

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

26 October 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Communication and Engagement Strategy, 2016-20

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Head of Policy and Communications
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse and Helen Bell
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Committee reviews and approves the Communication and Engagement Strategy 2016-20 at Appendix A; and
2. Notes the update on the 2015-16 Communication and Engagement Action Plan at Appendix B.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all ; and
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	26 October 2016

Communication and Engagement Strategy, 2016-20

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of the Communication and Engagement Strategy is to set out how we will approach our communication and engagement activity to deliver the vision and priorities for the borough of Maidstone.
 - 1.2 The Communication and Engagement Strategy is a high level document which sets out our approach to communication and engagement. Its success is dependent on implementation and to that extent all employees and councillors have a role to play as highlighted in the strategy. The action plan covers how we will engage employees and councillors in our priorities to ensure we have pride in our borough.
 - 1.3 The report also sets out the actions completed in 2015-16 at appendix 2 and the new Strategy sets out our actions for 2016-17.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council's vision is that Maidstone is a place where residents, communities and businesses can all thrive. To achieve this, the Council will strive to help people reach their full potential, businesses to build a stronger economy and communities to flourish. The Strategy has been developed following two workshops with councillors reviewing the results of the residents' survey to identify actions.
- 2.2 The Council does face significant budget challenges. The Communication team must adapt and rise to the challenge of prioritising our finite resources to support the delivery of the Council's priority outcomes. The team will work with employees and councillors to ensure that the Council presents a consistent and positive message across all our audiences. To assist with engaging councillors in this process, it is proposed as part of the Strategy to establish a member sounding board which will be consulted on a regular basis.
- 2.3 We must ensure that residents understand what the impact of budget challenges mean to them, and that they have the opportunity to influence decisions taken by the Council in setting its budget and priorities. Alongside the strategy the Policy and Information team have been running consultations on key changes and services for teams across the council.
- 2.4 The purpose of this document is set out below.

External

- Communicate the Council's vision to residents and stakeholders
- Promote pride in Maidstone Borough Council in all communications

- Keep Maidstone Borough residents well informed
- Maintain a culture of two-way communication with all our stakeholders
- Address negative or potentially damaging information about council services
- Reach all sections of the community
- Maintain a strong and consistent identity for the council
- Raise awareness of council services to maximise access to them
- Develop and promote opportunities for residents, community groups and other stakeholders to engage with the council

Internal

- Support council staff in their roles as ambassadors for the organisation
- Support managers to deliver organisational change.
- Have a positive effect on employee engagement and staff satisfaction.
- Support elected members in their role as community leaders
- Keep abreast of technological developments and embrace them where feasible
- Keep staff informed and promote understanding
- Working with partners and others to co-ordinate communications and engagement for the benefit of Maidstone residents and businesses

2.5 We want to share our story through our communications. Our narrative is informed by our Strategic Plan with an emphasis on promoting pride in everything we do. It shows our commitment to aligning our priorities with our vision that residents live in decent homes, enjoy good health and a pleasant environment with a successful economy that is supported by reliable transport networks.

2.6 The 2015-16, Action Plan update at appendix B outlines the action taken over the past year. Highlights include:

- Communicated changes to governance arrangements to ensure residents understand how they can get involved in decision-making
 - Completed a resident survey and two follow up workshops with councillors to look at the results and inform our new strategy and action plan
 - Ran a number of campaigns for environmental services as part of ensuring the borough is an attractive place for all
 - 'You said, we did' campaigns in Borough Update
 - Working for you features in Borough Update
 - Regular staff and councillor briefings through Wakey, Wakey and One Council events
 - Social media campaigns to raise awareness of key messages and activities.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee could choose not to agree the Communication and Engagement strategy for 2016-20. This will impact on the ability to take a coordinated approach to communication and engagement.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to review the proposed Strategy and approve it. The Strategy includes an action plan for 2016-17 to ensure we have a coordinated approach to communications.
- 4.2 Communication is not a bolt-on service but should be one of the first things that is considered when service planning. The failure to engage at the start of a project is a real risk to its ultimate success. The communications team can provide sound communication advice from the outset to help support any service change which will contribute to successful outcomes.
- 4.3 In order to demonstrate how our narrative and internal and external campaigns are delivering against the Council's outcomes, we must benchmark against past performance and target improvements.
- 4.4 In 2015 we conducted a survey with residents to investigate their attitudes towards the Council and the Maidstone area. These surveys provide a focus for the Council's business and performance planning and allow us to monitor changes in customer perceptions and satisfaction over time.

Key results were:

- 52% of residents agree that MBC provides value for money
 - 68% of residents are satisfied with the way Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) runs things
 - 66% of residents trust the Council, a great deal or a fair amount.
 - 56% of residents feel fairly or very informed about the services and benefits provided by Maidstone Borough Council
 - 31% of residents agree that they have the ability to influence decisions affecting their local area
 - 56% of residents responded positively to the statement 'MBC is making the area a better place for people to live'
 - 82% of residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live
- 4.5 The Strategy seeks to improve communication and engagement to improve our results for the 2017 survey through ensuring a comprehensive and coordinated approach to communication with clear campaigns and actions.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 In 2015 the Council undertook a resident survey. The results of the survey have been used to benchmark our results in relation to communication and engagement and forms the basis of the action plan for 2016-17.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.1 Once the Strategy has been agreed it will be placed on the council's website and disseminated to all staff. The communications team will implement the action plan.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The communications and engagement strategy underpins the Council's Strategic Plan and Priorities.	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Risk Management	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.	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Financial	The strategy plays an important role in communicating financial information about the Council. Specifically, it includes proposals for budget consultation.	Mark Green, Director of Finance and Business Improvement (S 151 Officer)
Staffing	Communications is the responsibility of every officer and member of the council so whilst the communications team will be	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and

	responsible for coordinating the delivery of the action plans for the strategy it will need the support of everyone	Communications
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	
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	Large campaigns will need to include stakeholder analysis and information on how our residents like to be communicated with and appropriate methods of communication	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Environmental/Sustainable Development	Communication campaigns are run on environmental matters	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Community Safety	Communication campaigns are run on community safety matters as appropriate	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Human Rights Act	See equalities above	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Procurement	Any procurement for communication activities will be taken within procurement rules.	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Asset Management	Communications has a role to play in promoting our assets.	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications

8. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix A: Communication and Engagement Strategy 2016-2020
 - Appendix B: Communication and Engagement Strategy, Action Plan 2015-16 update
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