

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **10th December 2021**
Report Subject: **Communications Strategy Quarterly Performance Monitoring (July - September 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)
Nov 2021	Nov 2021	29.11.21			10.12.21	12.12.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

To present the quarter 2 update (July to September 2021) against the Corporate Communications Strategy.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The Corporate Communications Strategy was approved by Council in 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 continued during the second quarter (July to September 21). Communication activity focused on the easing of restrictions, testing, return to school arrangements and the 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 continued to pick up other priorities within the strategy including building the Council's reputation, making sure that residents are aware of Council priorities.
- 2.6 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. Coverage increased significantly in Q2 compared to the first quarter reflecting the focus priorities. 89 press articles appeared in Q2 compared to 54 in Q1 (an increase of 40%).
- 2.7 A Communications Strategy is in place to support the new operating model with staff communications including Wellbeing Wednesday being issued every week and a revised format to the staff newsletter.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 That Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee

Option 1: Considers and provides comment on the quarter 2 progress update against the Communications Strategy, prior to the report being presented to Executive Committee.

Option 2: Considers the quarter 2 progress update against the Communications Strategy and provides recommendation, prior to the report being presented to Executive Committee.

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**

A new Officer started in the team in September meaning the team is back to full strength. 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:

- 100,000 visitors to the Council website. This figure is up on the previous quarter reflecting the increased focus on promoting Council strategies.
- 2,130 social media posts – an average of 177 per week; this is down on the previous reporting period. The number of social media followers remains steady with Facebook followed by 15,000 residents and our Twitter account by just over 11,500.

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 48 press releases compared to 31 in the previous quarter.
- Media coverage increased with 89 articles published covering a range of positive topics including reflecting Council priorities:
 - Housing developments including the £16m Golwg y Bryn and the £29 Carn Y Cefn schemes in Ebbw Vale
 - Extended opening hours and range of services for the community hubs
 - Food and Fun summer campaign in schools
 - A Level and GCSE success
 - Refurbishment work at South Roseheyworth Business allowing companies like Insurgo Media Services to develop their business
 - Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary school's new outdoor learning area constructed by Alun Griffiths Ltd
 - Positive end of year 2020-21 revenue budget
 - Our award winning apprentices- Aspire Apprentices of the Year

- **Council wins Armed Forces Gold Award**
In recognition for its work the Council was awarded the highest badge of honour, Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award in the summer. This is awarded to those organisations that employ and support those who serve, veterans and their families
- **Decarbonisation progress.**
We reported that good progress is being made against the Council's 9 key target areas for focus a year after Council agreed its formal decarbonisation plan. The first area of focus is on Transport Direct which makes up 8% of the Council's gross carbon emissions. The Council now has a clear action plan in place for this area and communications plan for this area is being development to keep internal and external audiences up to date with progress.
- **Ciner Glass visit.**
Mrs Didem Ciner met Welsh political and council leaders including the First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, to discuss plans for glass container production in Blaenau Gwent in late September.
- **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 was introduced and 2 staff newsletters were sent out in July and August to update staff on key developments and changes to policy.**

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*