

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **11th December 2020**

Report Subject: **Corporate Communications Strategy Performance Monitoring**

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

Report Submitted by: **Anne-Louise Clark, Chief Officer Commercial**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
18.11.20	19.11.20	01.12.20			11.12.20	13.01.21		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To consider the performance of the Communication Strategy, focus on the impact of the strategy during COVID19 Pandemic. The period covered will be from March to September 2020.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The Corporate Communications Strategy was approved and accepted by Council in September 2020. Its main objective is to ensure that as a Commercial organisation the Council is seen as a trusted brand delivering quality services.
 - 2.2 The overall objective of the strategy is to deliver excellent, innovative and cost effective two-way communications, building a positive reputation and increasing trust and confidence that the Council is delivering services that meet resident, businesses and visitor's needs.
 - 2.3 There are 6 ambitions or themes which will 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.
 - 2.4 The response to Covid-19 pandemic which started in March 2020 and continues has meant that the delivery of the strategy has almost entirely

focused on the objective to ensure that residents (staff and Members) are informed at times of emergency. This is an unprecedented challenge and the move to remote working meant that the importance of digital and social media became even more significant.

2.5 This dynamic and fast moving environment required an almost constant flow of information and content being produced by the Communications team for these channels. Our aim was to produce clear and effective communication, coordinated between all sectors.

2.6 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Corporate Communications was a key member of Gwent LRF Warning and Informing Group. This group is responsible for aligning communications and communicating key information to the residents of Gwent during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring a consistent approach between local partners, PHW and Welsh Government. The content was a mixture of partner material (Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Health Board) and content created by the team using their creative skills.

2.7 The **aims** of the communication plan for the Covid-19 response are:

- To provide strategic direction for organisations involved in communicating a major incident or a situation where a multi-agency response is required;
- To ensure that the Gwent public, stakeholders, the media are informed in a timely manner about an outbreak and what they need to do to reduce transmission and to keep Wales safe;
- To ensure consistent use of terminology;
- To ensure that there is clear leadership and coordination of all communications activities, and that all communications activities are aligned with and supportive of each other – in line with the Gwent Warning and Informing plan and the All Wales Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020a);
- To ensure that communications activity and messaging around an outbreak in Wales is carried out in line with the overall Welsh approach to dealing with the pandemic;
- To effectively communicate and share information with the communities and individuals directly affected to maintain confidence and compliance with guidance / expectations;
- To align with existing Keep Wales Safe Communications campaigns.

2.8 Lead Responders ensure the following **objectives** feature prominently in the Prevention and Response Communication Plan:

- Reassurance
- Raising awareness of any risks
- Provide proactive information on how to protect family and loved ones
- Advise on steps being taken to handle the situation
- Explain steps that will be taken to return to normality.

Appendix 1 highlights the volume of communications and some information on channel usage during the crisis.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** That Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee notes the performance of the Communication Strategy, particularly on the impact of the strategy during COVID19 Pandemic. The period covered will be from March to September 2020.

3.2 **Option 2:** That Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee provides comments and challenges the performance of the Communication Strategy.

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

4.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (Section 15), places a duty on all Local Authorities in Wales to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. As part of this, the Council is required to develop a Corporate Plan. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 also places individual duties on public bodies. The legislation is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and creating a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future. The Corporate Communications Strategy supports these objectives by delivering timely and informative communications to residents and staff.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There is no direct impact on budgets.

The majority of Council communications uses digital channels. Much of the material used in the first half of 2020 was created by partners like Welsh Government and Public Health Wales to manage the Covid-19 pandemic. Individual marketing campaigns are often externally funded by partners (eg WRAP).

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 are no human resource implications.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

- Accurate and balanced media coverage
- Increased specialist and national media coverage.
- Increasing number of visitors to the Council website.
- More social media followers.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

The focus of the first half of 2020 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 in a rapidly changing environment,

Communications regarding the delivery of essential public services, changes to service and introduction of brand new services has been a feature. Improving access to relevant information delivered in a timely manner utilising multiple channels.

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

Research will be carried out with residents on a regular basis to check the impact of our external communications activities. Internal communication will also be measured for impact through regular staff engagement activities.

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

The role of the Council in building the reputation of the area and shaping Blaenau Gwent the place is significant. The Communication Strategy articulates the approach the Council will take to ensure the longer term objectives of the Corporate Plan and The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and represented and the impact of the Council's work is promoted positively.

This remains our long term objective but the response to Covid-19 and its unprecedented challenges has meant short term focus on this.

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 of this however across the life of the Communications Strategy there will be many other areas of behavioural change that will be significant.

This remains our long term objective but the response to Covid-19 and its unprecedented challenges has meant short term focus on this.

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 and particularly in relation to integrated marketing. Developing our reputation as a trusted brand will include demonstrating how our services collectively impact in positive ways for our households and businesses.

6.8 ***EqIA***

All communication activities will be screened to ensure there is no adverse impact on protected characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The Communications Strategy will be monitored as part of the Directorate Performance Management arrangements and all activities will be monitored through Corporate Leadership Team and Executive Committee quarterly. Regular updates on impact will be discussed with the Executive Member.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Summary of Activity and Key Facts