

**Classification:** Part 1 – Public

**Key Decision:** No

## **Gravesham Borough Council**

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 9 November, 2020

**Reporting officer:** Communications Manager

**Subject:** Communications Strategy

### **Purpose and summary of report:**

To present to members for the purposes of discussion the draft Communications Strategy and its associated appendices:

1. Draft Social Media Policy
2. Draft Crisis Communications Policy

### **Recommendations:**

1. Members agree to the adoption of the Communications Strategy and related appendices.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Communications and engagement is at the heart of all the council does. It is vital that the council engages with residents, businesses, partners and stakeholders and effectively communicates its key messages and how it is delivering against the objectives set in the Corporate Plan, which includes under 3: Progress, the requirement to build a strong and trusted brand.
- 1.2 The council does not currently have a Communications Strategy, the purpose of which is to provide structure and focus to the council's approach to communicating and engaging with its audiences and stakeholders.
- 1.3 The Communications Manager committed to drafting a Communications Strategy on his appointment in August 2019.
- 1.4 A key finding of the LGA Peer Challenge 2019 was the need for the council to communicate its successes more effectively by developing a corporate approach to communications.
- 1.5 Action 26 of the council's LGA Peer Challenge Action Plan requires the Communications Manager to develop a Communications Strategy, which includes

internal communications, to ensure the council celebrates its success and publicises its achievements.

- 1.6 The council's Annual Governance Statement 2019-20 identifies four actions to enhance the council's governance environment, with a deadline for delivery of the actions of March 2021.
- 1.7 Action two as outlined in the Annual Governance Statement 2019-20 is the development of a Communications Strategy that establishes the activities and principles with which to enable:
  - Active promotion of Gravesham as a place and the authority's corporate vision for the Borough;
  - Communication of the information customers need to access services;
  - The community to help shape future service policy and provision; and
  - An open and transparent culture at all levels of the organisation.

## **2. The Communications Strategy**

- 2.1 The aim of the Communications Strategy is to ensure the work of the council to deliver a Gravesham to be proud of is communicated clearly and concisely to residents, businesses, stakeholders, councillors and officers and that all communications support the Corporate Plan 2019-2023 objective of building a strong and trusted brand.
- 2.2 By following the strategy, all proactive council communications to external audiences will be linked to one or more the Corporate Plan 2019-2023's three core objectives of People, Place and Progress.
- 2.3 The strategy identifies the council's varied audiences, how it communicates with and listens to those audiences, and who communicates.
- 2.4 The strategy includes as appendices new Social Media and Crisis Communications policies as outlined below.

## **3. Social Media Policy**

- 3.1 The council's current Social Media Policy was adopted in 2015. Having reviewed it as part of the drafting of the Communications Strategy, the Communications Manager is of the opinion that the existing policy should be withdrawn and a new version adopted.
- 3.2 The Social Media Policy set out as appendix two to this report sets out the council's policy on the use of social media platforms for disseminating information and listening to the view of our various audiences. This includes who can post to council accounts, dealing with feedback from external audiences, adopting new platforms, and personal use of social media.
- 3.3 Section 9 of the policy sets out how the council may use social media when conducting investigations into alleged offences or in the discharge of other duties performed by the council and has been drafted in conjunction with the Legal Services team.

#### **4. Crisis Communications Strategy**

- 4.1 Gravesham Borough Council does not have a current Crisis Communications Strategy. Such a strategy has an important role to play in providing structure and direction to the authority's communications response to developing incidents within the Borough or within the authority itself.
- 4.2 By their nature, Crisis Communications strategies cannot provide 'by-the-numbers' guidance as they are designed to help organisations respond to unexpected, fast-developing and urgent incidents.
- 4.3 The draft Crisis Communications Strategy as attached as appendix three is designed to provide a guide to how to structure the response to such incidents for the Communications Manager or their alternate, Directors, Senior and Wider Management and Members.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX ONE
<b>Legal</b>	The Communications Strategy aligns all council communications with publishing law and standards. The Social Media appendix to the strategy ensures legal procedure and best practice is followed where social media channels are used to conduct investigations.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	<p>There are no significant costs associated with the council's Communications Strategy. The strategy provides a framework from which future council communication activities should be based and which therefore should be accounted for as part of on-going financial planning processes.</p> <p>Adoption of the Communications Strategy is likely to result in some direct communication-based activities and publication costs as the council's key messages are communicated to various stakeholders.</p>
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	<p>It is important that the council formally communicates its key objectives, policy commitments and performance over the coming years, in order to clearly demonstrate how successfully the work undertaken meets the needs and aspirations of local residents and businesses. Open and transparent engagement with our audiences is key to attaining the council's objective of creating a Gravesham to be proud of, a key objective of the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The Communications Strategy outlines a clear strategic platform from which the council can effectively communicate and engage with residents, businesses and stakeholders.</p> <p>Failure to put in place an effective Communications Strategy could result in the risk of a lack of transparency and accountability.</p>
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>?</p> <p>A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links. <b>No</b></p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>.</p> <p>N/A</p>

<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<b>Screening for Equality Impacts</b>		
	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?  Yes. The Communications Strategy states that council communications will recognise the diverse nature of the Borough’s communities and will promote and support a culture of inclusion and cohesion.		
<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>			
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	The council's Corporate Plan sets the strategic ambition and corporate objectives for the authority over the 2019-23 period. The Communications Strategy states that all proactive council communications will be linked to one or more of the three core principles of the Corporate Plan: People, Place and Progress		
<b>Climate Change</b>	There are no implications arising from this report.  The Communications Strategy provides the framework to follow in engaging our various audiences with our strategies to achieve carbon neutral status and communicating our successes on the road to achieving that status.		
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	n/a		
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	The Communications Strategy states the council will continually review and evolve its digital offering, taking note of relevant technological developments and employing them where appropriate. The council will develop new platforms, such as the bespoke council news website news.gravesham.gov.uk, to enable it to keep residents and businesses both fully informed of council activities and policies, able to respond easily to consultations and carry out transactions with the council.		
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	n/a		