# EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2014-2017
# R100

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| MEETING: | COUNCIL |
| DATE: | 17 DECEMBER 2014 |
| REPORT BY: | COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING MANAGER |
| WARD: | ALL |
| COMMUNITY FORUM: | ALL |
| KEY DECISION REFERENCE (IF APPLICABLE): | 442 |
| BACKGROUND PAPERS | Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum review of external communications http://chesterfield.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s4870/Appendix%201.pdf |

**FOR PUBLICATION**

### 1.0 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To seek approval for the council's External Communications Strategy 2014 to 2017.

### 2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That Council approves and adopts the proposed External Communications Strategy and action plan (appendices 1 and 2).

### 3.0 **BACKGROUND**

3.1 Chesterfield Borough Council has never had a formal External Communications Strategy.

3.2   Between November 2013 and June 2014 a project group from the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum carried out a review of external communications (see background papers).

3.3   The review had three objectives:

*a) To review and evaluate current practice with regards to external communications. To identify what we are doing well and what we need to improve.*

*b) To find out about the external communication strategies of other councils and assess the possibility of transferring some of these ideas to Chesterfield Borough Council.*

*c) To make recommendations to ensure that the strategy is customer led and enables Chesterfield Borough Council to move forward with technology to be a council fit for the times in which we live.*

3.4   The project group visited the City of Lincoln Council, Derbyshire County Council and the Peak District National Park Authority to see the operations of their communications teams. In addition they carried out desk based research looking at communication strategies from other councils, analysing the results of the Are You Being Served? residents' survey and Google analytical data about the council's website usage.

3.5   The project group presented their report to the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum on 19 June 2014. Their recommendations were then formally presented to Cabinet on 29 July 2014.

3.6   These were:

*a) That the council adopts clear branding and a 'one council' approach.*

*b) A review to look at how better coordination of marketing and communication activities can be achieved to enable the objectives of the new communications strategy to be delivered. This may involve the need for a review of the organisational structure.*

*c) That analytics (the discovery and communication of meaningful patterns in data) is used to guide web*

*content and to be able to better predict and improve performance.*

*d) That the council consider adopting a 'digital first approach' to all its external communication.*

3.7 Cabinet agreed to accept the recommendations and asked the Communications and Marketing Manager to incorporate them as part of the proposed External Communications Strategy now being presented for approval.

3.8 The strategy also takes into account other issues affecting the council.

These include:

- Increasing customer service expectations of the council

- Changes to the demographic make-up of Chesterfield's resident population

- Operating in an environment of frequent public policy changes

- Cuts to public sector spending

- The desire for channel shift, enabling more customers to carry out transactions with the council that are more convenient for them and cheaper for the council to manage

3.9 The strategy was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 2 December, 2014 and it recommended for adoption by full Council the proposed External Communications Strategy and action plan. (Cabinet Minute No.127 2014/15)

3.10 At the meeting Cabinet approved the accompanying media protocol (appendix 3) to replace the existing document. (Cabinet Minute No.127 2014/15)

3.11 Cabinet also approved the recommendation that the social media policy (appendix 4) should replace existing documents, and that the necessary amendments to the existing HR and ICT policies are made to cross reference to the new policy. (Cabinet Minute No.127 2014/15)

3.12 At the meeting Cabinet approved the accompanying style guide (appendix 5) as the standard writing style for external communications. (Cabinet Minute No.127 2014/15)

3.13 Cabinet also supported the recommendation that six monthly progress reports on the implementation of the strategy are presented to the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum and Cabinet. (Cabinet Minute No.127 2014/15)

**4.0  ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

4.1 The proposed strategy sets out eight key objectives to achieve by the end of 2017.

4.2 Many of the objectives are aimed at addressing the changing consumer expectations of communicating with and transacting with the council.

4.3 In particular there is a need for the council to always think of digital communication channels first as these are the areas experiencing rapid growth in contacts from our customers.

4.4 In many cases our online offer for customers can be enhanced, particularly through greater integration of different communication channels. For example, providing video clips for websites and social media sites.

4.5 While these communication channels offer many opportunities to reach out to different audiences in better ways it is important that more traditional methods of paper based communication are continued to ensure we meet the needs of all of our community.

4.6 Increasingly, it is also important for the council to generate more income and be more commercial in its approach to services. So the strategy also sets out objectives to help achieve this, including work to develop the council's brand and marketing of services.

4.7 As part of the development of the draft strategy the existing media protocol and social media policy have both been updated (appendices 3 and 4) to reflect the changes in technology and the communications environment since they were originally written.

4.8    To support the move towards digital first communications a style guide has also been produced which will enable the council to communicate with one voice on websites and in corporate communications publications even if different members of staff are writing the copy.

4.9    <u>Legal and data protection considerations</u>

When communicating with the public all staff are required to ensure they are adhering to the relevant data protection legislation and other general legal requirements (eg defamation laws). It is particularly important that no personal data is revealed in public communications.

## 5.0    EVALUATION

5.1    The strategy sets out a number of measures which the council will monitor to establish the success of its external communications activity.

5.2    A key element of this will be the bi-annual Are You Being Served? resident surveys which will monitor measures tracking opinions on our overall communication, brand advocacy and the council website. Analytical data will also be used to measure website, social media and media relations targets.

## 6.0    RISK MANAGEMENT

| Risks | Impact | Likelihood | Mitigating Action | Residual Impact | Residual Likelihood |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of staff buy-in to delivering the strategy | High | Possible | Provide clear internal communications to staff, managers and councillors outlining the objectives and the actions being taken to address them. | Low | Unlikely |
| Corporate branding not enforced allowing mixed messages to be communicated to the public | Medium | Possible | A system will be set up to ensure all communications activity is checked by the corporate communications team against the branding guidelines before being published | Low | Unlikely |

## 7.0   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1   It is anticipated that the actions to deliver the strategy can be met from existing budgets. During the course of the strategy if any additional initiatives are required which have financial implications officers will produce a business case, with full costs, and seek the appropriate approval.

## 8.0   EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)

8.1   A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and can be seen at appendix 6. It confirms there are positive benefits to adopting the proposed strategy.

9.0   **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

9.1   That Council approves and adopts the proposed External Communications Strategy and action plan (appendices 1 and 2).

**10.0  REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1  To provide a strategic approach to improving external communications with residents, businesses and visitors.

10.2  To help communicate the council's corporate plan priorities and actions, including the corporate aim of 'making it easier for customers to contact us'.

You can get more information about this report from John Fern on 01246 345245.