

# Engagement Strategy

Leader of the Council

Date:	7 July 2020
Agenda Item:	6
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Key Decision?	NO
Local Ward Members	ALL



**CABINET**

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 An Engagement Strategy has been developed (Appendix 1) using the results from a review of our communications service and general approach to communications and engagement, as well as research relating to similar strategies from a range of good practice local authorities and 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 diverse 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 Cabinet approve the adoption of the Engagement Strategy.

## 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 Engagement Strategy (Appendix 1) was created in response to a review of our communications service and general approach to communications and engagement.
- 3.4 Research was undertaken to consider similar strategies from a range of good practice local authorities and high-performing private sector organisations. Interviews with a number of senior officers and Councillors were undertaken to ascertain their views and experiences. Together these have helped us create a strategy that is fully bespoke to the needs and ambitions of Lichfield District Council.
- 3.5 The strategy clearly sets out 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.*

- 3.6 It is written in an open, honest and reflective style, offering ‘personality’ where appropriate, to embrace the proposals within it. The introduction sets out the current position and seeks to outline the need for change. While this may feel critical in parts, this is not the intention, but rather it offers a balanced reflection that accepts the council is good but that it must evolve to meet our new aspirations, and the expectations of our communities.
- 3.7 There are nine objectives, designed to drive positive new behaviours in our own team, support culture change across the organisation, and support our corporate objectives.
- 3.8 The objectives will be delivered through three key work streams, which are; *laying the foundations, building success, and reaching new heights*. Each work stream incorporates a large variety of different activity that will be delivered in an agile way, to quickly test, learn and refine our approach throughout the course of the strategy.
- 3.9 The approach centres on a clear ambition take an innovative approach to how we communicate with our diverse communities and engage with them to obtain meaningful insight that helps make decisions and direct activity.
- 3.10 The strategy clarifies that our communities are the reason why we are here and they are at the heart of all we do. However, this is not easy as we have very diverse communities with differing needs.
- 3.11 We recognise that engagement is a two-way process, and this is the main element of our strategy with our communities and our approach being the most significant element within our strategy. However, we also appreciated that while we must create a dialogue it is also important to provide access to information, services and support as well as utilising effective brand management to add value to everything we do.
- 3.12 To engage our communities, we need to better understand them and plan to make better use of the information we have on them to refine and adapt our approach. This will see us utilise segmentation and the strategy provides a basic example. However, we have a clear desire to enhance this in the future, making our segmentation as comprehensive as it can be in order to address the specific needs of every community and ensure no one is disadvantaged or underrepresented.
- 3.13 The strategy will be delivered over a four year period, however, some of the activity has already started. 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.
- 3.14 An outline delivery plan is provided 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 duration, 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.
- 3.15 We will monitor our performance and the strategy provides potential measures that can help us obtaining a baseline of the current position while also allowing us to demonstrate the impact of our actions. However, we understand that as we go forward, more opportunities to measure success will become available and so additional measures may be added in order to obtain a holistic view on performance that can inform future decisions and direction.
- 3.16 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.

<p>Consultation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To create the strategy, a period of consultation was undertaken with members and officers involved in communications and engagement activity, as well as middle managers.</li> <li>2. Consultation has been undertaken with Leadership Team.</li> <li>3. Strategic Overview and Scrutiny considered the report on 23 June 2020. Feedback included; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The examples provided, and some of the language in the strategy, may not be the most appropriate, or may not mirror the intent. The strategy was reviewed and modified to better reflect the narrative and objectives.</li> <li>b. The segmentation of our communities had to ensure it reflected our diverse communities and the different needs they would have. This element of the report has been reviewed to ensure this is more visible, and it has also been referenced in the report to provide assurance.</li> <li>c. Communication will enable all elements of the strategic plan and not just enabling people. The strategy was reviewed and the cross-cutting nature is referenced, therefore no further additions were felt necessary.</li> <li>d. The strategy is all-encompassing and it may be necessary to split it in to a number of separate strategies. This is not common practice and although the strategy covers all elements of communications and engagement it does break these down in the objectives, work streams and delivery plan.</li> <li>e. The timescales were too long and we should deliver look to reduce this from 4 years. Strategies are normally over the longer term, this being between 3 and 5 years. There is a significant amount of activity within the strategy with delivery happening quickly. Therefore, it was felt the timescales were appropriate.</li> <li>f. Engagement was the most important element of the strategy and so more content on this was needed. In addition, brand management was not as important. The prioritisation on communities, and engagement with them, was the main priority and the strategy was reviewed and amended to ensure this was adequately reflected. In addition, this has been added to the report to offer further assurance.</li> <li>g. The success measures were not those that would adequately reflect success and seemed to assume a direction of travel. These were reviewed and felt appropriate as measures that could be used at present, but there was also the ability, as outlined in the strategy, to amend these over time to choose measures that would adequately provide a view on performance. This was incorporated in to the report to provide greater clarity and assurance.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p>Financial Implications</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There are no perceived financial implications of the strategy at this stage.</li> </ol>
<p>Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ol>
<p>Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There are no perceived equality, diversity and human rights implications.</li> <li>2. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken.</li> </ol>
<p>Crime &amp; Safety</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There are no perceived crime and safety implications of the strategy at this stage.</li> </ol>

Issues

Environmental Impact  
1. There are no perceived environmental impact of the strategy at this stage.

GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment  
1. There are no perceived GDPR or privacy 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.