

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee - 28 November 2019

Report of Chief Executive

Status For Consideration

Key Decision No

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Peter Fleming

Contact Officer Lee Banks, Ext. 7161

Recommendations to Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee: that Members provide comments and suggestions on the Draft Communications Strategy

Introduction and Background

- 1 In September 2018, the Council invited a Peer Team from the Local Government Association to conduct a Communications Review. At the Council's request, the review focussed on a number of specific priorities. These were capacity and capability; digital; role of Members; internal communications; and priority setting.
- 2 The Peer Review team concluded that Sevenoaks District Council has a strong communications base and a clear appetite to succeed.
- 3 To assist the Council to achieve its aims, the Peer Review team provided a report and set out a range of recommendations for the Council to take forward.
- 4 One of the key recommendations identified by the Peer Review team was to 'embed additional strategic communications resources and communications skill into the communications team'. With the agreement of the Portfolio Holder for Communications, the Council appointed an experienced communications professional to provide support to the Communications Team on a temporary basis.
- 5 The work to support the Communication Team was focussed on delivering a new Communications Strategy and improved ways of working to deliver that strategy effectively. That support was provided following the District Council elections and, with the exception of three further days retained for supporting the team, that contract concluded at the end of September this year.

Draft Communications Strategy

- 6 Provided at Appendix A is the draft Communications Strategy. This draft document has been created for collaboration and input from Members of the Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee and then the Communication Team as owners and implementers of the strategy.
- 7 When the approach and words are signed off, this document will be reported to the Council's Strategic Management Team, designed in the Sevenoaks brand style by the Print Studio and presented to Cabinet for adoption.
- 8 Providing an early draft of the Strategy ensures that Members input can be incorporated fully in the approach they wish the Council to take to its communication with residents, local businesses and other stakeholders.

Communications Review Action Plan

- 9 In addition to the work on the Draft Communications Strategy, additional work has been completed, that subject to agreement of the strategy will be implemented by Officers before the end of March 2019.
- 10 These actions include a review of the Council's visual identity and brand guide to ensure it remains fit for purpose. This review also takes in to account the need to retain a strong brand identity across all Council services and the growing importance of social media channels as an effective means of communicating with residents.
- 11 Questionnaires have also been prepared to assess communications capabilities and preferences amongst Council staff that may be useful in generating additional communications resource from within existing staff. A questionnaire for Council Members is also recommended to assess communication preferences and identify any further areas where they would wish to see improvement in the way the Council communicates with them. This would enable the effective delivery of a new newsletter or information bulletin for Members, which was recommended by the Peer Review and supported by the work undertaken by the external support bought in to the Communications Team.
- 12 An approach to communications planning has been developed and officers in the communications team trained to ensure a proactive approach to communications using the OASIS campaign methodology advocated by the Government Communication Service. It is recommended that a campaign focussed on the Council Plan is delivered early in 2020. This new approach will incorporate campaign planning, development of content, implementation and measurement and evaluation.
- 13 An annual communications plan has been drafted which will incorporate the communications strategy action plan deliverables, campaigns, marketing activity, internal communications, social media and events. The intention is that the content on the communications plan will be first updated with knowledge within the communications team, then shared with teams for

input and content regularly. The plan would be updated and discussed monthly with the Portfolio Holder for Communications.

- 14 Additional work is also being undertaken on working practices across the Communications and Print Studio teams and to develop IT systems to better support high quality, effective and consistent communication across the Council.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications to this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

There are no legal or risk implications related to this report.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Conclusions

Following the Peer Review of the Council's communications the Council appointed an experienced communications professional to provide support to the Communications Team on a temporary basis to develop a new communications strategy and to provide support in the delivery of the actions set out by the Peer Review team. This report provides an update on progress and a draft communications strategy for Members comments.

Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Communication Strategy

Background Papers

Communications Peer Review report

<http://cde.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s36167/06%20Communications%20Review%20-%20App%20A%20-%20Peer%20Review%20report.pdf?J=4>

Pav Ramewal

Chief Executive