVERY**  
get the word out.

## EXAMPLE 10

UK SPACE AGENCY

### WHY IT'S GREAT:

**USES COMPELLING SUBJECT LINE:** Your emails are only ever as good as your subject line. Design starts in the inbox. The UK Space Agency emphasises the urgency of this reminder in the subject line: "Principia: watch the launch live today!". Put the most important words at the start to grab your readers' attention.

**REINFORCES THE SCARCITY OF THE OPPORTUNITY:** Reminders should always make deadlines clear, whether for an event or another type of time-limited opportunity. Here you see the timing in the subject line; the best position for a reminder!

If you're encouraging greater take-up of a service or attendance at an appointment, research shows people are more sensitive to messaging around possible losses than possible gains. Therefore you could focus on what people will miss out on if they don't act now. Try using phrases like "Don't miss out on..." or "Here's what you'll miss..." in your marketing, where appropriate.



**TECHNIQUE YOU SHOULD TRY**



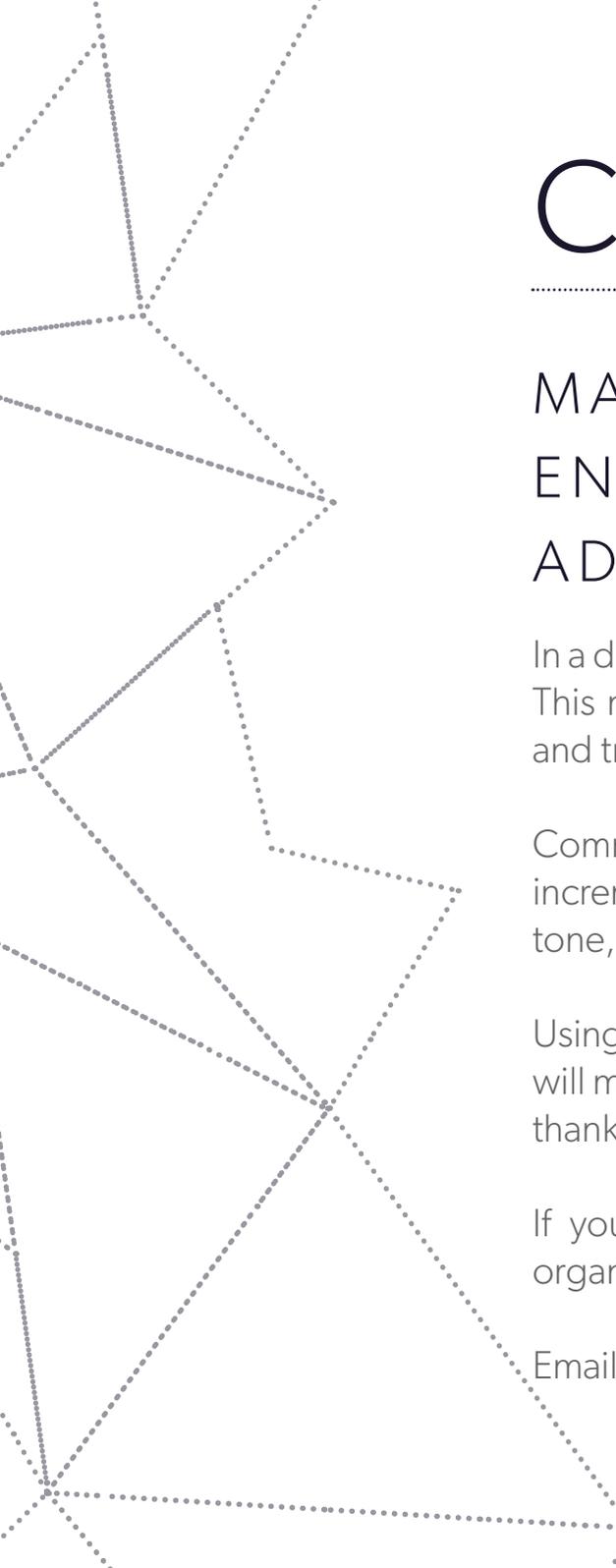
**Watch the launch live!**



**Time: 11:00 am GMT**

The launch and key moments will be streamed online throughout the day via:

- [Livestream](#)
- [ESA TV](#)
- [NASA TV](#)



# CONCLUSION

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## MAKE SURE YOU MEASURE ENGAGEMENT AND MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

In a digital world, we're able to monitor results much more easily than ever before. This means you can analyse what messages are resonating with your audience, and track engagement rates.

Communications strategies should be continually reviewed and adjusted for incremental optimisation. Never underestimate the power of the colour, format, tone, and subject lines of your emails. Test what gets the best results.

Using the GovDelivery [Advanced Package for Communications Cloud](#) by Granicus will make it easy for your team to instill a culture of constant testing and evaluation, thanks to the automated A/B testing features.

If you have best practices or success stories of what emails work for your organisation, let us know!

Email us at [info@granicus.com](mailto:info@granicus.com) or tweet us at [@GranicusUK](https://twitter.com/GranicusUK)

