

Review of the Communication and Community Engagement Strategies and the Media and Social Media Policy and Guidelines

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Colin Slade
Responsible Officer: Communications and Engagement Manager

Reason for Report: The purpose of this report is to provide members with the revised Communication and Engagement Strategy which now replaces the previous Communication Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy, Media and Social Media Protocol and Social Media Policy & Guidelines. This revised and amalgamated strategy is required to ensure we deliver and improve two way communication with staff, members and our customers to ensure all are engaged with and informed about Council services.

RECOMMENDATION: To recommend to Cabinet the content of the reviewed and amalgamated Communication and Engagement Strategy.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: To ensure that our customers, staff, members and stakeholders are informed about Council services, news and changes through appropriate and varied channels.

Financial Implications: Any financial implications would depend on the methods chosen to implement the action plans. The majority of the proposed actions can be implemented with the existing communication staff. Should the Council wish to implement larger scale communication changes, such as to develop a new intranet or carry out a full rebranding exercise, this would involve a financial cost. Any projects identified within the attached action plan would be accompanied by a costed and approved business case.

Legal Implications: To ensure that all communication and methods of consultation are GDPR compliant and adhere to the Council's Single Equality Scheme.

Risk Assessment: None

Equality Impact Assessment: Any consultation and communication channels would have regard to the Council's Single Equality Scheme.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council has a duty to consult and engage effectively with residents, partners, employees and other stakeholders when deciding about future changes to services and new developments.
- 1.2 As a council we must offer value for money and customer satisfaction, therefore two way engagement is an essential part of delivering our services.
- 1.3 The Council previously had separate communication and engagement strategies which were due for review at different times. The Council's Social Media Policy and Guidelines previously sat with IT, while the Media and

Social Media Protocol sat with Communications. Now that there is a Communications team in place these policies and guidelines all sit within the Communication service area and are contained within this single document to provide an effective overarching strategic approach to the Council's communication and engagement activity.

2.0 The Communication function and team

2.1 The Communication function is split into three key areas, all of which are detailed in this strategy:

- Internal Communication
- Community engagement
- Media relations

2.2 Core functions of the Communications team include:

- Media relations and media monitoring
- Social media
- Staff communication
- Community consultation and engagement
- Stakeholder consultation and engagement
- Branding and corporate campaigns
- Communication advice and training for managers, leadership team and elected members
- Website editing

3.0 Action plans

3.1 Following a Corporate Peer Review in 2017 the Council recognised the need to improve consultation with our customers. Detailed in the strategy are proposed action plans in order to achieve this, both internally and with our external customers. These action plans essentially form a business plan for the Communication team. While it may not be appropriate, or cost effective, to develop all of the proposals they give an indication of the areas of work which the Communication team will be looking to develop over the coming months and years to support the Council in achieving its mission and corporate goals.

4.0 A corporate approach

4.1 Now that a communication team exists the Council can adopt a more strategic approach to communication. The Communication team is already an integral part of the business transformation project and is seeking to work more closely with other service areas.

4.2 This work has begun but there is more that can be done to utilise existing channels of communication in other services areas, for the benefit of sharing a corporate message to a wider audience.

4.3 The Communication team is also looking at ways to raise its own profile among service areas to ensure any corporate and service messages which are communicated are targeted to their audience, that language used complies with our Single Equality Scheme and to support the Council's Annual Governance Statement which assesses our position against the Code of Corporate Governance. This will take some time to embed within the organisation but once the Communication team can develop the proposed actions and support the service areas this should improve, to the benefit of our customers.

5.0 The Future

5.1 Communication and engagement has moved from being focused on traditional print media and the distribution of press releases and postal literature to the emergence of online communities and the use of multiple and instantaneous channels which give individuals a platform to share their views. The Council must now recognise this, while being mindful of our demographic, and change and improve the way it reaches out to its customers to both inform them and seek their views.

5.2 In a digital era the Council should also recognise the importance of branding and adopt a more recognised and uniform approach to its communication channels, whether they are in print or online.

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Circulation of the Report: Councillors Colin Slade and Margaret Squires, Group Managers, Leadership Team and Community PDG

List of Background Papers: Communication Strategy 2015, Social Media Policy & Guidelines 2013, Media and Social Media Protocol 2015, Community Engagement Strategy 2016.