
Operational Review of the Communications and Engagement Strategy

Committee considering report:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Committee:	25 January 2022
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Lynne Doherty
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	
Report Author:	Gabrielle Mancini
Forward Plan Ref:	

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission with an update on progress made on the implementation of the Communications and Engagement Strategy, which was adopted in October 2020.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission is asked to review progress to date and recommend whether any further action might be taken to implement the strategy effectively.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	None from this report, however additional investment was agreed at the time of the strategy's adoption.
Human Resource:	None, however additional investment was made into the Customer Engagement and Transformation Team as part of the restructure of Strategy and Governance in 2020.
Legal:	None

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Risk Management:	N/A			
Property:	None			
Policy:	This paper relates to the implementation of a strategy which was adopted by the Executive in October 2020.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	x			The Strategy includes a number of proposals which seek to address inequality by ensuring that communication channels reach all members of the local community and by ensuring our engagement objectives are focused on the most vulnerable.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	x			
Environmental Impact:		x		This paper relates to an operational review of a strategy delivery plan. None of the actions within the strategy in question were deemed to have an environmental impact.
Health Impact:		x		This paper relates to an operational review of a strategy delivery plan. None of the actions within the strategy in question were deemed to have a health impact.

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ICT Impact:		x		
Digital Services Impact:		x		
Council Strategy Priorities:		x		Although the actions relate to the operation of support services and constitute business as usual, it is considered that the improvements they will bring will lead to better services for residents as they facilitate enhanced levels of consultation and engagement, thereby ensuring that the voice of the resident is reflected in decision making.
Core Business:	x			The Communications and Engagement Strategy was developed following an LGA Peer Review of the Council, which took place in November 2019. Its implementation is key to the fulfilment of the recommendations for improvement laid out in the review team's final report.
Data Impact:		x		
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Service Director- Strategy & Governance</p> <p>Executive Director- Resources</p> <p>Service Lead- Legal & Democratic</p> <p>Communications Team Manager</p> <p>Performance, Risk and Consultation Manager</p> <p>Digital Services Manager</p> <p>Residents Survey undertaken in June 2020</p>			

4 Executive Summary

4.1 The Local Government Association Peer Review which took place in November 2019 found that although West Berkshire Council is a high performing local authority, there were ways in which the authority could make improvements to the way in which it communicates and engages with its community as well as taking a more active role in the Placemaking agenda. As a result, senior officers began to consider how

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communications and engagement activity within the organisation might be made more effective.

- 4.2 The Covid-19 Pandemic necessitated an overnight change in how the Council both communicated and engaged with its local communities and consequently, enhanced performance was delivered at pace. Key changes have included the deployment of additional resources, less reliance on local media and more focus on contacting residents and businesses directly, a more prominent role for the Council Leader and Chief Executive and an increased focus on digital communication.
- 4.3 The Communications and Engagement Strategy, which was adopted in October 2020, was developed in response to this and contains a number of actions which aim to enhance the way in which we communicate with residents, businesses and stakeholders. Responsibility for these actions falls on a number of service areas and is ultimately overseen by the Executive Director for People.
- 4.4 The Strategy has six core themes, under which there are various actions:
- *Inform- Better informing our key audiences and stakeholders about what they want and need to know and in a way that is timely, appropriate and relevant to them*
 - *Consult- Planning our consultation with stakeholders more effectively to ensure it is genuine and represents value for money*
 - *Involve- Involving stakeholders more to help shape what the Council does and increasingly what they and their communities do*
 - *Collaborate- Collaborating more effectively to enable the development of effective engagement and the achievement of better outcomes*
 - *Empower- Empowering individuals and communities more so that they can take their own decisions on matters that might historically may have been for the Council to take*
 - *Serve- Transforming services so that they are better for our customers*
- 4.5 The adopted strategy was accompanied by a detailed delivery plan which outlines the actions required in order to deliver the stated objectives. Progress on the strategy's delivery was originally reported to the Customer First Programme Board. Given the high number of actions within it, however, this was a significant burden on the agenda for this group so a new subsidiary group- the Communications and Engagement Delivery Group- was established to remove this whilst ensuring appropriate implementation monitoring.
- 4.6 Significant progress has been made to date, with the vast majority of actions within the delivery plan having been completed in full or part. Some of the actions have also been reviewed to ensure that their content is appropriate and provides the best outcome for residents. The report at Appendix A and spreadsheet at Appendix B outline the form this progress has taken.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 Relevant background and supporting information is included in the Annual Progress Report in Appendix C.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The actions contained within the Communications and Engagement Strategy are an integral part of our overarching drive to focus more closely on our customers and to communicate more effectively with our customers.
- 6.2 Progress to date has been good, with enhanced levels of communication and engagement having achieved already across all of the strategic priority areas. This is evidenced through our strong performance in social media analytics, the high number of subscribers to our newsletters, the increased number of respondents to our consultations and the feedback we have received on the work done to date. However, as further work such as the co-production framework is progressed we will build on this still further so that our stakeholders are fully engaged in what we do and service improvements are realised as a result.

7 Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix A – Report
- 7.2 Appendix B – Delivery spreadsheet

Background Papers:

None

Wards affected: All wards

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