



EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Beyond Communications: A strategy for communication, engagement and consultation	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Corporate Management Team – Tuesday 16 th November 2021	X
	Leader and Deputy Leaders – Monday 22 nd November 2021	X
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group / Independent Alliance Advisory Group – Wednesday 1 st December & Tuesday 2 nd December 2021	X
	Cabinet – Monday 20 th December 2021	



Is this an Executive Decision:	NO	Is this a Key Decision:	NO
Is this in the Forward Plan:	YES	Is the Report Confidential: If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:	NO N/A

Essential Signatories:

ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE

Interim Monitoring Officer: **Chris Ebberley**

Date Signature

Chief Finance Officer: **Sal Khan**

Date Signature

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

Date: Monday 20th December 2021

REPORT TITLE: Beyond Communications: A strategy for communication, engagement and consultation

PORTFOLIO: Leader of the Council

HEAD OF SERVICE: Sal Khan

CONTACT OFFICER: Daniel Arnold Ext. No. x1626

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1. To provide an overview of the Council's proposed communication, engagement and consultation strategy (Appendix 1).

2. Background

2.1. Communication and engagement plays an important role in everything we do at East Staffordshire Borough Council. The ONS estimates the population of East Staffordshire in 2018 was 118,574 and this is forecast to increase to 121,975 by 2028. Therefore, effective communication is vital to bring the Council and the community together. It is the responsibility of everyone at the Council including members and officers.

2.2. The strategy will guide the Council on how to build trust and enhance engagement with its stakeholders and consider how we engage and consult with our residents and demonstrate how effective communication is linked intrinsically to stronger engagement and consultation.

3. Contribution to Corporate Priorities

3.1. The communication, engagement and consultation strategy supports the delivery of all three Corporate Priorities:

- Value for Money
- Community Regeneration
- Environment and Health and Wellbeing

4. The strategy

4.1. Section 1 – Aim and vision

4.1.1. The strategy provides a long term strategic overview of the Council's approach to communications and will be used to help the Council meet various targets throughout the lifespan of the strategy.

4.1.2. The aim of the strategy is to ensure all members, officers, residents and partners have a clear understanding and a positive perception of our vision, aims, values, services and achievements. This will lead to high levels of satisfaction and engagement. In addition, the strategy encourages all members and officers across the organisation to take ownership of communicating and engaging in their service areas.

4.1.3. The Council's communications should:

- Tell the story of East Staffordshire and the priorities of the Council
- Improve corporate and professional reputation
- Support the leadership and objectives of the Council
- Engage with members, officers, residents and partners
- Build trust
- Attract investment
- Strengthen public support and understanding
- Follow legislation with regards to communicating with residents
- Involve the right person at the right time

This should be delivered through:

- An annual communications plan
- Campaigns that are linked to corporate targets and priorities
- Multi-faceted marketing and communications
- Evaluation of communication performance
- Ensuring organisation wide ownership of communications

4.2. Section 2 – Influences on the strategy

4.2.1. There are a number of internal and external influences to this strategy. Internally, influences range from the Council's Corporate Plan to our Marcomms and Digital Strategies. Externally, the law governing council external communications heavily influences the strategy as does the Civil

Contingencies Act 2005. The Government Communication Service has influenced campaign management and our approach to evaluation.

4.2.2. A list of external and internal influences is described on page 7 of the strategy document.

4.3. Section 3 – Delivering our communication objectives

4.3.1. The strategy will introduce the East Staffordshire communications campaign model which will be used as a basis for communicating key objectives, campaigns and initiatives.



4.3.2. By adopting this model the Council is able to plan its communication which enables devolved ownership of key messages, objectives and evaluation.

4.3.3. To deliver our communication objectives, the Council will undertake a number of actions through the following themes:

- Understanding audience and sense of place
- Communicating effectively
- Measuring success

4.3.4. Understanding audience and sense of place

4.3.5. This section explains how the Council will establish a clear identity and branding for the place and organisation it is communicating about. In addition, it outlines that understanding how our audience feel about the Council and how it wants to receive information is key to ensuring we can communicate and engage effectively.

4.3.6. This will be delivered through:

- Approval of place branding and narrative

- Engagement and consultation with residents and partners

4.3.7. Communicating Effectively

4.3.8. Effective communication is at the heart of any communication strategy. It is important the Council is transparent and inclusive in its communication. In order for communication to be effective it must be relevant to the target audience and delivered through a method which is appropriate to the objectives and audience.

4.3.9. The strategy will ensure the Council communicates effectively through:

- An Annual Communications Plan
- Digital Communications
- Website content refresh
- Internal Communications
- A refreshed communication toolkit

4.3.10. Measuring Success

4.3.11. It is important the Council monitor and evaluate all campaign activities effectively to determine if campaigns have delivered campaign objectives, providing clear evidence of impact and value for money.

4.3.12. Utilising the Government Communication Service Evaluation Framework, the Council will develop an evaluation framework that can be used as part of its communication campaign methodology.

4.3.13. The strategy will also link directly into the Digital Strategy and will look to obtain user feedback on service delivery.

4.4. Section 4 – Programme Plan

4.4.1. This section outlines in more detail how the outcomes described within the themes in Section 3 will be delivered. The programme plan describes a number of projects that have been identified at the outset of the strategy however the programme plan will evolve over the lifecycle of the strategy.

4.4.2. Each initiative outlined below is linked to the outcomes described at section 3 of the strategy. More detail on each initiative can be found between pages 18 and 25 of Appendix 1.

Place branding

Developing a clear place brand and identity provides the Council with an opportunity to raise the profile, confidence, growth and vibrancy of East Staffordshire.

A clear place brand will enable members, officers, residents and partners to understand the role of the Council in delivering frontline services, providing a sustainable future for the area and improving people's lives in the borough.

A place brand is a significant element of any communication strategy therefore the strategy will be reviewed once the place branding exercise has been completed.

Residents Survey

It is important the Council continues to understand the extent in which members, officers, residents and partners feel informed and engaged by the Council, and the services they receive.

The Council will conduct a resident survey to gain a better understanding of what local people think about the council, the services it provides, how they access information about the council, and how they prefer to receive this information. Results from this survey will help shape and inform our communications moving forward.

Annual Communications Plan

An annual key strategic communications plan will allow the Council to identify and prioritise key communication activities for each financial year. The annual communications plan should be closely linked to the Corporate Plan to ensure the Council is effectively communicating its key objectives and priorities.

The annual strategic communications plan is to be complemented by an operational communication plan. This will ensure operational activities from across the organisation are captured and communication activities from external organisations can be supported by the Council where appropriate.

Digital Communications

Following the successful launch of the resident e-newsletter, the Council will develop a business e-newsletter. The business e-newsletter will use content focused solely on the commercial sector and will be used to promote funding opportunities, changes in legislation, case studies and opportunities for sponsorship.

Through the annual communications plan, the Council will continue to schedule engaging content including Deputy Leader videos, infographics and partner content where appropriate.

Website Content Refresh

The Council is due to update the website content management system in 2022/23 and will take the opportunity to launch a content refresh programme to run throughout the lifecycle of the strategy. The content refresh programme will ensure all content is reviewed, and carefully monitored and managed through the Council's website quality assurance software.

Internal Communications

Effective internal communications allows members and officers to understand how their actions contribute to the overall achievement of Council priorities and how their behaviour impacts the way the organisation is perceived internally and externally.

The Council will review internal communication to members, including the exploration of a member intranet.

The Council will also launch a new intranet for officers and will utilise internal communication methods such as weekly briefings and noticeboards to promote topics ranging from workplace health to Council performance.

Review of Communications Toolkit

To support the delivery of the Communications Strategy the Council will update its communications toolkit. The communications toolkit will outline the Council's media protocol, branding guidelines and templates for communication campaign activity and evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation of communications

Utilising the Government Communication Service Evaluation Framework, the Council will develop an evaluation framework that can be used as part of its communication campaign methodology. This will provide a method to measure the success of the Council's work and influence future communication activity.

The Gantt chart on page 26 of the strategy outlines the timescales for the initial programme plan.

4.5. Section 5 – Risk Management

4.5.1. The table in section 5 of the strategy describes a number of strategic risks, how they are to be mitigated, the likelihood of them occurring and the impact on the organisation. The quantification of the risk likelihood, impact and risk level are taken from the Council's Risk Management Strategy.

5. **Financial Considerations**

This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: Lisa Turner

5.1. Any financial requirements would be met either from either existing resources/budgets or, should it be required, a funding bid during the annual MTFS refresh.

6. **Risk Assessment and Management**

- 6.1. The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:
- 6.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):
 - 6.2.1. Enhance the Council's communication and engagement with members, officers, residents and partners.
- 6.3. **Negative** (Threats):
 - 6.3.1. Communication and engagement must be appropriate to the target audience. This will be mitigated by appropriate place branding and appropriate insight into our target audience when developing campaigns.
- 6.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

7. **Legal Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:
Caroline Elwood*

- 7.1. The Local Government Act 1986 contained the statutory power for the Secretary of State to issue a Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity which all Local Authorities are required to have regard to. This was further strengthened by the insertion of a new section 4A of the 1986 Act by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 which grants the Secretary of State the power to direct specific authorities to comply with requirements of the Code.
- 7.2. The current Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity sets out guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity. Seven principles underpin the guidance which requires all local authority publicity to be lawful, cost effective, objective, even handed, appropriate, to have regard to equality and diversity and to be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.
- 7.3. It is important to note that the Local Government Act 1986 specifically prohibits Local Authorities publishing any material which appears to be intended to affect public support for any particular political party.

8. **Equalities and Health**

- 8.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is attached as Appendix 2.
- 8.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed.

9. **Human Rights**

9.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

10. Sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

10.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) Yes

10.2. Please detail any positive/negative aspects:

10.2.1. Positive (Opportunities/Benefits

10.2.2. The strategy provides an opportunity to promote Council climate change initiatives and engage and consult with residents and partners on issues related to Climate Change.

10.2.3. Negative (threats)

11. Recommendation(s)

11.1. To approve the communications, engagement and consultation strategy; and

11.2. Review the strategy following the completion of the place branding exercise.

12. Appendices

12.1. Appendix 1: Beyond Communications: A strategy for communication, engagement and consultation

12.2. Appendix 2: Equality and Health Impact Assessment