

Communication and Engagement Strategy Refresh and Action Plan 2023/24

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee	4 July 2023
Cabinet	26 July 2023

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

Executive Summary

This report includes an updated Communication and Engagement Strategy and a new Action Plan for 2023/24. The report details the performance of the communications team across various communications channels. The Action Plan for 2023/24 is focused on Pride in Place and promoting work and services that achieve our strategic priorities.

Purpose of Report

Recommendation to Cabinet

This report makes the following recommendations to the Cabinet:

That the refreshed Communication and Engagement Strategy and Action Plan for 2023/24 at Appendices 1 and 2 be approved.

Communication and Engagement Strategy Refresh and Action Plan 2023/24

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve the vision and priorities set out in the Strategic Plan.</p>	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>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.</p>	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.	Director of Strategy, Insight and 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

	<p>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.</p>	
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 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. 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.
- 2.2 The Communication and Engagement Strategy has been updated to reflect the Council’s current approach to communication and engagement particularly the channels used to communicate and engage with local residents, stakeholders and businesses. The update includes the latest performance information for these channels and our new approach in relation to Borough Insight with editions focused on topics, this year there will be one edition in the Autumn on events and pride in the Town Centre linked to our Local Investment Plan for allocating the UK Shared Prosperity Funding. There will be a further edition in Spring 2024 focused on environmental issues.
- 2.3 The Action Plan for 2023-24 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, activities to support the Mayor and civic events. The plan sets out key communication and engagement activities aligned to the Council’s strategic priorities. The action plan is a living document developed with the Cabinet and the Wider Leadership Team; as new projects are identified by services requiring communications support or delivery these will be added.
- 2.4 Key activities for the team this coming year include delivering the events and associated press and publicity 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, a literary festival and promotion of events and activities in our Town Centre. To promote and support other events in the Town Centre which are being led by partner organisations (e.g. Lunar and Light Up Festivals).

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 (April 2022 – March 2023) the team have:

- Issued 146 Press Releases (average 12 per month)
- Responded to 388 press enquires

This has led to

- Volume of published articles – 3,305
- 644 million opportunities to see (OTS)
- Total advertising value equivalent - £19.4m

Across social media channels we have achieved:

- 64,677 followers
- 4,615,249 impressions
- 68,650 engagements

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

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

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Option 3.1 is recommended as the preferred option 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 Cabinet and Leadership Team to support the delivery of the Council's four strategic priorities within service budgets.

5. RISK

- 5.1 The Communications and Engagement Strategy and Action Plan 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 and 2023. 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 for this year.
- 6.2 The matter was considered by the Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee on 4 July 2023, and the Committee recommended that the Cabinet approve the recommendation. Following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts, 'Reach 644m people' has been changed to '644 million opportunities to see (OTS)' within point 2.6 of the report.
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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: Communication and Engagement Strategy 2023-2026
 - Appendix 2: Communication and Engagement Action Plan 2023-24
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.