Key Decision Required:		In the Forward Plan:	No

CABINET

14 JUNE 2013

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PLANNING & CORPORATE SERVICES

A.8 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY
Report prepared by Jon Barber and Sally Cornish

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide Cabinet with the Tendring District Council Communications Strategy. The Strategy sets out the corporate approach to communications and sets out guidance for the use of Twitter.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Communications Strategy sets out the Council's approach to communications.
- The Strategy is underpinned by a number of guidelines and protocols. It is expected that these will evolve as the Council develops its approach to communication / develops web and intranet use. Therefore these underpinning guidelines are referenced as a summary in an appendix to the Communications Strategy.
- Clear guidelines are included in the use of Twitter to reduce the likelihood of reputational damage that can be caused through inappropriate use.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet:
i)   Notes and agrees the Communications Strategy, including the guidelines for the use of Twitter.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The Communications Strategy will contribute to the following Corporate goals;
- Affordable excellence.
- Continue to improve public perception and reputation.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and other resources
There are no financial implications.

Risk
Without a clear Communications Strategy (and robust guidelines for the use of Twitter) the Council

could be exposed to reputational damage.

LEGAL

There are no legal implications.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder/Equality and Diversity/Health Inequalities/Area or Ward Affected/Consultation/Public Engagement

Wards affected
All

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

CURRENT POSITION

The Communications Strategy has been developed in order to establish and maintain clear and relevant two-way channels of communication in order to create an informed and recognisable profile for Tendring District Council and a positive image of the District as a whole. Taking this into consideration, the Strategy is supported by the following protocols/guidelines:

- Branding Guidelines
- Media Protocol
- Website Strategy & Development Plan
- Intranet Policy & Guidance
- Social Media Guidelines
- Guidelines for Members and Staff on the Use of Twitter

The Guidelines for Members and Staff on the Use of Twitter have been written (in support of the Social Media Protocol) to clarify the position of the Council in respect of the use of this form of Social Media and these can be found at Appendix 2 of the Communications Strategy.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

None

APPENDICES
1) Summary of Supporting Protocols
2) Guidelines for Members and Staff on the Use of Twitter

Contents

This Strategy explains how we plan to communicate with our stakeholders and the **purpose** of the Communications Strategy is:

To establish and maintain clear and relevant two-way channels of communication in order to create an informed and recognisable profile for Tendring District Council and a positive image of the District as a whole.

Introduction

Research shows that the better informed people are about their Council Services, the more satisfied they feel. Clearly written, open and transparent communications builds trust among residents. Good communications leads to more effective services, a better reputation and stronger relationships with residents and partners.

Through successful communication, we are able to deliver the services that are important to those who live, work in or visit the District. We want to have good working relationships with our partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors as together we work to make Tendring a place to be proud of. In achieving this aim, we promise to communicate with you in a clear, open and accurate way, so that there is a shared understanding of our roles and responsibilities.

This Strategy outlines how we are going to manage our communications activities. It will help us to ensure that communication between the Council and the people and organisations we come into contact with, is always appropriate. We will ensure that everyone is kept informed about the Council's policies, activities and events, and that people know how to share your ideas and opinions with us. We will ensure that we focus our communications activities on those matters that are key priorities for the Council and the Community.

This Strategy is aimed at making sure we make communication appropriate to our services, at the right time, and using the right methods.

We are ready to talk and willing to listen.

Peter Halliday, Leader of the Council

Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011

The Code Of Recommended Practice On Local Authority Publicity 2011 says that:

'Publicity by local authorities should be: lawful; cost-effective; objective; even-handed; appropriate; have regard to equality and diversity, and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity'.

We will have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and all our communication will be free of political bias.

As such, we are committed to making all our communications activities:

Two-way - making it easy for people to get in touch with us in ways that suit them.

Relevant and appropriate - 'speaking in the language of our audience', using plain English that people understand.

Easily available and easily understood - in different formats.

Consistent - consistency of messages, tone, style and presentation.

Honest - telling it how it is, and not over promise.

Accountable – making it clear who is responsible for decisions taken by the Council.

Timely - responding promptly to enquiries from third parties such as the media, partners and stakeholder groups. We will make sure that communications are up-to-date.

Identifiable - making clear use of branding to make sure it is obvious that the communication has come from the Council.

Efficient - avoiding unnecessary duplication or contradictory/mixed messages.

Planned - ensuring that communication issues are considered as an integral and early part of service and project planning.

Who communicates & how we communicate

Communication is the responsibility of every officer and Member of the Council. We have a Communications and Public Relations Manager who manages the Council's communications function by providing procedures, guidance and advice, which ensures that information is exchanged in an accurate and consistent manner.

We provide our staff with Customer Service Guidelines and we also display our Customer Services Standards in our reception and public areas.

We have a range of spoken and published methods through which the Council we can communicate, and people and organisations can communicate with us. These include: telephone; face-to-face meetings; our website: www.tendringdc.gov.uk; press releases; email; Facebook and Twitter profiles; consultation groups; "Drop-in" sessions / surgeries; Council meetings, Cabinet and other Committee meetings; Cabinet Question Time; Councillor surgeries; numerous public consultation events, road shows and displays; reports and policy documents; our corporate strategy; meetings with Council staff; staff briefings and intranet.

Our Internet & Intranet

We have redesigned our website so that it is informative and easier to use, providing access to our services and information to a wider audience. The use of new technology to provide alternative ways of accessing information, such as Quick Read (QR) codes and Mobile Apps, are being developed, so that our customers can access our services at a time and place convenient to them, as well as allowing to Council to provide affordable excellence.

The Council's website is a key communication tool. It allows all of our stakeholders access to Council information 24/7 and includes a secure on-line internet payment service enabling people to pay their bills e.g. housing rent, Council Tax or a parking fine at a time convenient to them.

The Intranet (our internal 'website') is one of the Council's most powerful communication methods as it allows both officers and Councillors immediate access to press releases; Council, regional and national news; strategy and policy documents; internal documentation and operational guides; events; staff news, Members' information; internal and external websites.

The Council's Intranet facility was last reviewed in 2007 and following the introduction of new technology that has made design and editing easier, the Council is keen to redevelop its Intranet facility to improve its usefulness.

How are we going to improve our external communications?

Tendring District Council already has a Twitter account with over 1,000 followers, enabling immediate responses to enquiries. There are a number of Facebook pages for various Council services in operation. For example, the Princes Theatre Facebook group has 2,805 friends and has also become an invaluable tool for raising awareness of events and shows the theatre hosts to large numbers instantaneously.

These channels are an important vehicle for the Council to connect with a wider range of groups such as young people or those who may be dissatisfied with the Council and want to register a complaint. We are also looking at using YouTube as a way of communicating visually with our customers for new initiatives.

Branding – we will ensure that the Tendring branding is easily recognisable and means more to our customers than just a name. This will help strengthen the reputation of the Council and raise awareness of the services it provides.

Focus groups – we will look to expand the base of customer focus/user groups with which we communicate to include more hard-to-reach groups and provide opportunities for feedback and engagement.

Wireless internet connection project – our inward investment and growth team is working with local network providers and success has already been achieved by the Council enabling high speed Broadband in the District by our Planning officers working with Broadband suppliers.

QR Code/Mobile App project – we are working with a local education provider to develop a project, which will benefit the students' education and the Council's promise to improve the public's opportunities to access services. A "My Clacton", "My Harwich", "My Dovercourt" etc. App presents great opportunities for the Council to reach residents and visitors and boost local businesses.

Use of SMS text messaging

Text, or SMS messaging is proven to be the fastest, most reliable method for communicating with large groups of people, as it is quick and easy to use. SMS messaging could also be useful for members of the public to report faults covering issues such as: vandalism; abandoned vehicles; litter; fly-tipping; graffiti; stray dogs and dog fouling.

Messaging provides an opportunity to quickly reach a large number of people in a specific area and could be used to remind Tendring residents to vote at an election time, potentially increasing the turn-out at elections.

Tendring is using Text messaging to remind Council tenants of appointments arranged for gas servicing and as a reminder system for people with appointments to see homelessness and housing advice officers. It has been introduced as an additional means of chasing outstanding rent payments from Council tenants. Additionally, text messaging has also proved useful for communicating to our leisure centre customers about last minute changes to classes and promotions.

Internal Use of SMS Text Messaging

SMS could be used successfully to communicate with staff to inform them of such things as emergencies including facility closures, special events, road traffic incidents within the District, weather warnings, IT updates, training opportunities and vacancy alerts.

Sharing knowledge & improving our internal communications

There is a wealth of knowledge available across all the Departments within the Council. However much of this information is not currently easily or widely shared.

To make sure the knowledge base is widened we will also look at developing initiatives such as providing our reception areas with a "quick guide" to the most requested information; newsletters and presentations from each Department for colleagues to better understand the work of each area and the availability of "duty officers" for front-line functions.

Staff networking groups will be encouraged to come together to discuss issues and share information. Other initiatives could also include a "Regular Corporate Email" with links to press releases and other items of corporate interest and/or a "no email day" in order to encourage staff to speak to each other and develop effective working relationships across the organisation.

Good internal communication is vital to enable our staff to provide the best service possible to our customers, and this can only be achieved by ensuring staff are well-informed and knowledgeable, and understand our corporate goals.

Supporting Protocols

The Communications Strategy provides the over-arching explanation of how we plan to communicate with our stakeholders and is intrinsically linked to the Guidance and Protocols developed for the following;

- ♦ **Branding Guidelines**
- ♦ **Media Protocol**
- ♦ **Website Strategy & Development Plan**
- ♦ **Intranet Policy & Guidance**
- ♦ **Social Media Guidelines**
- ♦ **Use of Twitter Guidelines**

The above Guidelines and Protocols are referenced in the attached Appendices to this Strategy. The full documents will be published and accessible on the Intranet for Officers and Members.

Appendix 1:   Supporting Protocols

Branding Guidelines

Every day Tendring District Council communicates with residents, businesses and other organisations. Having a strong and consistent identity for the Council raises awareness of our services and can help raise satisfaction among residents.

The Branding Guidelines aim to unify our communications so the Council appears as a single professional organisation. The guidelines provide details of how we will achieve consistency and these must be followed when producing material that bears the Tendring District Council brand.

The Council Logo: The Tendring District Council logo should be used on all communications on or behalf of the Council. The precise position and proportion of all elements of the logo is fixed and should not be modified in any way. Where possible the logo should be displayed in green on a flat white background. The full colour crest version of the logo should only be used for civic purposes.

Venues and Locations: Council venues, such as the Princes Theatre or Lifestyles Health Club can have their own logos. These should be used alongside the Tendring District Council logo so it is clear that the facility is in partnership with or provided by Tendring District Council.

Fonts: The Council's main font is Arial and should be used on all core literature.

Images & Photography: Taking care when selecting an image can make a big difference to the end message and result. Ensure that when you are choosing an image that it reflects the message that you are trying to create.

Branding Guidelines

Literature Templates: There is a standard template used for all printed leaflets and information booklets.

Core Literature: Core literature covers permanent information about the Council and the services that are provided. It is considered that all material produced by the Council is core, unless there is a good case for them to be considered to be non-core.

Non-core Literature: This is type of literature is promotional information that the Council produces to market an event or campaign. The information will have a limited shelf life with a definitive start and end date.

Partnerships: Where TDC works jointly with other organisations, joint publications may be produced. The TDC logo should appear in the bottom corner in the same way as the core documents and partner logos should be in the row beside it.

Advertising: Adverts should be professionally designed to ensure they achieve the marketing objective for the advert and are consistent with the Council's branding guidelines. You should contact the Council's Communications and PR Manager for assistance if necessary.

The Branding Guidelines aim to unify our communications so the Council appears as a single professional organisation.

Media Protocol

The Media Protocol is aimed at both Councillors and Council officers who may come into contact with the media during the course of their work and duties. The protocol is governed by the provisions in the Local Government Act 1986, the Local Government Act 1988, the Local Government Act 2000, and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (revised version March 2011).

Promoting the Council's Business: The media will often attend meetings of the Full Council, Cabinet and committees. To ensure they are able to report these meetings effectively it is important to supply them with the necessary paperwork such as committee Agendas etc.

TDC Official Press Releases: The drafting of a news release can be requested by the Leader/Deputy Leader, Cabinet Members, the Chief Executive, Head of Department or Corporate Directors or they can be initiated by the Communications and Public Relations Manager. All News Releases must be cleared by the relevant Member/Officer quoted in the release. No officer, other than the Communications and Public Relations Manager, or their stand-in, should issue press releases.

The Council aims to provide a service to the media which is built on a basic principle of wanting to be proactive, open, transparent and honest. It is also the aim to facilitate photographic opportunities, interviews and other reasonable requests.

Supporting Protocols

Website Strategy & Development Plan

Our aim is to reduce the overall cost of the Council and to improve services to the public through the effective application of the website.

The website has been re-launched on a new content management system with a new look and feel. This means that we now have a stable platform on which to build on the website and continue to add to and develop functionality to keep pace with the demands of our customer and the needs of the Council.

The Development Plan sets out some of the improvements planned over the coming year or so, ensuring that we:

♦   Provide services that customers want, when they want it
♦   Provide relevant, high quality content, usable by all
♦   Reduce the cost to serve and generate efficiencies
♦   Improve engagement with customers, communities and partners
♦   Improve the image of the Council and the area
♦   Be based on reliable, secure, appropriate technical infrastructure

Items in the Development Plan will be updated as changing requirements are identified ensuring that it remains current.
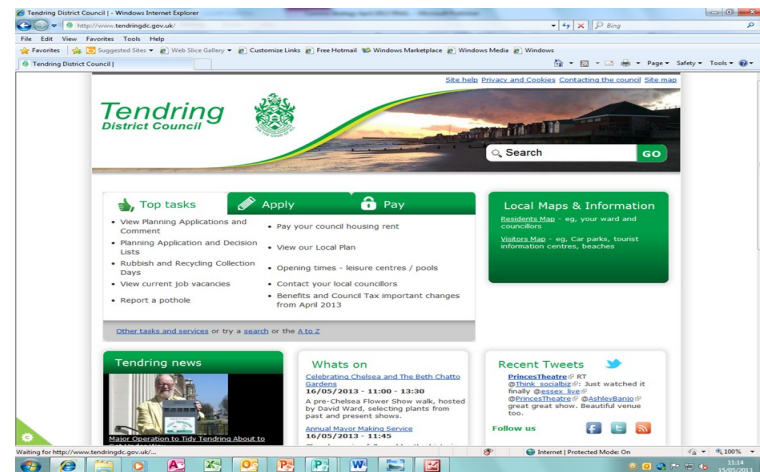
Supporting Protocols

Intranet Policy and Guidance

The Intranet is designed specifically for the use or benefit of Officers and Members and will act as the first source of information and service provision. It will enable everyone to communicate with colleagues, managers and team members in the most efficient way.

The Intranet will be judged not only by its performance, availability, speed etc, but more importantly by its accuracy, ease of navigation and currency of information.

Each Council Department has a nominated Communication Representative and at least one Intranet Co-ordinator. These people are responsible for managing their Department's Intranet content, under leadership of the Intranet Manager.

The Intranet Policy sets out the standards and provides guidance for those who create and edit content for the Intranet.

Supporting Protocols

Social Media Guidelines

Social Media is the term commonly given to website and online tools (such as Facebook and Twitter) which allows users to interact with each other in some way—by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement.

Whilst the use of Social Media presents exciting opportunities for the Council to have conversations with the wider community it must be recognised that there are risk attached to the use of social media and that the distribution of material cannot be controlled.

Tendring District Council has a corporate Twitter Account, managed by Ian Phillipson —see attached guidelines for the Use of Twitter at Appendix 2.

There are a number of Facebook pages for various Council services in operation, which provides an excellent communication portal for customers to express opinions as well as ask questions.

These principles apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as an employee of the Council.

- ✓ **Be professional:** remember that you are an ambassador for the Council.
- ✓ **Be responsible** be honest at all times and when you gain insight; share it with others where appropriate.
- ✓ **Be credible:** be accurate, fair, and thorough and make sure you are doing the right thing.

Social Media Guidelines

Employees must take the following into consideration when accessing social media;

♦ Do not engage in activities on the internet that might bring the Council into disrepute
♦ Do not allow on-line activities to interfere with the day job
♦ Do not use the Council logo on personal web pages
♦ Do be aware of your association with the Council
♦ Do not reveal information which is confidential to the Council
♦ Do not publish comments on your work or services offered by the Council on any personal account
♦ Do not make any offensive or derogatory remarks about the Council, Councillors or other members of staff

Staff wishing to use social media as a channel for a project or campaign must first discuss and agree this with their Head of Department/Corporate Director to ensure that there is a clear purpose and content is suitable for the target audience.

Function-specific Social Media accounts and profiles must be agreed by the relevant Head of Department/Corporate Director prior to being set up. A Senior Manager will act as "responsible officer" for each account.

The Social Media Guidelines have been introduced to ensure appropriate, legal and effective use of Facebook and Twitter as communication channels for the Council whilst also ensuring that we are keeping abreast of an ever-changing environment in the social media world.

Appendix 2: Guidelines for Members and Staff on the Use of Twitter

Introduction

1.1   Social Media is becoming an important part of the operation of a democratic society. For TDC and its Members it is an efficient and cost-effective way of keeping in touch with residents and businesses and discussing issues with their communities.

1.2   These Guidelines have been written in support of the Council's Communications Strategy 2012-15 and associated guidelines in respect of dealing with the media and general Social Media Protocols.

What is Twitter?

2.1   Twitter is a medium that allows users to send short messages (of no more than 140 characters) which can be read by anyone that 'follows' the user. It is also possible to include in messages links to websites, as well as photographs and other media.

How can Members and Staff use Twitter?

3.1   Members can use social media in a number of ways:
♦   as an identified Member
♦   as an individual through a private account
♦   anonymously through a private account.

3.2   When using Twitter, Members will be bound by the Council's Code of Conduct if they are conducting Council business or representing the Council.

3.3   Staff using any of the Council's Twitter accounts will be bound by any Guidance, Protocols or other instructions given. Only authorised staff may post and manage a Council Twitter stream.

Guidelines for Members and Staff on the Use of Twitter

Using Twitter as an Individual

4.1   Members and Officers who make private and personal non-political Twitter contributions, unconnected to Authority business and without describing themselves as Members are unlikely to be subject to the Code.

4.2   In considering whether a Member was acting as a Member, any investigation would have regard to the following factors:

•   The privacy settings on the member's Twitter feed. Members who have a private, personal Twitter account, which they use as a private individual and not as a Member, should ensure that they have appropriate privacy settings so that they control who reads their posts.
•   The Member's profile on their Twitter account. Where this is intended to be private the Member should not describe themselves as a Member or refer to Council business or contacts. A Member who did so would have difficulty sustaining an argument that they were not within the Code.
•   A disclaimer in a private Twitter feed to the effect that comments are not made as a Member will not necessarily avoid the application of the Code.

Anonymous use of Twitter

5.1   The Council does not support or encourage anonymous postings by Members.

5.2   An anonymous post by a Member conducting Council business will be subject to the Code.

5.3   An anonymous post by a member of staff regarding Council business will be subject to normal disciplinary proceedings. Staff should familiarise themselves with rules regarding conduct and political impartiality.

Guidelines for Members and Staff on the Use of Twitter

TDC Twitter Feeds

6.1   Only Twitter accounts which have been approved for use may be operated by staff for Council business. Requests for new accounts must be approved by the appropriate Head of Department / Corporate Director. The completed request form should be sent via the Department's Communication Group representative to the chair of the Communications Group for storing.

6.2   Users and those that manage Council Twitter feeds should ensure that only appropriate users are followed by that stream. No Members of TDC should be followed to ensure political impartiality is maintained. The person responsible for the twitter account, may be required to justify who is followed, and why.

6.3   When 'tweeting' on Council feeds, all messages should be factual, without opinion and only in course or connection with the nature of that feed (i.e. Air Show related, Leisure related, etc.). Similarly, any re-tweets' should only be on appropriate topics.

6.4   When replying to a tweet, whether a question, or to clarify what is being discussed, ensure all responses remain professional. Do not get into an argument. The user is responsible for any tweets.

6.5   If at any stage a user needs guidance, this should be sought from the Communications and Public Relations Manager. Anything that is considered to be defamatory, threatening or inappropriate, should be reported the Communications and Public Relations Manager for advice.

Guidelines for Members and Staff on the Use of Twitter

Other Important Issues to Consider

7.1   There are also considerations apart from the Code of Conduct for Members and guidance for staff that should be taken into account when using Twitter. The following is a brief guide to some of the legal pitfalls in establishing personal social media sites such as blogs. These can be avoided if your online content is objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

7.2   In the main, you have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

7.3   **Libel**
        If a user publishes an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation they may take proceedings for libel. This will also apply if a user allows someone to publish something libellous on their Twitter feed and does not take prompt action to remove it.

7.4   **Bias and Predetermination**
        Users (especially Members) should avoid publishing anything that might suggest they have already made up their mind about a matter they may be involved in determining. Otherwise, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

7.5   **Copyright**
        Placing images or text on a site from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications, photos etc.) without permission, is likely to breach copyright. Users should avoid publishing anything they are unsure about or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages. This risk may be avoided by providing a link to another source.

7.6   **Data Protection**
        Never publish the personal data of individuals. Users should also not publish/upload any photographs of others unless they have expressively sought permission from them to take the picture and to post it to your social media.

7.7   **Obscene Material**
        Never publish anything that people might consider obscene. Publication of obscene materials is a criminal offence.

Guidelines for Members and Staff on the Use of Twitter

Other Important Issues to Consider cont

7.8   **Electoral Periods**

The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature and that includes web advertising. There are additional requirements such as imprint standards for materials which can be downloaded from a website. Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk