

Council Communications Strategy and 2018-20 Campaign Plan

Cabinet

Date: 11th July 2018

Author: Leader of the Council
 Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services
 Director of Performance, Organisational Improvement
 Communications
 Head of Communications

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet's support to adopt the Council Communications Strategy and 2018-19 Campaign Plan in order to bring shared understanding and focus on how to prioritise professional communications resource to support the Council.
- 1.2 This report also informs Cabinet of how the LGA Communications Peer Review findings have been used to shape the Strategy and Campaign Plan.
- 1.3 Evidence-based and evaluated campaign activity can make a measurable difference to achieving the Council's priorities. The delivery of this Strategy and Campaign Plan aims to increase how informed and engaged residents feel in the work of the Council which in turn is proven to improve overall trust and satisfaction levels.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Endorse the Council Communications Strategy.
- 2.2 Note the recommendations of the LGA Communications Peer Review completed in January 2018 (Appendix Two) that have informed the Strategy, Campaign Plan and action plan (Appendix Three).
- 2.3 Authorise the Head of Communications, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate Services, to develop the 2018-20 Campaign Plan.
- 2.4 Authorise each Head of Service and Cabinet Member as appropriate to develop a detailed communications plan for each individual campaign/project.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Phil Avery 07392 109772 pavery@swindon.gov.uk or Samantha Mowbray 07823525337 smowbray@swindon.gov.uk

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3. Detail

Value of strategic communications

- 3.1 The purpose of the new Communications Strategy is to prioritise where professional communications resource can most add value to supporting the strategic goals of the Council serving residents. The full strategy is attached at Appendix One.
- 3.2 The Government Communications Service defines a campaign as: “*A planned sequence of communications that use a compelling narrative over time to deliver a defined measurable outcome.*” Therefore, consistent with best practice at both national and local government levels, the Council continues to embed a strategic communication model within the organisation, which recognises the role of timely campaigns to help deliver corporate priorities.
- 3.3 There are two recent examples of how the Council has applied the principles now set out formally in the Strategy. In the first part of 2018, there was the successful multi-channel campaign to support the voter ID pilot in Swindon. The measurable outcomes were to maximise the number of registered voters who presented their poll card or other form of approved ID to vote and maintain voter turnout (both were achieved and turnout increased). Another illustration is the campaign to support Foster Care Fortnight (May 2018), which successfully generated 71 public enquiries in support of the Council’s pledge to recruit more foster carers.
- 3.4 The Communications Strategy outlines the overall approach to managing strategic communications, before presenting the 2018-19 Campaign Plan that lists the specific campaigns the Council will develop, deliver and evaluate over the next two years, along with the criteria used to identify these.
- 3.5 The Campaign Plan has been informed by the LGA Communications Peer Review completed in January 2018 (Appendix Two), insight from the 2017 Swindon residents’ survey, input from the Corporate Management Team and discussions with individual service areas.

Communicating a clear corporate and place narrative

- 3.6 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (2016) and LGA Communications Peer Review (2018) undertaken in Swindon both highlighted the importance of the Council having a clear narrative that is central to all communication activity. This would help tie the communications of individual projects and schemes to an

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overarching story of what the Council is trying to achieve for residents and the Borough.

- 3.7 Communicating a clear, consistent narrative would help explain how the Council understands what matters to residents and their families: an affordable home, education and career opportunities and a good quality of life. The narrative would link these outcomes to how the local authority is working with partners to deliver the Vision for Swindon so that the Borough continues to thrive in the future and benefits from well-managed growth, investment and regeneration.
- 3.8 If Cabinet endorses the Strategy, officers would develop a detailed campaign plan to communicate and explain the Council's overarching role in Swindon's growth story.
- 3.9 Communications also has a clear role to play in helping to articulate a clear and coherent place narrative to audiences outside the Borough, supporting the Council's economic growth objectives and securing domestic and foreign direct investment. Specific communications activity would be developed in consultation with the Resources and Growth directorate to complement the evolution of the Switch On To Swindon place marketing initiative.

Measuring impact

- 3.10 The extent to which residents feel informed and engaged by their Council, and the trust they place in it, directly affects their views about their local authority and the services they receive. This in turn affects their levels of satisfaction and ultimately, the Council's public reputation.
- 3.11 The ultimate aim of delivering the Council Communications Strategy and 2018-20 Campaign Plan would be to enhance the proportion of residents who are informed and engaged. The Council would seek improved trust and satisfaction ratings when compared with the recent measurements from the Swindon residents' survey (November 2017).
- 3.12 Alongside this, each individual campaign plan would set out clear objectives and how the activity delivered would be evaluated.
- 3.13 There is not a centralised budget for communications. Therefore the Strategy and Campaign Plan would be delivered through no or low cost activity, utilising budget where identified by individual service areas.

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4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to approve the Council Communications Strategy and 2018-19 Campaign Plan. However, that would mean losing an opportunity to focus and prioritise the Council's professional communications resources to best effect in support of the local authority's objectives.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial or procurement implications arising directly from this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Legal and Human Rights considerations have been taken fully into account in compiling this report. It is considered that the recommendations of this report are compatible with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other implications arising from this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has not been completed for this report, as there are no direct implications on the delivery of any individual service. It would be expected that individual campaign plans would take into account the different needs of Swindon's communities as appropriate, depending on the objectives and outcomes sought by the campaign.

Risk Management

- 5.5 Risks will be managed in line with department risk management techniques and programme management.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Council's Report Writing standard requires authors to consult appropriate Corporate Directors, Directors or Heads of Service, other officers and relevant partners on the purpose, content, and recommendations of the report before it is

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presented for decision. In respect of reports to Cabinet, authors are also required to consult the relevant Cabinet Member.

7. Background Papers

7.1 None

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 - Council Communications Strategy and 2018-19 Campaign Plan (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).

8.2 Appendix 2 – LGA Communications Peer Review Final Report (January 2018) (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).

8.3 Appendix 3 – SBC action plan in response to the LGA Communications Peer Review Final Report (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme

9.1 This is not a key decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme for July 2018.