

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

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| <b>Report to:</b>            | Overview and Scrutiny Committee            |
| <b>Date of Meeting:</b>      | 12 January 2021                            |
| <b>Subject:</b>              | Communications Strategy Action Plan Review |
| <b>Report of:</b>            | Corporate Services Manager                 |
| <b>Corporate Lead:</b>       | Chief Executive                            |
| <b>Lead Member:</b>          | Leader of the Council                      |
| <b>Number of Appendices:</b> | One  |

## **Executive Summary:**

Communications has a vital role to play in helping Tewkesbury Borough Council deliver its vision, priorities and objectives to local people.

Our Communications Strategy is short and simple – looking at how our communications can protect and enhance our reputation, while also complementing supporting strategies such as digital and customer care.

Good progress has been made on the 2020/21 action plan despite the significant communications resource required during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Recommendation:**

**To consider the progress made on the 2020/21 action plan and approve the actions for 2021/22.**

## **Reasons for Recommendation:**

Given that we are a Council delivering a wide range of complex services to more than 90,000 residents, we need a clear strategy with an effective action plan to face the challenge of communicating effectively.

## **Resource Implications:**

None other than Officer time to implement the action plan.

## **Legal Implications:**

None directly arising from this report.

## **Risk Management Implications:**

If the Council does not have a strategy and action plan in place then this will adversely affect the reputation of the Council.

**Performance Management Follow-up:**

Progress in delivering the action plan will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

**Environmental Implications:**

None directly arising from this report.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

**1.1** Our current Communications Strategy sets out to develop and improve our communications, as well as making sure it is in line with current best practice. It is important we recognise that communicating is at the heart of everything we do at all levels of the organisation. Clear communication helps us to strengthen our links with the public, our residents, stakeholders, Councillors and staff.

**1.2** The strategy was developed with the financial challenges facing local government in mind, and as services develop to be as cost effective as possible, it is vital that we are able to communicate these changes effectively to our target audiences – both internally and externally.

**1.3** Importantly, the Communications Strategy reflects the importance of supporting our transformation work too. Communications is vital in helping our customers, Members, staff and stakeholders know when and how a service is changing, or when it can be accessed in a different way.

**2.0 COMMUNICATIONS TEAM UPDATE**

**2.1** It is important to note that the actions within the plan have all been delivered alongside the day-to-day work on the communications team. This includes:

- Responding to media enquiries.
- Responding to communication and design requests from all services across the Council.
- Supporting key corporate projects such as the new digital platform, the Joint Core Strategy and the Ashchurch Bridge project.
- The production and delivery of proactive communications, such as press releases, posters, Tewkesbury Borough News, staff briefings and e-newsletters.
- Continual social media monitoring and updates.

**2.2** The communications team has been instrumental in ensuring our customers are kept informed of our response to the pandemic. This has included attending the internal business and community cells, attending the county-wide communications cell, and providing the weekly update from Management Team Plus to Councillors and Parish Councils. A significant amount of work has also been invested into ensuring our social media accounts are kept updated with the constantly changing messages around the pandemic.

**2.3** In the Peer Challenge carried out in March 2020, a recommendation was put forward to increase the proactive communications delivered by the Council. Given the already existing pressure on the Council’s only part-time communications officer, vacant resource has been used create a temporary (two-year) full-time communications officer post. This post was successfully filled in October, and is already making a significant difference to the work being produced by the communications team, as well as providing much-needed resilience.

**3.0 2019/20 ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

**3.1** The majority of actions have been delivered or, because of their ongoing nature, continue to be delivered. This progress is reflected within the action plan, which can be found in Appendix 1.

**3.2** Of the 13 actions for 2020/21:

|               |    |   |
|--|---|--|
| 10   | 2   | 1  |
| <p>10 actions have been completed and these can be found in the action plan at Appendix 1.</p> | <p><b>Carry out a review of internal communications that can be improved by Office 365 applications</b> Progress has been made on a range of Office365 functions but a full review of the impact of Office 365 applications on corporate communications will be carried out as part of the overall internal communications review.</p> <p><b>Deliver regular communications to Town and Parish Councils.</b> The regularity of Parish Matters was impacted by the pandemic, but this did not mean that communication with Parishes declined. In fact, it increased with the introduction of the weekly Members’ Bulletin. A new format for Parish Matters was established prior to the pandemic which offered Parish Councils updates with links to supporting and more detailed information.</p> | <p><b>Carry out a review of internal communications</b> Due to pressures from the coronavirus pandemic, this action has not been completed yet. The communications team will aim to carry out a full review in early 2021.</p> |

**4.0 ACTION PLAN FOR 2020/21**

**4.1** The action plan for 2020/21 can be found in the right hand column of the action plan at Appendix 1.

**4.2** There are 27 actions within the new plan, which reflects the additional resource within the team as well as adding a new specific 'graphic design' category, which will be delivered by our internal graphic designer. The seven areas of focus for the action plan are:

- Proactive communications.
- Digital communications.
- Training.
- Communicating achievements.
- Internal communications.
- Communicating with partners.
- Graphic design.

Given the significant resource needed to support the COVID-19 pandemic work, it was felt prudent to include specific actions relating to this work.

## **5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

**5.1** None.

## **6.0 CONSULTATION**

**6.1** Not applicable.

## **7.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

**7.1** Communications Strategy.  
Council Plan 2020 to 2024.  
Social Media Policy and Guidelines.  
Digital Strategy.  
Written Style and Branding Guide.

## **8.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

**8.1** None.

## **9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)**

**9.1** Managed within current resources and budget.

## **10.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)**

**10.1** None.

**11.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)**

**11.1** Good communications will improve stakeholder's knowledge of, and access to, council services and information.

**12.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS**

**12.1** None.

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**Background Papers:** None.

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**Appendices:** 1 – Communications Strategy.