

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### **Report to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Panel**

**Date**                    **21 October 2024**

**Report of:**            **Assistant Chief Executive Officer**

**Subject:**              **COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

#### **SUMMARY**

The report presents to the Panel the draft of the Council's new Communications and Engagement Strategy document, which will support the Council's Corporate Strategy 2023 – 2029. The Strategy sets out the draft vision, aims and priorities which are designed to improve communications and engagement with both our internal and external audiences. The report will be presented at the 4 November Executive where approval will be sought for a public consultation on the draft strategy.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the draft Communications and Engagement Strategy and Executive report.

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive for Decision

04 November 2024

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Policy and Resources
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Communications and Engagement Strategy</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	Policy, Research and Engagement Manager
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	Responsive, inclusive and innovative Council

#### **Purpose:**

To seek approval to consult on the Draft Communications and Engagement Strategy, which sets out proposals for how the Council will communicate and engage with our diverse audiences.

#### **Executive summary:**

The creation and implementation of a new Communications and Engagement Strategy is a key project to be delivered under Priority Six of the Corporate Strategy 2023 – 2029 which aims to ensure we are ‘a responsive, inclusive and innovative Council.’

The Communications and Engagement landscape has changed during recent years, with many more people consuming news and engaging online. However, a core group of people prefer to engage using more traditional methods.

To ensure we continue to meet the needs of our diverse audiences a draft Communications and Engagement Strategy has been developed. This is based around a series of proposed aims, supporting priorities and projects with which to guide better communications and engagement with both external and internal customers of the Council.

Approval is sought to consult on the draft strategy.

#### **Recommendation/Recommended Option:**

It is recommended that the Executive approves a public consultation on the Draft Communications and Engagement Strategy.

**Reason:**

To ensure that the Council's approach to communications and engagement reflects the changing needs of our staff, residents, businesses and partners.

**Cost of proposals:** The cost of implementing the strategy will be funded using current budgets.

**Appendices: A: The Draft Communications and Engagement Strategy**

**Background papers: None**

**Reference papers: None**

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## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Executive Briefing Paper

<b>Date:</b>	04 November 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Communications and Engagement Strategy
<b>Briefing by:</b>	Policy, Research and Engagement Manager
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Policy and Resources

#### INTRODUCTION

1. This report outlines the development of the draft Communications and Engagement Strategy, covers the main proposals in the document, and seeks approval for a public consultation.
- 2. Background**
3. The creation and implementation of a new Communications and Engagement Strategy is a key project to be delivered under Priority Six of the Corporate Strategy 2023 – 2029 which aims to ensure we are ‘a responsive, inclusive and innovative Council.’
4. The current Strategy has been in place since 2013. Since then, there have been significant changes in technology and culture. For example, an estimated 97.8% of the UK are internet users, with 82.8% accessing social media regularly. News, messages and sometimes misinformation can spread rapidly across online and social media platforms.
5. Whilst most of our residents and businesses are online, a core group still prefers to engage with us using more traditional methods such as in person or over the phone.
6. It is an appropriate time to review our Communications and Engagement Strategy, to help ensure we continue to meet the changing needs of our diverse audiences.
- 7. Developing the Draft Strategy**
8. The Draft Strategy was developed following workshops with all service areas across the Council so as to better understand their needs, and the known needs of their customers. We also conducted an all-staff communications survey in 2023.

9. From this work, it was clear that staff wanted to improve their awareness of work taking place elsewhere in the Council and to better understand how each job fits into our corporate priorities. It also became clear that we could do more to utilise the knowledge and experience of our staff across the Council to help shape decision making, as many are also residents who regularly use our services, visit the town centre, etc.
10. Surveys were also conducted online and via social media to better understand what the Council's external customers want from communications. We also engaged face-to-face at a number of high footfall events during Summer 2024. These included D-Day 80, 999 Day and the Fareham Community Showcase. At these, officers ensured they spoke with people who may not have online access to better understand their needs.
11. From our external engagement it became clear that most customers use online sources to stay up to date with local news or have their say on topics. However, a core group of residents prefer to use more traditional methods.
12. These findings matched the UK wide statistics with regards to online access and use. It was therefore clear that whilst the new Communications and Engagement should have a strong digital focus, it should also look to provide people not online with good opportunities to stay informed and have their say.

### **13. Overview of the Draft Strategy Proposals**

14. The Draft Strategy is based around a series of proposed aims, supporting priorities and projects with which to guide better communications and engagement with both external and internal customers of the Council. The following provides a top-level overview of these with greater detail found in Appendix A:
  - **Aim 1** - Ensure all staff are well informed about the work of the Council and how they and others contribute to it.
  - **Priority 1.1** - *Improve staff awareness of work across the Council:* Actions include improving access to the intranet for operatives at the Depot, as well as making content easier to find on SID and highlighting 'hidden heroes' across the Council in the staff newsletter, 'Our News'
  - **Priority 1.2** - *Raise awareness of our corporate priorities, alongside our internal values and behaviours and our staff's role in delivering them:* Actions include an annual in-person event for all staff, service open days, regular Teams 'lunches' hosted SLT, embedding corporate priorities in documents, and emails where appropriate.
  - **Aim 2** - Ensure we listen and respond to staff.
  - **Priority 2.1** – *Better utilise the skills and experience of staff across the Council.* Actions include internal workshops, surveys and consultations on internal and external topics, and a refresh of the Service Information Directory (SID) pages.

- **Aim 3** - Engaging external audiences.
  - **Priority 3.1** - *Maximise the effectiveness of outgoing communications.* Actions include social media guidance for both Councillors and Officers, better on-line communication, and improvements to the way we engage with harder to reach groups, such as young people and commercial tenants. We will also continue to embed and regularly review the Tenant Engagement Strategy.
  - **Priority 3.2** - *Maximise the potential of social media for consultation and engagement.* Actions include the development of a corporate social media strategy, incorporating guidance on LinkedIn for Council staff and Members and relaunching the Council's e-panel.
  - **Priority 3.3** - *Ensure those offline remain well informed and connected.* Actions focus on more effective in-person engagement at high footfall events, a review of noticeboards, and the development of volunteer champions to build relationships with offline groups.
  - **Aim 4** - Build Trust with more residents.
  - **Priority 4.1** - *Improve transparency in our consultations.* Actions include ensuring clarity on what can and cannot be influenced in a consultation, and an improvement on the quality of feedback from consultations.
  - **Aim 5** - Good value for money services.
  - **Priority 5.1** - *Explore ways to cover some of our service costs.* Actions include promotion of possible film locations across the Borough, and sponsorship options for wildflower areas.
15. Some actions in the Strategy such as the launch of the Let's Talk Fareham Facebook Page have already been completed. It is intended that the Strategy will be a living document and the aims, priorities and actions updated as required according to the changing needs of our audiences.
  16. If approved, a public consultation on the Draft Strategy would take place between 20 November and 8 January. In addition to the normal usual online engagement and Let's Talk Fareham Facebook page, officers would attend the Christmas Light Switch On to get feedback from visitors, with opportunities for people to have their say at locations such as libraries.
  17. Any amendments to the Strategy would then be made ahead of it being presented for final approval at the February Executive.

### **Conclusion**

18. The Draft Communications and Engagement Strategy aims to help ensure we continue to meet the changing needs of our diverse audiences.

### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Roy Brown - Policy, Research and Engagement Manager, Tel: 01329 824489, Email: [RBrown@Fareham.Gov.UK](mailto:RBrown@Fareham.Gov.UK)