

To: **Executive member for economic development and regeneration**
18 APRIL 2024

Communications and Marketing Strategy 2024-2028
Assistant director: communities and policy

1 Purpose of report

1.1 To agree the council's new communications and marketing strategy for 2024-28.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the executive member for economic development and regeneration approves the council's corporate communications and marketing strategy 2024-28.

3 Reasons for recommendations

3.1 The council currently does not have a communications and marketing strategy for proactive and planned activity.

3.2 An agreed approach provides staff and councillors with a clear view as to what is and is not in scope for the service for the next four years and where it will spend its time and resources.

3.3 A defined and clear strategy makes the communications service accountable to objectives that are linked to the overarching Council Plan, supporting strategies and organisational values.

4 Alternative options considered

4.1 Do nothing and continue with the current situation (no strategy in place). For the reasons above this was discounted.

5 Supporting information

5.1 The council's last communications and marketing strategy ran from 2012-2015. There has not been a proactive communications and marketing strategy since 2015, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which dominated the communications work plan for several years.

5.2 Following the election of the new administration in May 2023 and adoption of a new Council Plan, now is the right time to set out how we will communicate, when and why in an agreed strategy. This provides clear guidance to staff and councillors as to what the communications service's main priorities are for planned and proactive activity, as well as guiding principles for all staff when communicating. It also gives external audiences reassurance that communicating with them is a key priority for the current administration in line with the Labour manifesto and the overarching aims of the Council Plan (specifically the theme of engaged and healthy communities).

- 5.3 The strategy covers planned and proactive communications and marketing, a separate process is in place for reactive/ emergency communications. The strategy details that all reactive, crisis and emergency communications must go through the corporate communications team for guidance and messaging. It does not cover engagement or consultation but recognises communications will support that work.
- 5.4 It also sets out our approach to third party and partner communication issues, publicity and information. Likewise, it sets out our approach to spokespeople.
- 5.5 The strategy has been through CMT and Executive Briefing for comments and considerations. It has been endorsed by both. The strategy start date is quarter one of 2024/25.

6 Consultation and other considerations

Legal advice

- 6.1 Legal comments have been sought.

Financial advice

- 6.2 Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, the communications budget for the council is relatively small, (£0.011m excl. annual software costs and Town & Country publication) and any strategy costs would need to remain within this approved budget. With regards to any skills gap, centralised training budgets may be able to support the upskilling required to deliver the plan.

Other consultation responses

- 6.3 N/A

Equalities impact assessment

- 6.4 The strategy aims to improve the accessibility of our communications and marketing for people with disabilities and/or those who could be at risk of digital exclusion. An EQIA screening has been completed and has determined a full EQIA is not needed.

Strategic risk management issues

- 6.5 There are risks to the organisation's reputation, customer dissatisfaction and complaints and the potential for legal challenge under the Equality Act 2010. This strategy looks to reduce that risk. Likewise, the strategy aims to reduce the risk to reputation by having a clear commitment to focusing on the most high-profile issues, challenges, and projects – this will include mitigation and robust challenge.

Climate change implications

- 6.6 The recommendation in section 2 is expected to have a neutral impact on climate change. Traditional/ printed methods will only be used if there is a direct need and digital exclusion could occur if more traditional channels are not used.

Health and wellbeing considerations

- 6.7 Routine publicity officers may see their workload increase, which could cause an impact on their health and wellbeing. Conversely, good communications can reduce anxiety and/or other mental health conditions, as the recipient is able to understand

the message easily and request reasonable adjustments, if required. Staff will be supported to try different approaches in line with the strategy through regular informal performance and support conversations as well as formal performance conversations and the offer of training.

Background papers

EQIA screening form (attached).

Contact for further information

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