Engagement Strategy

Leader of the Council

Date:	23 June 2020
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Key Decision?	**YES NO (delete as appropriate)**
Local Ward Members	If any Wards are particularly affected insert the name of the Ward Members and their Ward. Ensure that the Ward Members have been consulted.

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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1.   Executive Summary

1.1   A draft Engagement Strategy has been developed (Appendix 1) using the results from a recent review of our communications service and approach, as well as research relating to similar strategies from a range of good practice local authorities as well as from high-performing private sector organisations.

1.2   The strategy focuses on communities rather than customers, learning from the shifting perceptions of the relationships required to succeed, moving them from transactional in nature to being more co-creative, and so by inference, fully engaged.

1.3   The strategy is aspirational and sets out a clear road map to improve how we engage with our varied community groups and utilise new and emerging tools and approaches to ensure we successfully engage while making our communities central to all we do.

2.   Recommendations

2.1   The committee note the draft strategy and provide their views and comments on its content.

3.   Background

3.1   In 2017/18 an audit of the service suggested consideration should be given to developing a Communications Strategy that aligned to the Council's Delivery Plan actions for 2018-20. This was not accepted by the department and instead reliance was placed on the Communications Service Plan.

3.2   However, following a review of the communications service, along with changes to the political leadership of the council and its officer structure, it was felt an Engagement Strategy would be helpful to ensure the council had a clear direction and high-level objectives to meet future needs.

3.3   The draft strategy (Appendix 1) was created in response to this, using a review of our communications service and approach, as well as reflecting on similar strategies from a range of good practice local authorities and high-performing private sector organisations.

3.4   The strategy clearly sets out clearly an ambitious aim to; *understand our communities and their communication needs in order to tailor our communications methods and content to keep them informed and engaged in a way that enhances the reputation and brand of the Council.*

3.5   It is written in an open, honest and reflective style, offering 'personality' where appropriate, to embrace the proposals within it.

3.6   While this may feel critical, this is not the intention, but rather it offers a balanced reflection that accepts that what we do may be good but that it is does not meet our new aspirations and so reflects on where we can learn how our approach can evolve.

3.7   There are nine objectives, within three key work streams, which are; laying the foundations, building success, and reaching new heights.

3.8   The approach centres on a clear ambition take an innovative approach to how we communicate with our varied communities and engage with them to obtain meaningful insight that helps make decisions and direct activity.

3.9   While the strategy is to be delivered over four years, it has been suggested that it should begin in 2020, as some of the activity within the strategy has already begun, and will not be wasted should any changes be made to the proposals within the strategy. For example; a review of the structure has been undertaken and some new approaches in communicating are being tested. All of this offers helpful learning to inform any next steps.

3.10   An outline delivery plan is provided within the strategy, and will be turned in to a detailed service plan for the communications service. It prioritises activity that needs to be available for the whole durations, such as our approach and use of customer insight, while deprioritising some activity to future years which will be reliant on this work, i.e. targeted communications and marketing.

3.11   While the strategy is owned by the communications service, it is reliant on the whole council to recognise their role in communicating and engaging with our customers and working together to achieve success.

Alternative Options	1. The council choose not to have an engagement strategy and continue as it has, making tactical decisions as they arise. However, a previous audit and subsequent review of communications, has suggested this is not good practice and could have led to a divergence from intent, leading to wasted resources, mixed messages and lack of clarity to our customers.
Consultation	1. To create the strategy, a period of consultation was undertaken with officers involved in communications and engagement activity, as well as middle managers. 2. Consultation is being undertaken with Leadership Team.
Financial Implications	1. There are no perceived implications of the strategy at this stage.
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	1. The strategy will support the delivery of the strategic plan, through ensuring our communications and engagement activity is aligned to our strategic narrative and provides the necessary insight to make decisions.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	1. There are no perceived implications but future changes in how we communicate will consider these issues and may require an Equality Impact Assessment.
Crime & Safety Issues	1. There are no perceived implications of the strategy at this stage.

	Environmental Impact	1. There are no perceived impact of the strategy at this stage.
	GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment	1. There are no perceived implications but future changes in how we gather and use insight and information will consider these issues and may require an impact assessment.

	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RYG)
A	Public Perception could be negatively impacted through the use of new approaches that grow the audience and raise more awareness of what we are doing.	We will monitor the impact of our approaches and refine quickly where needed. However, some of this risk is accepted as if we wish to increase our audience then we have to accept that this opens us to more criticism as well as praise.	Yellow
B	Greater complaints and criticism could be received through greater use of communications that are aimed at increasing audience raising awareness and improved involvement.	We will continually monitor the impact of what is being done and respond in an agile way to address issues that arise.	Green
C	Additional resources may be required to continue to meet the needs of our customers or address the changing behaviours of our audience.	We will seek to mitigate this using best practice and low cost tools, and raise specific business cases in a proactive way to ensure funding is planned and manageable.	Green
D	Internal tensions could be felt should there be a disagreement on the use of resources or approaches to communications and marketing where the information or guidance is not aligned to service preferences.	We will seek to use insight to inform decision making and utilise good practice examples. In addition we will work with services to proactively co-create and keep shared purpose, testing and trialling to demonstrate results and so limiting any negatively impact on our services.	Yellow

Background documents
- None.

Relevant web links
- None.