

REPORT TO	ON
CABINET	Wednesday, 16 December 2020



TITLE	PORTFOLIO	REPORT OF
Refresh of Communications Strategy	Leader of the Council	Deputy Chief Executive

Is this report a <b>KEY DECISION</b> (i.e. more than £100,000 or impacting on more than 2 Borough wards?)	No
Is this report on the <b>Statutory Cabinet Forward Plan</b> ?	Yes
Is the request outside the policy and budgetary framework and therefore subject to confirmation at full Council? This should only be in exceptional circumstances.	No
Is this report confidential?	No

## PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present a refresh of the communications strategy and associated documents.

## PORTFOLIO RECOMMENDATIONS

2. To approve the new communications strategy
3. To approve the updated media protocol

## REASONS FOR THE DECISION

4. One of the actions outlined in the annual governance statement was a refresh of the communications strategy.

## CORPORATE PRIORITIES

5. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

An exemplary Council	x
Thriving communities	
A fair local economy that works for everyone	
Good homes, green spaces, healthy places	

## BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

6. The communications strategy has been in need of a refresh and this was brought to the fore as one of the actions highlighted in the annual governance statement.
7. The detailed document is attached in the appendix and we have also taken the opportunity to update the media protocol to provide more clarity for officers.

## PROPOSALS (e.g. RATIONALE, DETAIL, FINANCIAL, PROCUREMENT)

8. The refresh of these documents goes hand in hand with how we will develop the function of the new communications team

### Communications Strategy

9. The new strategy sets out the aims, objectives and principles we will adopt but also focuses on four key areas for improvement that have been identified as part of the team review.
10. The detail is in the draft strategy at Appendix A but here are the priority areas:
  - i. Doing digital better to engage with our residents
  - ii. Planning and prioritising
  - iii. Improving internal communication
  - iv. Rebranding South Ribble Borough Council as a modern, professional authority
11. Our approach to communications is weighted too much in favour of unplanned ad hoc work. This strategy will drive forward improvements and ensure we are delivering properly planned campaigns to the right people at the right time.
12. There are lots of opportunities with social channels and automation – particularly considering the use of WhatsApp, Messenger and NextDoor, which we need to investigate further and develop a way forward for using corporately.
13. This will need to go hand in hand with the use of the new website, the review of customer services and the delivery of the digital strategy. For this to be successful it is not just about communicating with residents it is allowing them to reach us on channels that they prefer to use.

14. While elements of the new strategy do focus on making most of the digital channels we will still continue to use traditional channels as appropriate and this will be determined by the communication plans and the audiences we are looking to target for each of those.
15. We've known for some time that our internal communications is at times second best to our external communications and we need to ensure the extra resilience provided by the shared service allows us to focus on this properly.
16. The previous internal communications strategy will be revisited with some dedicated resource to drive it forward over the coming months.

#### **Media protocol**

17. While reviewing the strategy we have adapted the media protocol to clarify the questions raised by members as to how a situation would be dealt with if there was a conflict of interest between both South Ribble and Chorley Council. This would be handled by working to the protocol for each authority and reflecting the view of each authority. The draft is included at Appendix B.

## **CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT AND OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION**

18. Residents were asked about how they feel they are communicated with in the citizen survey earlier this year. The relevant responses are included in the strategy as a baseline to improve upon.

## **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

19. The detail of the strategy has been formed as we have reviewed the communications team over the summer. There are various approaches to how we will develop our communications included in the strategy.
20. The option to continue with the existing strategy was rejected as it is out-of-date and this is a requirement of the annual governance statement action plan.

## **AIR QUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

21. The strategy itself has no air quality implications.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

22. There is a significant amount of change that will be required both in how the communications team operates and how other teams work with the service.
23. The risks focus on whether the team can deliver the actions contained in the strategy and how the new team operates as a shared service with Chorley Council.

## **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT**

24. The strategy aims to ensure we keep all our residents and stakeholders informed. The individual communications plans that fall out of this for specific projects will identify the target audiences and how we intend to reach them.
25. This will take into account the specific needs of audiences and ensure that we are compliant with any legislation such as the new accessibility laws that have recently come into force and is one of the main considerations in the launch of the new website.

## **COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER**

26. Any changes outlined in the report will be met within existing budgets.

## **COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

27. The necessity to review the Communications Strategy was identified in the Annual Governance Statement. There is a recognised need to have a completely up to date document in this regard. There are no concerns from a legal point of view with what is proposed.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Communications Strategy

Appendix B – Media Protocol

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