

Communications Peer Review Swindon Borough Council

8 – 10 January 2018

Feedback Report

1. Purpose of report

This report provides a summary of the findings of the Swindon Borough Council communications peer review. It builds on the main messages which were discussed with leading members and officers from the council at our feedback session on 10 January 2018. It is intended to provide a basis for consideration and action by the council to enhance the effectiveness of its communications activity and ensure the best use of resources deployed to support those.

2. Context and focus of the review

Swindon Borough Council (SBC) has around 217,000 residents in a combination of urban and surrounding countryside. It is one of the fastest growing areas in the UK in terms of population and has a thriving business base that the council is keen to build upon. The council itself has a budget of around £136.4m of which 78% is spent on vulnerable adults and children. As part of its medium term financial planning the council has identified a predicted funding gap of £30m between now and 2020.

In 2015, the council launched a Vision for Swindon outlining its key priorities for Swindon and which it plans to have achieved by 2030. In 2017 it also launched the Swindon Programme which sets out how it proposes to transform the way the council itself works and achieve the efficiency savings required by its anticipated funding gap. This programme includes an anticipation that the council's workforce will be reduced.

The council identified the need to enhance its communications capability and approach in order to better support its ambitions. As a result the communications team was re-structured in November 2016 and digital communication responsibilities revised within the council in 2017. The council requested the Local Government Association (LGA) to complete a communications peer review during 2017/18, to assess progress and identify improvements with a particular focus on the following:

- **Strategy, structure, capability, capacity and resources:** Is the current model for delivery the right one? Are resources managed effectively and sufficient to meet demand and expectation? How effective is the council in communicating the strategic direction of the council to internal and external stakeholders?
- **Governance, commissioning and oversight:** Is there a robust system for planning, processes and evaluating outcomes? Is the process for commissioning activity owned at a senior level and understood across the organisation?
- **Role of Members:** Are members supported to communicate their aspirations for the council and kept well informed? Do members have a good understanding of the important role they play in delivering effective communications?
- **Stakeholder engagement:** How effective is the council at communicating its message to residents, partners and stakeholders? Are the correct systems and resources in place for managing and delivering effective stakeholder engagement?
- **Digital communication:** How effective is the council's use of digital communications to inform and engage its audiences?
- **Internal communications:** How effective are internal communications at informing and engaging staff? Are communications channels used to best effect to achieve this aim?

3. The peer team and process

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and were agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge were:

- David Holdstock, Director of Communications, LGA (Lead Peer)
- Cllr Peter Fleming, Leader of the Council, Sevenoaks District Council
- Paul Compton, Communications Team Leader, Dorset Councils Partnership
- Nicky Jackson, Deputy Head of Campaigns, Cabinet Office
- Adam Kearney, Strategic Communications and Marketing Manager, Luton Borough Council
- Klara Nordstrom, Digital Communications Advisor, LGA
- Bob Ross, Review Manager, LGA

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer reviews are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government communications to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information including the council's corporate plan, communications strategies, position statement, structures as well reviewing the council's website and digital presence.

The team then spent three days onsite in Swindon, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 45 people, including a range of councillors, council staff and external stakeholders
- Gathered information and views from around 30 interviews, focus groups and meetings
- Collectively spent more than 150 hours to determine our findings – the equivalent of one person spending around four weeks in Swindon

4. Principles of good communications

In undertaking its work, the team was guided by an understanding of the importance of good communications and how to achieve these. The LGA has found the following to be generally characteristic of effective communications across the councils that it works with:

Why is good communications important?

- Supports good political leadership
- Articulates the ambition for your area
- Improves corporate and personal reputation
- Helps engagement – residents, partners and staff
- Builds trust and rallies advocates to drive change (and can help deliver savings)
- Attracts investment (and good people)
- Strengthens public support and understanding

What does good communications look like?

- **Leadership** - Clarity of purpose and commitment
- **Brand** - What you stand for, values and trust
- **A clear vision** - be ambitious first...and then realistic!
- Be **authentic** to your local area
- **Strategic approach to communications** - Communication without strategy does not work
- A corporately agreed, fully evaluated **annual communications plan** - not just sending out ad hoc stuff!
- All **communications** activity **based on research and insight**
- All **campaigns to be linked to corporate priorities** and resourced accordingly
- **Invest in evaluation**
- Ensure **communications is owned by everyone**

These general principles and the experience of the peer team have guided it in identifying the key issues in Swindon, formulating findings and suggesting actions the council could take to address these issues. We believe it would be helpful for the council to refer to these principles to ensure that its approach to communications continues to develop in the most appropriate way.

5. Executive summary

Swindon Borough Council (SBC) is ambitious and is keen to build on its existing successes. It has captured its vision for Swindon and its priorities within two key documents: 'Vision for Swindon' and the council's Corporate Plan 2016 – 2020. Internally it has recognised its financial challenges and the need to realise efficiencies to meet these whilst at the same time improving services through different ways of working, increased digitalisation etc. It has identified the changes needed to its own organisation and ways of working in its 'Swindon Programme'.

Strategic communications is a central support to achieving the council's external and internal aims. The council has already taken several positive steps to strengthening its communications function including a restructuring of the central team, ensuring adequate staffing resourcing for communications plus clarifying and increasing accountability of digital and web site responsibilities. Already communications are moving from a primarily reactive style to a more proactive and strategic approach. In addition the council is trying to embed the OASIS model (incorporating 'Objectives, Audience Insight, Strategy, Implementation and Scoring/ Evaluation) across its communications activities.

Despite the positive steps outlined, the council does need to develop further its capability for using strategic communications to take forward its ambitions. There are a number of important strands to this including the need to have a clear narrative and place brand that actively reaches out and engages residents and the wider investment audience that the council is trying to attract.

The full potential of strategic communications to support your ambitions is not yet appreciated by all senior leaders and middle managers. Although a communications strategy has been developed, this needs to be formally adopted and signed off by political and managerial leadership. Similarly, there is no formal commissioning process for communications or robust evaluation of activities that have been undertaken. The council should develop an annual campaigns plan approved by Cabinet and CMT and evaluated by them as to whether the campaigns were successful in achieving their objectives.

Strategic communications needs to have a stronger presence with and as a part of the senior leadership of the council. Current arrangements are hindering an understanding of the role communications can play, early involvement of the communications team in initiatives etc. A simple step to help overcome this would be for the Head of Communications to attend every Leader' Advisory Group (LAG) and Corporate Management Team (CMT). The communications team is also trying to embed a business partner approach although it is hampered in this by the fact that it currently has vacancies within its approved structure. These vacancies threaten the development the strategic approach desired and the reputation of the team in the wider organisation and its ability to deliver the communications strategy. In our view, recruitment to these posts should be a priority for the organisation.

A residents survey has recently been re-established and this shows good levels of satisfaction with Swindon as a place to live and with the council itself. It also shows that many residents do not feel sufficiently engaged with the council. This is impacting on residents' understanding of the council, its ambitions and its achievements. Developing a community engagement strategy would be useful for the council. As part of this the council

should ensure that it has a clear understanding of the communication channels that people use and value. It should also seek opportunities to increase its joint communication working and awareness with partners.

The importance of increased digitalisation is well recognised across the council and forms a key strand within the Swindon Programme. The council is starting from a relatively low base on its digital transformation journey. A low proportion of council services has been digitalised so far and the website is primarily transactional rather than a source of information. The council is already taking positive steps to enhance its digital programme including a review of responsibilities already mentioned and ensuring that the website is now available on a new smartphone and tablet-friendly platform. In addition the current content management system provides a good base for further development although a permanent post for a web developer would be advantageous.

There is also good understanding of the role that social media can play in the reputation of the council. In line with good practice an audit of social media across the council has been undertaken and a range of recommendations made to improve co-ordinated management of social media accounts and activity.

At present there is no clear internal communications and staff engagement strategy (although a high level communications plan does exist for the Swindon Programme). There are, however, various internal communication activities and the development of a formal strategy is planned. We were informed that staff felt there was good 'visibility' of senior leadership. Similarly, the staff survey showed that staff felt well informed by their immediate manager regarding developments within their immediate teams (although staff response rates for the survey were quite low at 46% which could suggest low staff engagement). As part of the engagement strategy there is a need to clarify the role of managers as communicators for corporate messaging. The strategy must also ensure that it encompasses and promotes two-way channels of communication.

There is a high-level engagement plan regarding the Swindon Programme and good awareness across all levels of the council of its objectives. Various communication activities (including direct staff briefing sessions) have been undertaken to support this awareness. The council does need to ensure that there is a clarity of message regarding the envisaged transformation/ efficiency programme, including the potential effects on staff. At present there appeared to be widely differing perceptions as regards the potential effects

6. Feedback

6.1 Strategy, structure, capability, capacity and resources

Swindon is one of the fastest growing areas in the UK and has already had success in attracting thriving businesses to its area. Its geographical location helps with the attraction of inward investment and its popularity should be further enhanced by the electrification of the railway line between Swindon and London in December 2018 which will reduce journey times to 45 minutes.

The council is clearly ambitious to build on its existing successes. In 2015 it produced a Vision for Swindon comprising four priorities and 30 pledges. These clear priorities are also incorporated within the council's Corporate Plan 2016 – 2020. These priorities and pledges

are a useful planning and monitoring tool for the council. Within these documents, however, and other marketing material examined we did not find a clear narrative and place brand that would actively engage residents and reach out to the wider investment audience that the council is trying to attract. In our view, a clear narrative and place brand for Swindon linked to corporate vision and priorities should be developed as soon as possible and be central to all communication activities.

The council has also adopted a relatively low-key approach to emphasising its own major contributions to attracting inward investment (for example, provision of a skilled workforce, facilitating housing for relocating families, planning support and site identification for new businesses and so on). Although the peer team understands that the council has been keen to emphasise a 'business to business' communication approach it may wish to consider whether its own contribution is recognised sufficiently and if the merits of an ambitious council is not an attraction in itself. In this respect the role of central communications in regeneration and inward investment is at present unclear and limited. As a minimum it is recommended that the council considers reviewing communications activity across the Switch On To Swindon, One Swindon and Forward Swindon initiatives to ensure consistency of messages.

The council has recognised the need to enhance its communications and has been proactive in developing its communication capability. In particular a formal communications strategy has been developed. This strategy has raised the profile of the communications team, identified key campaigns which it will support and stresses the advantages of adopting a robust and strategic framework (the OASIS model) for communications. This is a very positive step but the strategy would benefit from being formally endorsed by senior political and managerial leadership. In particular this would allow the OASIS model (incorporating 'Objectives, Audience Insight, Strategy, Implementation and Scoring/ Evaluation') to become truly embedded in the council and used to prioritise/ commission all communications activities.

The council has ensured that it has an adequately resourced communications team relative to the size of the local authority. A restructuring of the communications team was completed in November 2016 and created the basis for a 'business partner' approach with operational services. The structure of the team is appropriate, allowing specialist leads to draw upon generic skills from others in the team. Feedback from both within the team and with other stakeholders indicated that the team is moving from a reactive to a proactive approach. Supporting this we found the communications team members consistently enthusiastic and willing, with a desire to work with operational services on focussed campaigns. There are already examples of success where the communications team has been involved at an early stage in the development of such initiatives, such as the work promoting building control commercial services.

However, the communications team faces considerable challenges. In particular it still has vacancies in its new structure. This is a real risk to the reputation of the team and the communication strategy itself. The communications team is rightly trying to promote its services and the advantages of the OASIS approach. However, if it does not have the capacity to respond appropriately when services request support/ wish to commission services it will be very hard for the OASIS model to become truly embedded and it will not enhance the reputation of the team. The vacancies also have a significant impact on the team's ability to undertake proactive relationship building through attending service planning meetings etc. The council may wish to consider ways of attracting staff to fill the

vacancies and an emphasis on 'fast track' development of staff and exposing them quickly to challenging opportunities could be considered.

In addition, the communications team needs to better demonstrate its strategic value to the organisation. It still has a need to build fully effective relationships internally and externally. Although it is important that the whole organisation adopts the strategic approach of the OASIS model, we would suggest that in the early days of its implementation, the communications team support colleagues to better understand the approach and where required, offer a degree of flexibility. This will help to help build good relations. One simple step to help build good relations with operational services and move them 'closer to the action' would be to re-locate the team. At present it is physically separate from operational services (although close to Chief Executive and other senior functions) and closer proximity would allow for more informal contact and relationship building.

As part of adopting a more strategic approach to marketing and to reduce the amount of printed material that is sent out without any wider strategic links, we would recommend a review of the council's print and design function. This would allow the council to assess all aspects of communications and may deliver some savings for the council.

It was noted that Operational media relations are seen as very effective both within and outside the council. Local media told us that the council's media relations are good. Whilst this is a strength, it was also found that communications are often tactical with a need for more strategic media relations. This could include ensuring that there are regular meetings between the Council Leader/ Chief Executive and local media to help develop relationships, identifying future issues etc.

6.2 Governance, commissioning and oversight

The importance of communications is indicated by this being in the Council Leader's personal portfolio. There is also a growing awareness of the importance of proactive strategic communications and examples of positive outcomes where the team has been involved at an early stage of campaigns. Such examples include a flu jab campaign and development of building control commercial services.

The benefits of strategic communications, however, do not appear to be fully appreciated at all senior leadership and middle management levels across the council. There is still a tendency for the focus to often be reactive e.g. responding to local media stories or requests to the team for single press releases rather than a strategic approach. There is a need to ensure that all campaigns and communication activities have clear desired outcomes from the outset. This has not always been evident although the communications team is stressing this need via the OASIS model approach.

As part of the desired strategic approach the council should develop a clear process for commissioning communications activity (see also the suggestion in section 6.1 above for the senior leadership to formally endorse the communications strategy). To have such a process would allow the council to identify a clear focus for its communications activity directly linked to its own priorities.

One of the causes of the lack of appreciation of the benefits of strategic communications is that the communication function does not have a strong enough presence with the senior leadership of the council. This is hindering an understanding of the role communications

can play, early involvement of the communications team in initiatives and priority planning. We recommend that a simple step to help overcome this would be for Head of Communications to attend every LAG and CMT (in the same way that these groups receive financial and legal advice).

This commissioning process should also include a formal and reported evaluation process for communication activities. At present this does not exist although there is some reporting of communication activities but this is not the same as an evaluation of the outcomes achieved.

There is also an acknowledgement that communications activity is still being undertaken directly by some service areas. This goes against the strategic communications approach that the council is trying to adopt and has the potential to create consistency/ quality issues. This situation also means that the council has no clear understanding of its corporate spend on communications. This non-commissioned activity should be reduced as far as possible or brought into a formally commissioned programme.

The communications team has access to MOSAIC but insufficient access to data to inform audience insight. There is no qualitative or contextual data about residents as 'whole people' separate from 'what they think about the council / where do they want to hear about the council'. There is a need to access data about what people in the borough think, feel and care about local issues in order to tailor campaign messaging and properly target the audience.

A final point is that it is not clear who is in control of and managing the council's brand. Formal commissioning and evaluation would help this and it is recommended the council undertakes research regarding perceptions of the current brand with a range of stakeholders.

6.3 Role of Members

Elected members obviously have a crucial role in communicating the ambition of the council for Swindon as well as local communications in their own wards. It was clear to the team that members have a strong sense of ambition and pride in Swindon. This is also articulated in the pledges within the Corporate Plan mentioned in section 6.1. These strategic ambitions were also supported by individual members good local knowledge and personal communications 'on their patch'.

However, our view is that the council would benefit from members collectively and proactively articulating their vision of Swindon and the Council's contribution to this. There appeared to be an over emphasis on reacting to local media reports on individual service issues and on the use of traditional communication methods. In particular there appeared to be very limited direct member involvement in regeneration/ inward investment communications, which would help to embed the clear political leadership into all communications activity.

It is important that members have an increased awareness of the role and benefits of a modern strategic communications service as this can directly support their own ambitions. Being formally involved in agreeing the communications strategy and its priorities would aid this awareness. Similarly regular, formal evaluation of communication outcomes would demonstrate the benefits that are achievable.

The changing use of media channels by different parts of the population should also be fully recognised by members. People now use a very wide range of media and communication channels to access information and for day-to-day communications. Members should seek to become more engaged on social media and the communications team can assist this by providing regular support and advice to members to build their expertise in using these channels to engage with and communicate with residents.

6.4 Stakeholder engagement

The council has been successful in building networks through 'Switch on to Swindon' and other similar initiatives. The council has also recently undertaken a residents' survey. We welcome this development and that fact that the survey shows high satisfaction with Swindon as a place to live (84% commenting positively) which is a strong basis on which to build a narrative. Significantly, two thirds of residents are also satisfied with the Council (in line with national average) and just over half agree that the Council provides value for money although a quarter disagree (in line with national average). These are positive results for the council.

However, the residents' survey showed that less than half of residents (47%) are satisfied with the 'level of engagement with the council' and only 57% felt well informed about council services and benefits which is below the national average of 65%. As the council does not have a stakeholder management strategy – including a clear resident engagement strategy – this is likely to have an impact on those results. Engagement by the council is generally through operational services but this is not always formally commissioned or strategic to the council's main priorities. It also means that there is little collective corporate understanding of residents' views. A strategic stakeholder strategy would allow the council to identify key stakeholders, develop stronger relationships and develop appropriate communications.

The council doesn't currently hold a stakeholder database. It would be useful to develop this as, in order for strategic campaigning to work well, audience insight is vital. We would recommend that as the annual communications plan is developed, the team uses this as an opportunity to start building a database of key influencers, stakeholders and partners against core priority audiences (for example, businesses, community leaders, faith groups, education / young people, families and so on).

Currently 'engagement' is generally through formal consultation and opportunities are not maximised to use less formal engagement to help inform policy development and to help shape the way that change is communicated.

One aspect of further developing the engagement strategy should be to better understand the channels of communication that people prefer and which they value. Undertaking a 'who reads what' survey would enable the council to have this understanding and which lines of communications are most effective.

During the review we found limited evidence of partnership working on communications. We appreciate the time consuming nature of much partnership activity but the potential benefits of co-ordinated and consistent messages across the public sector in Swindon should not be underestimated. As a minimum communications staff should be aware of any high profile campaigns planned by partners.

It would be useful for the communications team to ensure that it is an active participant in local public sector communications groups within Swindon / Wiltshire but also more widely within the South West to share best practice and potentially work in partnership. This will help both develop the team and also identify crossover priorities, audiences and campaigns with partners which can help make efficiencies / increase the reach of campaigns. The council should seek ways to increase such partnership working including developing a public sector communications board to share information and seek co-ordination wherever possible.

There are also advantages in developing better links with parish councils and residents associations/ community groups. These local groups are useful forums for community engagement, particularly as many also seek to directly provide local services. Feedback we received indicated that parish councils did not feel well engaged and would welcome greater involvement with the council and were keen to support the council by offering access to their engagement channels.

6.5 Digital communication

Developing digital communication is highlighted within the Swindon Programme as one of the main ways to improve services and achieve efficiency savings. We found good understanding across the organisation of the importance of this and the potential of digital communications. The council is starting from a relatively low base on its digital transformation journey and so there are huge opportunities for the council. A low proportion of council services have been digitalised so far (verbally reported to us as 9%) although we noted that the website is primarily transactional rather than a source of information.

The council has recognised that it needs to enhance its digital programme and has taken a number of proactive steps to do this. These include a review in 2017 of digital development and website responsibilities to ensure that these are clear and accountable within the council. The council also allocated additional resources for digital development. We welcome both of these initiatives but would flag up that under the new arrangements there is a danger that the communications team's ownership of campaign and news content on the website could become too distant and care needs to be taken that this does not happen. It is also noted that there does not appear to be in the organisational structure a permanent post for a web developer and this could hinder speedy developments.

In addition to ensuring clarity around responsibilities, the council has taken positive steps to ensure that the website is now available on a new smartphone and tablet-friendly platform. The current content management system (Jadu) also provides a good base for future developments to the website structure and landing page. Most urgently we would recommend adding a 'Latest news' section (however, depending on research with users, we would recommend not simply a 'press releases page' but rather something that puts news into context of the council's narrative and priorities) and an easy way to sign up to receive email communications from the council. With regard to the transactional functions of the website, we would recommend getting user opinions (for instance by using small focus groups) to inform future service digitalisation efforts and to ensure it is appropriate for the intended audience.

There is good understanding of the role of social media in the reputation of the council. The council has recognised that it needs to ensure that there is robust management of such activity and, in line with good practice, it completed in November 2017 an audit of social media across the council. It was found that at that time there were 36 Facebook accounts operating with a range of followers from 8,900 to as low as 3 and 29 Twitter accounts with a range of followers from 4,200 to as low as 26. We welcome the audit and the associated recommendations for future management of social media accounts. This will require considerable diligence and 'sign up' by CMT to ensure the principles are enforced and the communications team is firmly established as the coordinating focal point and resource social media at the council.

We feel that the potential for speedy e-mail communication with residents has huge potential but is currently under used and is not being used strategically. The Council manages a number of e-newsletters including: a long-standing, monthly Libraries Service e-newsletter with 30,000+ subscribers; the "Your Swindon" e-newsletter established in September 2016 with 700+ subscribers; and the fortnightly Highways News established in June 2016 (which is well received) with 1,800+ subscribers. 'Your Swindon' – the main council newsletter and as such a potential channel for a consistent source of council information for residents – is only sent out sporadically. The council should seek ways to maximise the reach and impact of "Your Swindon" by making it a regular feature and, with data protection regulations in consideration, find ways of capturing the e-mail addresses of current and future My Account users to optimise audience reach. It is possible for residents to sign up to one or more e-newsletters, however the website does not advertise this and the signup page is difficult to find.

6.6 Internal communications

During the review we were not able to speak to many frontline staff. Most of the evidence regarding internal communications, therefore, is based upon a small number of conversations, the results of the staff survey, reading of internal documents, meetings with a UNISON representative and meetings with middle management.

Generally staff feel there is good 'visibility' of senior leadership – members, Chief Executive and Directors are well recognised by staff. Similarly, the staff survey showed that staff feel well informed by their immediate manager regarding developments within their immediate teams (although staff response rates for the survey were quite low at 46% which could suggest low staff engagement).

There is a strong understanding of the Swindon Programme across all levels of the organisation (many people were able to reflect back to the '£30 million in 30 months' target for the council) and there is a high-level engagement plan for the Swindon Programme. Various communication activities (including direct staff briefing sessions) have been undertaken to support this awareness. The council does need to ensure that there is a clarity of message regarding the envisaged transformation/ efficiency programme including the potential effects on staff. At present there appeared to be widely differing perceptions as regards the potential effects

The traditional communication method of a weekly newsletter is valued, but we were told there is a danger of communication overload with the daily media briefing sent to all staff summarising local media reports cited as an example of 'too much information'. We do not feel that this is necessary for all staff and it may also exacerbate the tendency for the

organisation to sometimes be over sensitive to local media reports at the expense of keeping a focus on strategic communications.

At present there is no clear internal communications and staff engagement strategy (although a high level communications plan does exist for the Swindon Programme). It was noted that on 27 November 2017 the Resources and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on 'Delivery of Professional Communications Support' which reported 'An audit of existing internal communication channels and activity is currently being carried out, to include seeking input from managers across the Council on how we can better support them to communicate corporate information to their teams. The input from this audit will inform the development of a Council-wide staff communications and engagement strategy next year, linked to objectives around improving specific measures in the staff survey'.

We welcome this audit and that a formal staff communications and engagement strategy will be put in place. The existing communications strategy does have a section on internal engagement but it is light on detail and approach. Although there are numerous staff communication channels there does not appear to be a strategic approach and, as part of this, there is a need to clarify the role of managers as communicators for corporate messaging. The strategy must also ensure that it encompasses and promotes two-way channels of communication and – staff engagement. This work needs to be jointly led by Communications and HR.

Other internal communication channels were cited as being useful for finding out 'what's going on'. These include 'off line' approaches such as TV screens, good use of notice boards and a regular forum for around 80 middle managers to pass on important corporate information for wider dissemination. The intranet, however, is an underdeveloped resource including, we were told, that some basic information requires four 'clicks' to access and the 'have your say' function is not visible. Development of the intranet should form part of the overall staff engagement strategy and should involve staff in its development.

7 Key recommendations

We have summarised our recommendations under two headings. The first we have labelled '**quick wins**', essentially those matters that can and should be dealt with as soon as possible, which, if addressed will help create the environment for the **longer term** recommendations to also be achieved.

Quick wins

- The Communications Strategy needs to be formally adopted and signed off by political and managerial leadership
- Develop an annual campaigns plan fully funded and approved by Cabinet and CMT
- Develop a strategic communication plan for the Swindon Programme
- Undertake a 'who reads what' survey
- Undertake an audit of internal communications activity
- Social media training for members
- Head of Communications should attend every LAG and CMT
- Consider physically relocating the communications team

- Seek ways to increase partnership working and develop a public sector communications board
- Develop links with parish councils and residents associations/ community groups
- Maximise the reach and impact of “Your Swindon”
- Reintroduce annual all staff road shows with Leader and Chief Executive

Longer term

- Develop a clear narrative and place brand for Swindon linked to corporate vision and priorities
- Undertake a full audit of communication resources and spend across the Council
- Consider reviewing communications activity across Switch On To Swindon, One Swindon and Forward Swindon to ensure consistency of messages
- Research perceptions of the current brand
- Develop a clear residents engagement strategy in partnership with residents, business and partners
- Finalise the audit of social media and establish a clear social media policy
- Develop a home page with campaign functionality
- Maximise communications with My Account users
- Review print and design function

8 Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate that you will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions with your senior managerial and political leadership in order to determine how the council wishes to take things forward.

As part of the communications peer review process, there is an offer of further support. I would be very happy to discuss any areas for development and improvement where the LGA can help you. Andy Bates is the main contact between your authority and LGA for any wider support. His contact details are: andy.bates@local.gov.uk 07919 562849.

Yours sincerely

David Holdstock
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Local Government Association