

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **16th June 2021**

Report Subject: **Corporate Communications Strategy - Quarterly Update**

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

Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, Interim 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)
w/c 22/3/21	25/3/21	28.05.21			16.04.21	16.06.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider the quarter 4 update (January to March 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 response to the Covid-19 pandemic which started in March 2020 and continues, has meant that the delivery of the strategy has almost entirely focused on the theme relating to communication at times of emergency. During this time of unprecedented challenge, the importance of digital and social media has become even more significant.

- 2.4 As previously reported to committee, the Corporate Communications Team is 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 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 dynamic and fast moving nature of the Pandemic has required an almost constant flow of information and content being produced by the Communications Team, with the aim to produce clear and effective communication, coordinated between all sectors.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 As the National picture moves between response and recovery, so will the focus of the communication activity.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee recommended Option 1 at its meeting on 16th April 2021.
- 3.1 **Option 1:** That the Executive considers and accepts the quarter 4 (January to March 2021) update against the Communication Strategy.
- 3.2 **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)***

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***

Key activity for the quarter is outlined in Appendix 1. This includes:

- Trace, track and protect key information communicated;
- Lockdown information and promoting the required response from the public under the restrictions in Wales;
- Schools and learners remote learning arrangements communicated;
- Vaccine programme key information;
- Internal communication channels continued including the MD message, briefing for Elected Members and staff information;
- 197,000 visitors to the Council website;
- 4,900 social media posts – an average of 400 per week; and
- Working with service areas to promote key information.

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

The focus in late 2020 and 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 in a rapidly changing environment.

Communications regarding the delivery of essential public services, changes to services 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 are 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***

Material is produced in different formats and improving website accessibility remains a priority.

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 – Summary of key activity for the quarter