

This Report will be made public on 6 November 2018

Report Number **C/18/41**

To: CABINET
Date: 14 November 2018
Status: Non key
Director: Sarah Robson, Assistant Director – Strategy, Performance and Communications
Cabinet Member: Cllr Rory Love, Cabinet Member for Customers, Communications and Digital Delivery

SUBJECT: Folkestone & Hythe District Council – Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018-23

SUMMARY: The draft Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018-23 outlines how the Council will use communications to build a stronger reputation, involve and inform residents, engage effectively with stakeholders and improve customer satisfaction.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to adopt the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018-23 for the following reasons:

- Providing information which is clear, accurate and authentic using channels which are extensive and inclusive can make a significant and effective contribution to the overall performance of the Council and makes a vital contribution to the delivery of all of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities.
- The strategy commits the Council to continue its provision of quality communications to ensure stakeholders are aware of how we spend public money and how they can get involved with, and feel informed about, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, its services, events, policies and activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/18/41.
2. To adopt the Folkestone & Hythe District Council Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018-23

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At Cabinet Away held in June 2018, members highlighted strategic communications as a key priority for the Council over the coming year.
- 1.2 Strategic communications is critical to the Council's future success and sustainability. However, for it to play a key role in helping to transform our relationship with our residents and communities, it needs buy-in from the Council's political and corporate leadership.
- 1.3 The key issues facing this Council, like many others include; managing demand, investment and growth, business transformation, commercialisation and an ongoing relationship with its communities. Strategic communications lies at the heart of every single one of them.
- 1.4 Building trust and confidence, and through that, strengthening relationships with citizens, stakeholders and staff, requires recognition of the importance of strong strategic communications to act as a both a trusted advisor, navigator and leader.
- 1.5 The LGA Peer Review undertaken in June 2018, highlighted that strategic communications will help support a compelling story through the Council's strategy, corporate narrative, place brand and communications. Recommendations included:
 - Further align and communicate its Corporate Plan (2017-20) vision and show how it links to Council priorities and other related plans.
 - Better promote itself, as a leader of Folkestone & Hythe 'the place', a service delivery organisation and strategic partner.
- 1.6 The Council does not currently have in place a formal Communications and Engagement Strategy to provide a framework for its communications activities. Therefore, this new strategy aims to strengthen existing foundations in place at the Council for providing quality information to stakeholders in a transparent and inclusive fashion, promoting Folkestone & Hythe as the place to bring business and a great place to live, work and visit, whilst ensuring communications activity, capability and capacity align with the Council's priorities.
- 1.7 Effective communications have been shown to provide a direct link in enhancing stakeholder engagement, satisfaction levels among residents, increasing business and tourism, whilst protecting and building reputation.
- 1.8 Therefore, the Council will continue to use successful communications channels such as Your District Today, the Folkestone & Hythe District Council website, press releases and social media. However, it will also embrace new communications and marketing opportunities, including proposals for a District 'place' branding and marketing campaign and new branding guidelines to explain how the Folkestone & Hythe District Council brand works.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The draft Communications and Engagement Strategy sets out a framework to enable the Council to continue to develop and enhance the way it involves and informs key stakeholders.

2.2 Effective communications and engagement will ensure that the Council's vision, strategic objectives and the impact we have are clearly understood by local people, our staff, our partners and local businesses. It will also help us promote the Council and the district as a whole outside of the immediate area, across Kent and further afield. All aspects of our communications and engagement have an impact on the Council's reputation. Whether it's through traditional or social media, internal communications, marketing materials or corporate publications, the Council recognises how crucial it is that our stakeholders are aware of:

- What the Council does
- Why we do these things
- How we do these things
- Why we will need to do things more efficiently and effectively in the future

2.3 The objectives of the strategy are to:

- Effectively communicate the Council's vision to residents and other stakeholders
- Maintain a strong and consistent Council identity
- Showcase the district as a great place to live, work, play, visit and bring business
- Increase awareness and access to Council services and activities
- Encourage more people to vote through better awareness of Council elections
- Improve the process and participation levels during Council-led public consultations
- Support elected members in their role as community leaders

2.4 Principles

2.4.1 Effective communications is the responsibility of all our Councillors and Officers as they are key ambassadors for the organisation. This strategy should be read and understood by everyone within the organisation as without the support of these key Council advocates, it cannot be successful.

2.4.2 The Communications team sets the strategic framework for delivering the communications and engagement functions which will assist the Council in the delivery of its ambitions.

2.4.3 The framework is based on six key principles that will shape our communications delivery.

1. The Council's customers are at the heart of our activities.

2. Communication activity will protect, promote and enhance the Council's reputation.
 3. Performance and survey data will be used to ensure our campaigns are audience led and outcome focused.
 4. Communications is an integrated and strategic, corporate function.
 5. Communications must be of demonstrable value to the Council and the communities it serves.
 6. Appropriate channels are used to help engage and inform residents and to promote behaviour change.
- 2.5 The Council will communicate clearly, openly, accurately, regularly and at appropriate times with residents, business and our partners, and throughout the Council by ensuring our communications and engagement activities are:
- Two way – both informing and listening
 - Relevant and easily understood by their target audience
 - Cost-effective
 - Accessible
- 2.6 To ensure our communications are based on effective insight and a good understanding of the local population, our communications activity will be evaluated to understand its value and impact. As part of this ongoing evaluation, we will review communications activity and spend across the Council to ensure oversight of both delivering strategic communications and communications spending.
- 2.7 By having a strategy in place, member communications and the role of councillors more broadly will be supported, ensuring an effective information flow to support them in their roles and as ambassadors for the Council.
- 2.8 The importance of the Council maintaining and developing effective relationships with its partners is, of course, an increasingly important area. This also relates to the place shaping agenda, and the need to encourage inward investment to stimulate local economies, which has become a major priority for many authorities, including our own.
- 2.10 Finally, this strategy will ensure the Council's communications team is future proofed and equipped with the full suite of skills they need in order to be effective and to be able to adapt to the changing landscape, harnessing the power of data, insight, digital and technology and moving from our historic role of 'broadcaster' to relationship-builder and able to pre-empt problems and help design solutions.

3. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 3.1 Implementing the Communications and Engagement Strategy will provide a clear framework for service areas to ensure consistency and value for money in how we deliver communications across the Council.
- 3.2 Failing to provide a clear direction and strategy for the delivery of communications, risks teams duplicating and or providing conflicting corporate

information and messaging, and failure to spot opportunities to join up communications (internally and externally) and achieve value for money.

4. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

- 4.1 **Legal (DK)** – There are no legal implications arising directly out of this report.
- 4.2 **Finance (CS)** – There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report, CLT considered and agreed in principle on 2 October the funding required to support the delivery of this Strategy.
- 4.3 **Human Resources (AS)** – There are no HR implications arising from this report.
- 4.4 **Equalities (GE)** – An Equality Impact Assessment on the Communications and Engagement Strategy has been completed (see Appendix 2)
- 4.5 **Communications (MR)** – The Communications and Engagement Strategy clearly sets out the principles of how we will communicate and engage with all stakeholders and what this will achieve. If approved, it will provide a useful framework to help underpin all council communications.
- 4.6 **Transformation (SR)** – There are no direct implications arising from this report on the delivery of the transformation project.

5. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting

Sarah Robson

Assistant Director – Strategy, Performance and Communications

Telephone: 01303 853426

Email: sarah.robson@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Matt Rain

Communications and Engagement Manager

Email: matt.rain@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018-23

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment: Communications and Engagement Strategy