

Title of report: Communications Strategy 2022-2025

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 24 March 2022

Report by: Cabinet member housing, regulatory services, and community safety;

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

This report recommends to Cabinet a revised Communications Strategy and associated protocols to help align corporate communications to improve the way the council communicates to residents and stakeholders.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) The Communications Strategy is approved**
- b) The accompanying Communications Protocols and Principles are approved.**

Alternative options

1. The Council could choose not to use a Corporate Communication Strategy. This is not advised as a co-ordinated communication approach will be more effective and supportive for our residents, staff and stakeholders
2. The Council could choose not to use Communication Protocols. This is not advised as a co-ordinated communication approach will be more effective and supportive for our residents, staff and stakeholders

Key considerations

3. The current Communications Strategy expired in 2020. The Communications Strategy 2022-2025 has been updated with the County Plan messaging and supports the council's delivery plan, following the global Covid-19 pandemic along with other important issues that have an ongoing impact in Herefordshire.
4. The Communications Strategy includes the corporate narrative, which is described by the Local Government Association (LGA) as, 'fundamental to your organisation's position and mission in its area. Effective organisational narratives:
 - Build confidence and understanding for staff, partners and communities by structuring, prioritising, and ascribing meaning to experiences and beliefs
 - Support behaviour change (in the organisation) or promote social change (in communities) by communicating core behaviours and values, or, by reinforcing coherence (in a world where we are bombarded with information and messages)
 - Make the vision of the organisation stack up / believable, explain why the organisation thinks that, and build trust because it is human
 - Provide orientation in times of uncertainty when making critical decisions very quickly may be essential, and complexity needs to be reduced
 - Enhance the impact of your communications by telling a more memorable tale in which only a few specific properties of the organisation are emphasised'
5. The corporate narrative has been developed together with Cabinet Members and members of Management Board, the Communications Team and a Communications Advisor from the LGA.
6. The Communications Strategy is based on the principles of good strategic communications, outlining our overall approach to developing communications focused on the County Plan and establishing a framework for pro-active communications work over the coming period.
7. The County Plan has three key themes - connectivity, wellbeing and sustainability, which sit at the core of our policy making, planning and design for the future. These themes form the basis of planned and proactive corporate communications work focusing on campaign-led activity, stakeholder engagement and internal communications.
8. A campaign-led approach will support planned, pro-active and focused communications work. Using Government Communications Service recommended approaches, a communications plan will be developed for each campaign so that specific key messaging, channels and

audiences can be identified. Each campaign will support at least one of the three key themes in the County Plan - connectivity, wellbeing and sustainability.

Community impact

9. Revising the Communications Strategy and aligning with County Plan messaging will allow the council to be better understood and known for the work it is undertaking. It will allow residents and stakeholders to feel better informed and provide more opportunity for effective communication.
10. Pro-active communications activity depends on effective targeting of audiences, ensuring resources are focused in the right way and using the communications channels specific audiences prefer. Understanding audiences - who we are trying to reach and what we want them to do and then prioritising groups to create audiences based on similar characteristics (demography, geography, likely interest, sector), is a priority.
11. We will identify the ways in which our residents, businesses, visitors and partners prefer to get information about our work and use this insight to tailor the way we communicate and engage with our audiences. This will ensure communications campaigns are effectively resourced, use the right communications channels and are evaluated. We will use our existing insight and data and commission more research where needed.
12. The Communications Strategy will provide staff and stakeholders with the information and tools they need to help understand and communicate Herefordshire Council's priorities and policies.

Environmental Impact

13. The Communications Strategy will help promote Herefordshire Council's actions to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency and [environmental policy commitments](#) including:
 - Increase flood resilience and reduce levels of phosphate pollution in the county's river
 - Reduce the council's carbon emissions
 - Work in partnership with others to reduce county carbon emissions
 - Improve the air quality within Herefordshire
 - Improve residents' access to green space in Herefordshire
 - Improve energy efficiency of homes and build standards for new housing
 - Increase the number of short distance trips being done by sustainable modes of travel – walking, cycling, public transport
14. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
15. Whilst this is a strategic decision on a corporate approach, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy. Corporate campaigns will seek to utilise the most environmentally-friendly approaches and ensure the

impact of any printed materials is justified by the needs of the audience and effectiveness of the communication channel.

16. All printed publications will be recyclable and printed on sustainable paper stock

Equality duty

17. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows: A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. The commitment to improved, audience-focused communications should allow us to be more effective in our equality duty.

Resource implications

18. The cost of delivering the Communications Strategy will be delivered within the current Communications Centre budget, with additional funding by services as required for specified campaigns. This may include the use of additional staff or outside agencies and these will be recruited or procured in line with the council's recruitment procedures and/or contract procedure rules.

Legal implications

19. There is no statutory requirement for the council to have a communications strategy although it is good practice.
20. There are no legal implications arising from this report of the adoption of the Communications Strategy 2020 - 2024.

Risk management

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
If corporate messaging is uncoordinated and unplanned, residents and stakeholders may be unaware of council policies, services and approaches	The council works to an agreed narrative and uses the same, simple, messages to help people understand (Corporate)
If too many campaigns are running at one time, they may be less effective and compete with each other	The council plans its corporate campaigns and uses time and resource effectively and aligned with media interest (Service)
If there are no corporate protocols, staff and members may not understand their roles and responsibilities relating to media and social media	Communication protocols provide staff and members with guidance on speaking publicly. Media spokespeople will be identified and adequately trained for effective interviews. (Service)
If insufficient priority and importance is placed on the corporate communication approach, this may impact on the ability for the Communications Team to lead the organisation under its responsibility as a category 2 responder to warn and inform	The corporate communications approach will be observed by all staff and advocated by the senior management team. (Corporate)
If communications are perceived to be the sole responsibility of the Communications Team, the organisation will not be effective in communicating to its stakeholders	An internal campaign to promote the narrative, strategy and protocols, and to engage with staff and members will be undertaken. (Service)

Consultees

21. Consultation has been undertaken with councillors and feedback can be seen in Appendix 3. Documents were circulated on 25th January and all member briefings took place virtually on Wednesday 9 February and Tuesday 15 February. Feedback has been received via email and through verbal feedback at the virtual events.

Appendices

- Appendix 1- Communications Strategy
- Appendix 2- Communications protocols and principles
- Appendix 3- Councillor feedback

Background papers

None

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published

Governance	Sarah Buffrey	Date 04/02/2022
Finance	Audrey Clements	Date 25/01/2022
Legal	Alice McAlpine	Date 27/01/2022
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 01/02/2022
Equality Duty	Carol Trachonitis	Date 27/01/2022
Procurement	Mark Cage	Date 04/02/2022
Risk	Kevin Lloyd	Date 02/02/2022

Approved by [Click or tap here to enter text.](#) Date [Click or tap to enter a date.](#)

[Note: Please remember to overwrite or delete the guidance highlighted in grey]

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.