

CABINET

12 MARCH 2024

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

A.2 ADOPTION OF A NEW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

(Report prepared by Communications Manager Will Lodge)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To enable Cabinet to consider adoption of a new Communications Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's Communications Strategy was last updated in April 2021 to run until 2024, with an explicit link to the Council's Corporate Plan.

Now the authority has adopted a new Corporate Plan, it is appropriate to also update the Communications Strategy; this also allows changes to reflect the continued development of communications best practices.

A draft Communications Strategy has been drawn up to reflect those changes. It seeks to renew the alignment of communications with the Corporate Plan, and sets out a vision of key areas of focus for the team and its work over the next four years.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Cabinet approved the draft Communications Strategy 2024 for adoption with immediate effect.

REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

Having a Communications Strategy gives focus to the work of the Communications Team, and will allow it to prioritise workload appropriately and in accordance with the Corporate Plan.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not adopting a new Communications Strategy; while the team's work would still be guided by the Corporate Plan (as an overall strategic direction for the authority), there would not be a specific focus to guide and develop the Communications function.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The Communications Strategy will support work across the Corporate Plan priority themes; but particularly the Financial Sustainability and Openness theme.

Communications also supports the beginning of the Our Vision strapline: “Listening to and delivering for our residents and businesses”.

It is also one of the emerging highlight priority actions for 2024-25, under the theme of Financial Sustainability and Openness.

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT (including with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other stakeholders where the item concerns proposals relating to the Budget and Policy Framework)

The draft Communications Strategy has been developed working closely with the Leader of the Council, who holds the portfolio for Communications, along with internal officer consultation.

In addition, a new or revised Communications Strategy has been included as a proposed Highlight Priority Action for 2024/25, which has been subject to its own public consultation, and consultation with both the Resources and Services and Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Feedback from the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee included consideration within the Strategy of how Tendring District Council differentiates its services from those provided by others; and makes it clear to the public what this authority is and is not responsible for. This suggestion was based on feedback provided during the public consultation held in Autumn 2023 on the draft (now adopted) Corporate Plan.

While this is not explicitly covered within the draft Communications Strategy, this is a key issue which can be addressed through the Strategy; such as in work under the ‘Pride in Our Area and Services to Residents’ theme of Our Vision, balanced with ‘Working with our Partners to Improve Quality of Life. It could even form its own piece of work, developed through the lens of the Communications Strategy.

The consultation on the proposed Highlight Priority Actions – one of which is a review of the Communications Strategy – also found 70% of respondents thought the proposed activities strongly or somewhat supported this theme.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

Is the recommendation a Key Decision (see the criteria stated here)	NO	If Yes, indicate which by which criteria it is a Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Significant effect on two or more wards <input type="checkbox"/> Involves £100,000 expenditure/income <input type="checkbox"/> Is otherwise significant for the service budget
		And when was the proposed decision published in the Notice of forthcoming decisions for the Council (must be 28 days at the latest prior to the meeting date)	

Under Part 6 of the Tendring District Council Constitution, within the Protocol on Member and Officer Relations, Section 7 sets out arrangements for working with the media. This is covered by the Council's Media Protocol, which is developed separately to the Communications Strategy.

The draft Communications Strategy does reference the Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity, regulations set out by government which govern the work of Communications teams in local authorities.

As part of the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is asking authorities to produce a Productivity Plan, to cover four main areas including "Opportunities to take advantage of advances in technology"; elements of the draft Communications Strategy could help to support this objective.

X	The Monitoring Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:
----------	--

The Communications Team sits within the Governance Directorate and the Monitoring Officer, who is also the Assistant Director for Governance has been consulted on various stages of the draft Communication Strategy as it has developed.

FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications as part of the Communications Strategy. Some of the vision/targets do include development of communications tools, but these would all be considered and agreed independently through the Council's established processes – including the development of business cases where necessary.

The draft strategy is otherwise designed to be implemented using existing staff resources and equipment.

Paid-for communications activity is funded by the requesting service or project; the Communications Team budget is largely for staffing costs, along with equipment and software to support the development of communications. The Council has recently invested additional staffing resource into the Communications Team to reflect the increased activity and supporting the Corporate Plan and Emerging Priorities.

X	The Section 151 Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:
----------	---

The Communications Strategy along with the Community Engagement Strategy form an important element of the Council's use of resources activities, with timely and appropriate communication / engagement being necessary as part of the required response to the challenging financial position the Council faces over the coming years.

USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY

The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:

A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;	Use existing resources; this draft strategy is to provide focus and direction for the existing team.
--	--

B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and	The Communications Strategy will be delivered in accordance with existing rules, policies and procedures.
C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.	The 'Measures of Success' section of the draft strategy enables high-level performance management.

MILESTONES AND DELIVERY

The draft Communications Strategy is written for delivery over a four-year period, to align with the new Corporate Plan.

Key milestones are outlined in the 'Measures of Success' section of the draft strategy.

Delivery will be internal, though some specific pieces of work may require internal collaboration; or, if delivering against the 'Working with partners to improve quality of life' theme of the Corporate Plan then in partnership with others.

Capacity and skills are present within the organisation already to deliver against this, with the support of continuous professional development.

ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION

Ineffective communications can cause or augment risks to the organisation; both inherent risks – such as reputational risk which can negatively impact the council's ability to leverage partnership working and external funding – and specific operational and project risks.

There is no specific risk by adopting a new Communications Strategy; not adopting one presents a low risk of not meeting best practice and developing the function within the organisation. However, this higher level best practice work would be carried out by the Communications Team as part of its service delivery in any event.

The draft Communications Strategy does set out some areas of focus which would be new to the authority; these may present risks, but the careful and planned development of such work (including the use of research periods, pilot phases, and the organisation's existing project management approach) mitigates those risks.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies such as the Council must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Having undertaken an equalities impact assessment, the conclusion is that the proposal does not impact on the protected characteristics.

<p>Effective and accessible communications, as set out in the strategy, can improve equality through ensuring specific groups are appropriately communicated with to enhance and increase levels of engagement between these groups and this organisation.</p> <p>Although a separate document, the Community Engagement Strategy is an important related strategy which the Communications Strategy must align with.</p>	
<p>SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS</p>	
<p>The draft Communications Strategy does not directly improve social value considerations; but effective communications will help individual services and projects to do so.</p>	
<p>IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2030</p>	
<p>The draft Communications Strategy does not directly help the Council meet its Climate Change Action Plan objectives; but effective communications will help individual services and projects to do so.</p>	
<p>OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS OR IMPLICATIONS</p>	
<p>Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.</p>	
<p>Crime and Disorder</p>	<p>The draft Communications Strategy does not directly relate to crime and disorder considerations; but effective communications will help individual services and projects to do so.</p>
<p>Health Inequalities</p>	<p>The draft Communications Strategy does not directly tackle health inequalities; but effective communications will help individual services and projects to do so.</p>
<p>Subsidy Control (the requirements of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and the related Statutory Guidance)</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Area or Ward affected</p>	<p>District-wide</p>

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

<p>BACKGROUND</p>
<p>A key finding of the LGA Peer Review held in early 2018 identified that Tendring District Council (TDC) should do more to publicise and celebrate the great work that it does, and this continues to be a focus of the Council's communications work.</p> <p>The current Communications Strategy is due to expire as it aligns with the previous Corporate Plan, and this new draft is designed to renew that alignment with the new Corporate Plan, 'Our Vision'.</p> <p>Communications can support service and project delivery right across the organisation, and therefore help across all of the themes of Our Vision providing a golden thread and narrative</p>

through all of the work carried out.

As set out in the 'Vision for Communications' section, this will be achieved in a number of ways including increases strategic focus for the Communications service and a renewed push for proactivity in its workload.

The draft strategy also sets out some areas for innovation and development, such as utilising new technologies and platforms, and establishing a process for social listening to better capture public feedback.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS

Cabinet, 23 April 2021: Resolved that the draft Communications Strategy 2021 be approved and adopted.

Council, 28 November 2023: Resolved to approve and formally adopt 'Our Vision', the Corporate Plan 2024/28.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL

Equality Impact Assessment.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Draft Communications Strategy 2024

REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Name	Will Lodge
Job Title	Communications Manager
Email/Telephone	wlodge@tendingdc.gov.uk / 01255 686338