

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2024 - 27

Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee – 29 February 2024

Report of: Chief Executive

Status: For consideration

Also considered by:

- Cabinet – 14 March 2024

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report sets out the Council's approach to communication activities by proposing a Strategy and clear principles to guide engagement with our audiences.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Promoting the five Council Plan themes of Communities, Economy, Environment, Housing and Our Council.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Julia Thornton

Contact Officers: Lee Banks, Ext. 7161 and Daniel Whitmarsh, Ext. 7414

Recommendations to Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee:

- (a) Members comments on the Communications Strategy are noted; and
- (b) Cabinet are recommended to approve the Communications Strategy 2024 to 2027.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

The Communications Strategy 2024 to 2027 is approved.

Reason for recommendation: To ensure that Members are able to discuss and inform the Council's approach to communicating with its communities through the Communications Strategy.

Introduction and background

- 1 This report sets out the Council's approach to its communication activities. It proposes a strategic approach and clear principles to guide engagement with our communities, staff, Members and the media to promote our services and achievements, to build trust with our communities and safeguard the Council's reputation.

Communications priorities

- 2 The overarching priorities of our Communications Strategy (Appendix 1) is to provide consistently excellent, innovative, value for money and effective communications...

“to increase awareness of the Council’s services and its achievements, build trust and improve the reputation of the Council.”
- 3 The Communication Strategy is based on six overarching principles to support the delivery of the Council’s priorities. These are to:
 - i. Promote and uphold the Council’s reputation as a trusted, effective, efficient, innovative organisation that is focused on the public and their needs.
 - ii. Ensure that all communication and engagement activities are consistent and co-ordinated across all channels to maximise resources, ensure value for money and give maximum support to the Council’s strategic priorities.
 - iii. Promote the Sevenoaks District as a great place for doing business, to live, work and visit.
 - iv. Increase opportunities for people to engage with us on issues and services that affect them by developing existing and new channels of communication.
 - v. Coordinate internal communications with:
 - a. Staff – to ensure they feel valued and are engaged on the priorities, activities and messages of the Council, to inspire them to deliver the Council’s objectives
 - b. Elected Members – to support them in their role as community leaders, by providing communication skills and up-to-date information.
 - vi. Ensure our digital communications develop in line with advancing technology, social changes and customer needs, to allow us to engage with our communities in an effective and efficient way.
- 4 The Communication Strategy is supported by an annual communications action plan (which is approved by the Portfolio Holder for Communications), ‘publicity and media relations guidelines’ and the ‘paid-for advertising policy’.

Delivering the Communications Strategy

- 5 The day-to-day delivery of the Communications Strategy will be led by the Council’s Communications Team, with the support of the Strategic Management Team, the Council Leader and Cabinet, Elected Members, service/department leads, all staff and our partners.

- 6 The Communications Team consists of two full time members of staff - the Communications Manager and the Communications Officer. The Team is managed and supported by the Assistant Chief Executive.
- 7 The Communications Team's responsibilities include:
- Managing and upholding the Council's Brand Guide
 - Devising and running external and internal campaigns (using the OASIS methodology) to support the work of the Council
 - Media relations (issuing news releases, fielding media enquiries and organising media briefings)
 - Producing In Shape and helping colleagues with publications, posters and other collateral
 - Updating and managing the Council's main website. Advising teams about adding accessible content and documents to Council websites
 - Running corporate surveys and supporting colleagues with their survey needs
 - Managing the Council's core social media accounts (Facebook, X, LinkedIn and Instagram – currently 18,000 followers across all four platforms). Producing short social media videos
 - Email marketing and newsletters
 - Developing and managing the Council's intranet
 - Producing 'grapeVine', a monthly staff newsletter
 - Placing the Council's public notice adverts.

Residents' views on Council communications

- 10 The most recent Residents' Survey (September 2021) asked residents where they heard about the work of the Council, satisfaction with In Shape magazine and satisfaction with the Council as a whole.
- 11 The data tables on the following page set out residents views for Members' information to provide context to the Strategy that is proposed.

Sources of information where residents find out about what the Council is doing:	
In Shape - the Council's magazine	68%
Speaking with friends, neighbours and relations	43%
Council website www.sevenoaks.gov.uk	32%
Speaking with Council staff by telephone	22%
Local newspapers	18%
Printed information / leaflets	16%
The Council's social media feeds	5%
Councillors	5%
Speaking with Council staff face-to-face	4%
Radio	3%
Public meetings	2%
Other	5%
Don't know	2%
None of these	8%

Time spent reading In Shape	
Up to 10 minutes	56%
More than 10 minutes	30%
Don't read it	15%

Views on In Shape	% satisfied
Easy to read	94%
Informs me of Council news / activities I have not previously heard about	88%
Is colourful and well produced	88%
Tells me about the Council's future plans	90%
It keeps me informed about the Council's work and local services	90%

Overall satisfaction	% satisfied
Satisfaction with the way the Council keeps residents informed	82%
Trust in the Council	86%
Satisfaction with the way in which the Council runs things	81%

Conclusions

The Communications Strategy has been drafted for collaboration and input from Members of the Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee and then Cabinet.

Providing the draft 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.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

There are no legal or risk implications arising from 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.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the Council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the District, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Appendices

Appendix A – Communications Strategy 2024 to 2027

Dr Pav Ramewal

Chief Executive