

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Communications Strategy Quarterly Performance Monitoring (April-June 2021)**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Services**

Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, Chief Officer, Commercial and Customer**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
w/c23/08/21	26/08/21	07.09.21			10/09/21	22/09/21		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
To present the quarter 1 update (April to June 2021) against the Corporate Communications Strategy.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The Corporate Communications Strategy was approved by Council in September 2020.
 - 2.2 There are 6 themes which drive the communications delivery:
 - Build and maintain a strong reputation;
 - Residents know how we are delivering council priorities;
 - Informed and engaged staff;
 - Ensure marketing campaigns are well planned, targeted and provide value for money;
 - Promote the use of digital communications channels and encourage self-service where appropriate;
 - Make sure residents are informed in advance of and at times of emergency.
 - 2.3 The communications response to the Covid-19 pandemic which started in March 2020 continued during the first quarter (April- June 21). Communication activity focused on the shifting pandemic conditions including a focus on communicating the timescale for easing of restrictions and mass vaccination programme.
 - 2.4 The Corporate Communications Team remains a key member of the Gwent Local Resilience Forum Warning and Informing Group. This group is responsible for aligning communications and communicating key information to the residents of Gwent during the phases of the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring a consistent approach between local partners, PHW

and Welsh Government. The content has been a mixture of partner material (Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Health Board) and content created by the team maximising their creative skills.

- 2.5 The move into the recovery phase of the pandemic meant that the Communications team was able to pick up other priorities within the strategy including building the council's reputation, making sure that residents are aware of council priorities and promotion of digital and self-service where appropriate.
- 2.6 The Senedd and PCC Elections in May required significant resource and meant that some work was put on hold during the pre-Election period. However, appendix 1 details the media coverage for the period covering a wide range of topics which ensured that more of the corporate communications strategy priorities were planned and delivered.

A communications strategy was developed to reflect the new operating model and a detailed delivery plan will follow as a priority.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The report will be considered by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on 10th September 2021 and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.
- 3.2 **Option 1:** That the Executive considers and accepts the quarter 4 (January to March 2021) update against the Communication Strategy.

Option 2: That the Executive Committee considers the quarter 4 (January to March 2021) update against the Communication Strategy and suggests areas for improvement.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1 The Communication Strategy supports the Corporate Plan and the Well Being plan as part of the governance framework.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The communication activity is delivered within the existing budget whilst maximising material created by partners including Welsh Government and Public Health Wales and Individual marketing campaigns supported by external funded via partners (eg WRAP Cymru).

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The Corporate Communications Team will work with colleagues and partners to ensure communications plans are delivered in a timely manner

5.3 **Legal**

All internal and external communications activities will take account of any legal issues that may arise from publications and potential challenge.

Communication activities reflect the decision making of the Council and any exempt items will be treated in confidence. Communications relating to individuals will also protect their privacy rights.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There was a vacancy within the team from early May 2020 which reduced capacity. This role has been filled and the new post holder will focus on internal communications and delivery of the communications plan for new ways of working. This is a key priority within the Corporate Communications strategy and a dedicated resource is a key enabler to delivery.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Key activity for the quarter is outlined in Appendix 2. This includes:

- 84,000 visitors to the Council website viewing around 5 pages per visit. This figure is down on the previous quarter reflecting the reduced visits for Covid related information as the national position improved. This quarter is comparable to the pre Covid trend.
- 3,200 social media posts – an average of 260 per week; this is down on the previous reporting period due to the Pre-Election period and reduced Covid related response information. The number of social media followers remains steady with Facebook followed by 15,000 residents.

Digital communication has a number of benefits for the Council as we can send out information regularly and reach key audiences in large numbers very quickly.

- Proactive media activity stepped up and we sent out 31 press releases compared to 19 in the previous quarter.
- Media coverage increased with 54 articles published covering a range of positive topics including reflecting Council priorities:
 - Funding for road improvements
 - Litter strategy launch
 - Aspire shortlisting for national award
 - Education including expanding the places available in Pen y Cwm and proposals for Welsh language learning provision
 - Ebbw Valley railway investment
 - Advanced engineering training facility approval

- **Senedd and PCC Elections**
Blaenau Gwent was responsible for both the constituency and regional returns. This involved co-ordinating communications activity on a regional and national level. We also had to support BBC, ITV, S4C and print media pre-Election and over 3 days of the count to deliver their coverage in a safe manner within Covid restrictions in place at the time.
- **Launch of the community hubs**
To support the new operating model a detailed communications plan was developed and delivered to support the launch of the new community hubs. This involved a mix of traditional print, digital and online media. The work was phased with a soft launch in June and an uplift in activity as the hubs opening hours were extended.
- **Climate Assembly**
The team supported the promotion of the climate assembly output report and recommendations. This included working with partners to ensure consistent messaging and raising awareness of the decarbonisation agenda.
- **Covid communications focused on restrictions easing, mobile testing and the mass vaccination campaign;**
- **Internal communication remains very important and regular messaging using the following channels continued - the MD message, briefings for Elected Members and regular staff information. An internal communication plan supporting the move to the new operating model continued to be developed and included new features such as a revised staff newsletter. Further updates will be provided in the quarter 2 update.**

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The focus until early 2021 has been on managing crisis communications and the response to Covid-19. The main objective has been regular and timely information for the public to keep them informed as the Covid pandemic shifted through a number of phases during the quarter.

During this quarter, there was more emphasis on delivering wider communications on council strategies and priorities, as the Covid situation eased.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Internal communication will be measured for impact through staff feedback and engagement activities.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The Communication Strategy supports the corporate plan objectives and strategies which look to the longer term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

It is anticipated that effective and proactive communications will contribute to education and information campaigns designed to influence behaviour. Campaigns relating to littering, recycling and fly tipping and fostering are examples that have been supported by the communications activity.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Council works with other local authorities, partners and Welsh Government on a regular basis to deliver local, regional and national campaigns

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

Opportunities for promoting cross cutting service impact will be identified as part of the communication campaigns including in relation to integrated marketing.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The Communications team supported the promotion of the climate assembly report and recommendations as an important element of the council's decarbonisation plan.

Promotion of the littering strategy was also undertaken in this quarter as part of the launch activity.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

Not applicable.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***

A screening exercise on the communications strategy was undertaken. Material is produced in different formats and content accessibility is reviewed. Requirements in relation to the Welsh Language are considered as part of the wider communications activity planning.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Quarterly progress reporting against the Communications Strategy is part of the forward work programme of Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Committee

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 Media coverage*
- *Appendix 2 Communications Summary*