EXECUTIVE	**26 October 2022**

Communications and Engagement Strategy 2022-2025

Timetable	
Meeting	***Date***
Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	11 October 2022
Executive	26 October 2022

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Executive
Director	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance and Julie Maddocks, Communications Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Appendix 1 of this report is the Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2022-25; the Strategy sets out our priorities for and our approach to external communication and engagement. The Strategy is focussed on achieving Pride in Place with communications leading on a project to promote the Borough through events and promotion of the Town Centre over the next three years delivering the UKSPF. The Strategy is also supported by an action plan to deliver Council priorities, the plan is not exhaustive and is regularly updated to reflect the needs and priorities of services.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to the Executive:

1. That the Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2022-25 and Action Plan for 2022-23, at Appendix 1 be approved.

Communications and Engagement Strategy 2022-25

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The four Strategic Plan objectives are: • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve the vision and priorities set out in the Strategic Plan.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Cross Cutting Objectives	The four cross-cutting objectives are: • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected The report recommendation supports the achievement of the cross-cutting objectives by setting out actions to communicate, inform and engage with key audiences on our priorities.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Risk Management	Communications have a key role to play in managing and mitigating risks through proactive campaigns and responsive media relations.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance

Legal	No specific legal implications are identified. Under Section 3 of the Local Government Act local authorities have a duty to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". The Council's Strategic Plan and the Communications and Engagement Strategy demonstrate compliance with the statutory duty. The Council is required to observe the code of recommended practice on local authority publicity; the Strategy supports this.	Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)
Information Governance	The Communications team process data in accordance with the principles of data protection.	Information Governance Team
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	Safe, Clean and Green is a key priority for the Council, the strategy and action plan contain actions to improve public perception in terms of safety and campaigns to promote safety and the work of the Council's enforcement teams.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Procurement	Any procurement required to enact the Strategy and Action Plan will be completed in line with financial procedure rules.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Biodiversity and Climate Change	A fundamental element in combating biodiversity loss, mitigating and adapting to the impacts of Climate Change is effective communication and engagement. Flooding, heatwaves, drought and storms are projected to worsen in Maidstone due to climate change and residents and businesses must be informed and able to adapt and build resilience to the worsening impacts. Vulnerable community members will be hardest hit. Rising energy bills, food waste, and petrol cars are costly and polluting, and	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

	effective engagement with the public and businesses to raise awareness of small changes and greener alternatives will ultimately save money and go a long way to mitigating and preparing for the impacts of climate change.	

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The Strategy has been updated to reflect the emphasis on increasing Pride in Place and the proactive role communication and engagement plays in this.

2.2 The purpose of the Communications and Engagement Strategy is to ensure there is a consistent approach to delivering key Council messages, protecting and promoting our reputation and establishing a strong and trusted brand.

2.3 The strategy sets out that the Council's approach to communication and engagement including which channels we use and how we communicate and engage with local residents, stakeholders and businesses. Effective community engagement is essential to ensure the services the Council delivers are fit for the communities it serves. At other times the Council voluntarily and actively seeks out the views of the community to ensure that it is delivering high-quality, cost-effective services which meet the needs of our communities. An example of this is the Residents Survey which helps the Council to understand the needs of everyone across the borough and shape decisions and services required moving forward.

2.4 The Action Plan for 2022-23 sets out key campaigns and actions the Communications Team will be undertaking over this year to deliver the strategy and the council's priorities. The action plan does not contain every action and campaign undertaken by the team; for example, the internal communication activities, Borough Insight or activities to support the Mayor and civic events. Included in the plan are the strategic actions for each of our priorities. The action plan is a living document developed with the Executive and the Wider Leadership Team; as new projects are identified by services requiring communications support or delivery these will be added. Key activities for the team this year include delivering the Pride in Place project submitted as part of the Local Investment Plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This includes a creative communities grant for local voluntary and community groups to bid for funding to deliver events, funding for a Christmas event and promotion of events and activities in our Town Centre.

2.5 The team have responsibility for all internal and external messaging including through digital channels, social media platforms and working with the media. Core work for communications includes creating press releases and media statements to inform the public about initiatives and campaigns, branding, design and print for all signs, campaigns, events and Council initiatives as well as digital communications including video production. The

team actively seek opportunities to engage with the media to share messages about the Council's services, achievements and events.

2.6 Over the past year the team have:

- Issued 166 Press Releases
- Responded to 501 press enquires

This has led to

- 5,360 published articles
- Reach of 494 million

Across social media channels we have achieved:

- 27,931 followers
- 4,321,787 impressions
- 202,858 engagements

2.7 The Action Plan for this year focusses on the Council's priorities with activities and campaigns to support Thriving Place, Safe, Clean and Green, Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure and Homes and Communities. The strategy and plan focusses on sharing positive stories and a positive image of the Borough to promote pride in place whilst supporting the Council's core work and services.

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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Do not approve the Communications and Engagement Strategy and Action Plan. This would mean the new activities and actions to support our priorities are not captured and we miss an opportunity to clarify the teams work aligned to the Council's priorities. This option is not recommended.

3.2 Make recommendations to amend the strategy and action plan as it deems appropriate for example requesting additional actions.

3.3 Agree the Communications and Engagement Strategy and Action Plan, to ensure we have an up-to-date strategy and appropriate action plan to support our Strategic Priorities. This is recommended.

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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Option 3.3 is recommended to ensure the Council has an up-to-date strategy and action plan for communication and engagement activity. The action plan has been developed with the Executive and Leadership Team to support the delivery of the Council's four strategic priorities within service budgets.

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5. RISK

5.1 The Communications and Engagement Strategy seeks to minimise and manage risks in relation to the council's reputation. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 The Communications and Engagement Strategy sets out how we will communicate the council's priorities and strategic narrative which were heavily consulted on during 2018-19 as the new Strategic Plan was developed and then again when the plan was updated in 2020. The strategy includes an action plan setting out key campaigns to engage, communicate and consult with the public and key stakeholders across a range of services.

6.2 This issue was considered by the Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee on 11 October 2022 and the recommendation of the report was supported.

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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 Following approval, the Strategy will be made available on the Council's website and the actions will be implemented.

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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Communications and Engagement Strategy 2022-2025 and Action Plan 2022-23

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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.