

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE SERVICES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

7 APRIL 2015

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report prepared by Roger Adley

1. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1.1 Issue for decision

1.1.1 To consider the Communication and Engagement Strategy for 2015-20.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Policy and Communications

That the Committee recommends that Cabinet approve the Communication and Engagement Strategy for 2015-20.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The purpose of the strategy is to ensure the council communicates and engages effectively with residents, councilors, partners and staff to achieve its priorities. The communication and engagement strategy supports the council's new Strategic Plan for 2015 onwards.

1.3.2 Communication is central to the delivery of all council services. It is important to understand what residents need and expect and to engage them in decision making and service delivery. The council wants to ensure that its vision, priorities and outcomes are clearly understood by local people, the workforce, partners, local businesses and other stakeholders.

1.3.3 As well as supporting the delivery of the strategic plan the strategy should support other council strategies and plans, including the Community Development Strategy, Community Safety Partnership Plan Economic Development Strategy, Housing Strategy and the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.

1.3.4 Communication methods continue to change rapidly with social media increasing in importance for many residents who are looking to

communicate through Facebook and Twitter in particular. The action plan includes proposals to review existing channels for external communication to develop a new social media strategy building on our existing policy. This will support the council's work on moving more services on-line as identified in the customer services improvement programme.

1.3.5 The strategy takes account of best practice from other councils. The Head of Policy and Communications consulted the Local Government Association, which recommended Aylesbury Vale and Stevenage district councils as examples of best practice. This strategy follows a similar format to Stevenage's, which is the subject of a case study in the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' text book 'PR and Communication in Local Government'.

1.3.6 The council's editorial policy has served it well for many years under the cabinet and leader political management system. The council will revert to a committee system in May 2015 and the opportunity has been taken to review and recommend changes to the editorial policy.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The council could choose not to have a communications and engagement strategy; however this will impact on the ability to take a coordinated approach to communication and engagement.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The communications and engagement strategy underpins the Council's Strategic Plan and Priorities.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 A key part of effective communication and engagement is to manage and mitigate the risk to the Council's reputation. An effective strategy will assist with the delivery of the Strategic Plan and the corporate priorities.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	X
3.	Legal	X
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	

- 5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
- 6. Community Safety
- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement
- 9. Asset Management

1.8 Financial

The strategy includes a proposal to review spending on our external newsletter to ensure that the newsletter remains effective and that the council continues to receive value for money.

There is another proposal to review our social media monitoring to consider if our customer contact team and others should be trained to monitor and reply to posts. The costs of the extra licences would be included in a future report.

1.9 Staffing

Communications is the responsibility of every officer and member of the council so whilst the communications team will be responsible for coordinating the delivery of the action plans for the strategy it will need the support of everyone.

The communications team now consists of three full time equivalent employees reporting to the Head of Policy and Communications. The Head of Service is reviewing the structure of teams within the portfolio.

1.10 Legal

The strategy places great importance on the need for the council to continue to observe the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The chance has been taken to update the council’s own editorial policy.

1.11 Relevant Documents

1.11.1 Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Communication and Engagement Strategy

Appendix B – Draft Communication and Engagement Strategy Action Plan

Appendix C – Stage 1 Equality Impact Assessment

1.11.2 Background Documents

None

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u>		<u>THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED</u>	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, this is a Key Decision because:			
.....			
Wards/Parishes affected:			
.....			