

Meeting:	General overview and scrutiny committee
Meeting date:	26 July 2016
Title of report:	Communication Strategy 2016-2019
Report by:	Communications manager

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards affected

Countywide

Purpose

To seek the committee's views on the communication strategy with associated communication protocol for the period 2016-2019 and consider whether to make any recommendations to inform cabinet's consideration of the strategy.

Recommendations

THAT: the committee considers the communication strategy with associated communication protocol for the period 2016-2019 and whether to make any recommendations to inform cabinet's consideration of the strategy.

Alternative options

1. The council could continue working in current arrangements without a guiding strategy or accompanying protocols. This is not recommended as would result in an ad-hoc approach to communication and engagement with residents, businesses and partners.
2. The council could reduce the level and range of communication and engagement across the council knowing there is pressure on the budgets due to reduction in Government grant and the need to focus resource on areas of high demand. This is not recommended at this time as would reduce the capacity of the organisation to engagement during a period of change and development, with key activities and programmes being implemented over the next few years in line with the corporate plan.

Reasons for recommendations

3. To inform a future cabinet decision.

Key considerations

4. The communication strategy will support delivery of the corporate plan approved by Council in February 2016, with outlined priorities and future delivery. The strategy also supports the council's need to become 'digital by default'- reflective of the changing way in which people communicate.
5. As well as communication and engagement with residents and businesses, the strategy addresses internal communication with the workforce and members, to aid a joint understanding of the issues being addressed by the council, and new initiatives and service models being developed.
6. Whilst relaying the key council messages, the strategy supports communications based on type of message and the audience. This will assist effective engagement to; help manage expectations; provide information on service changes; and outline the rationale for council decisions. The improvements in channels of engagement aim to enable individuals and communities to source the information, which can reduce unnecessary contact with the council and where possible provide pre-emptive information and guidance.
7. The protocols outline the delivery of best practise communications and area reference point that both officers and members need to work towards.
8. Specific actions emerging from the strategy include:
 - Provide timely and engaging online news content from across the organisation
 - Improve web content for Herefordshire Council, linking to other public sector organisations
 - Use of insight and data to understand the needs and trends of service users and customers
 - Refine the internal communications with employees and council members
 - Bespoke media and social media training for designated spokespeople and online community managers
 - Refreshed branding to better suit digital channels and replace existing branded documents
 - Conduct brand audit and refresh public-facing and internal branded signage
 - Produce locally relevant imaging and photo stock for corporate and service use.

Community impact

9. There is much the authority needs to communicate to the community and an equal amount that the community needs to say to the council. How that is done will vary between levels of need and particular audiences. Whilst a large proportion of our audience are online and increasing use of social media can reach a wide audience with target messages, there will be some requirement for more bespoke contact.
10. Figures from the Office of National Statistics show that 11% of the Herefordshire adult population have never been on the internet. This suggests that there is significant potential, and for many people an expectation, that the local population interact with the council online. This still leaves a proportion of people who do not interact on line and other mechanisms need to be considered to reach these people where via the media or specific service support. Due to diversity across the Herefordshire community, it is important that the council communicates effectively with the right

people, at the right time, in the right way.

11. The communication strategy will help the local community understand the key council priorities, as approved in the corporate plan 2016/20. It is important for tax payers of the county to know what the council does and the areas the council needs to focus on. Sharing those priorities is fundamental to creating a joint understanding of the role, purpose, and functions of the council.
12. Targeted communications will be implemented using knowledge gathered through a range of readily available data tools, though with the potential of further data collection necessary to ensure the council can continue to support the best methods of communication.

Equality duty

13. The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). In particular, the council must have 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty when taking any decisions on service changes. This requires effective, targeted communication to any of the groups who need access to services, are affected by service changes or who are the target for a campaign.
14. A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under this Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
15. Where a decision is likely to result in detrimental impact on any group with a protected characteristic it must be justified objectively. This means that attempts to mitigate the harm need to be explored. If the harm cannot be avoided, the decision maker must balance this detrimental impact against the strength of legitimate public need to pursue the service remodelling to deliver savings. Effective engagement is a pre-requisite, along with supporting information to find alternative suppliers or services.
16. The implementation of digital services will mainly affect the protective characteristic of age – especially older people. It is important to address any instances where engagement has been available online only to avoid discrimination toward this protected characteristic. This can be overcome through effective, targeted offline information.

Financial implications

17. The implementation of the strategy will be resourced from existing communication budgets in addition to the specific reserve which was set-aside in 2015/16. Current staffing budgets will provide the necessary officer time. The existing communications budgets will also cover the costs of supplies and services to include media monitoring service, media training, digital magazine software, photography, and design and print services. These supplies and services will be procured in line with the council's Contract Procedure Rules.

	£000
2016/17	53
2017/18	30
2018/19	30
Total	113

18. Any additional income which may be generated through external funding such as advertising may create opportunities for further investment, subject to specific business cases and further cabinet member decisions.

Legal implications

19. There is no legal requirement to have a communication or engagement strategy.

Risk management

Risks if the strategy is approved

20. Pressure on budget and staff capacity due to increased communications activity
Mitigation: Current actions contained within the budget; additional spend would be through additional income.
21. Internal communications are not undertaken to staff on new protocols and processes
Mitigation: Effective roll-out with presentations, workshops and new communications toolkit.
22. A whole authority approach to effective communications – internal and external.
Mitigation: Commitment from senior managers and members on the roll-out of new protocols and principles. Communications team to lead on support at operational level with a whole organisation commitment to best practise communication and engagement.

Consultees

23. There has been no external consultation on this strategy. Insight has been gathered through existing data from Understanding Herefordshire survey, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, internal staff surveys and the council's Hereford 2020 communications survey.

Appendices

- Appendix 1. Communication Strategy 2016 to 2019
- Appendix 2. Communications Protocols and Principles
- Appendix 3 Presentation to GOSC Meeting July 2016

Background papers

None.