

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET**

Decision Made: 10 August 2011

**COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

**Issue for Decision**

To consider and comment on the Council's draft Communications Strategy 2011-2014.

**Decision Made**

That the draft Communications and Engagement Strategy 2011-2014, attached at Appendix 1 to the report of the Head of Communications, for consultation with Councillors, staff, and appropriate partners and stakeholders be adopted.

**Reasons for Decision**

The Communications and Engagement Strategy is a key document that underpins the Strategic Plan.

The strategy sets out the overall context and approach to how the Council will communicate and engage with residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

Research shows that good communications and engagement can make an effective contribution to the overall performance of a Council and satisfaction with the Council. Good communications are therefore vital if the Council is to build a strong reputation, to effectively inform and engage with residents, and to improve customer satisfaction.

The Council's current strategy was adopted in 2009 following extensive consultation and a full Equality Impact assessment carried out with Gravesham Borough Council as part of a Beacon Council peer review.

Since the adoption of the current strategy, the Council has set a new vision, priorities and core themes. It has carried out a full independent survey of staff engagement and the Local Government Association has issued its New Reputation Guide. This guide sets out actions which councils should carry out consistently to improve their reputation and the reputation of local government generally.

The Council has also obtained Mosaic customer profiling information which indicates appropriate methods of communication with residents.

As a result of the above, the Chief Executive sponsored, and the Head of Communications led, a corporate project to review our existing strategy.

Five work streams were set up to look at themes which complement the New Reputation Guide. The work streams were:

- Strategic Vision and Brand led by the Head of Change and Scrutiny.
- Value for Money led by the Head of Finance & Customer Services.
- Internal Communications and Engagement led by the Learning & Development Manager.
- External Communications and Engagement led by the Community Development Manager.
- Maidstone Destination Branding led by the Visitor Economy Business Unit Leader.

The draft strategy sets out why the themes are important, the current position and what the Council is trying to achieve. The overall aim set out in the strategy is to inform, listen and engage with our stakeholders so that they have a clear understanding and a positive perception of our vision, aims, values, services and achievements, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and engagement. The strategy includes ambitious external and internal communication and engagement targets to equal the best local government and private sector organisations.

The project team involved officers working in and contributing to each of the work stream areas. It is recommended that the draft strategy is sent for consultation with Councillors, all members of staff and appropriate partners. A number of partners will be able to contribute to our strategy such as Voluntary Action Maidstone which operates the Older Persons Forum and other focus groups on our behalf.

As well as setting out an overall strategy the document includes an action plan, a review of past performance, our adopted consultation principles, adopted editorial policy and details of most appropriate communication methods for the borough and by ward.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

The Council could chose not to have a Communications and Engagement Strategy but it would risk low levels of satisfaction with the Council and its services and inequality of access to services.

### **Background Papers**

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: <b>18 August 2011</b>
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