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Corporate Communications Strategy
2014 - 2019

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Introduction

The role of Corporate Communications at Waverley is to ensure that information about our services reaches the right people at the right time in the most accurate, efficient and cost-effective way. We capture information and feedback from our customers in a number of ways such as Citizens' Panel, customer satisfaction surveys and website feedback, which all helps to shape our communications.

Our Communications Strategy sets out a clear framework for council communications and gives direction to publications, digital, press, emergency and internal communications. Research shows that communication with residents is a key driver of overall satisfaction with council performance. Communication is also at the heart of good customer service. We will strive to meet customer expectations through our communications, ensuring that they are timely, straightforward and trusted.

The Strategy reflects the continued growth in 'all things digital' and captures the progress we need to make to keep up with customer expectations. At the same time, a significant number of our customers are not adopters of digital technology or simply prefer to access information via our customer magazine 'Making Waves', the telephone or the press and we will continue to support customers in this way.

Ultimately all of our communications are led by our councillors and Corporate Management Team and are delivered by officers.

1.0 Aims

The aims of the Strategy are:

- to ensure that our information is easy to understand, access and interact with and that we listen to our customers - reflecting their feedback into service development and communications.
- to clearly define and communicate our identity, roles and responsibilities to different stakeholder groups; elected members, staff, residents, businesses, visitors and partners.
- for all our stakeholders to have a clear understanding and positive perception of us and what we do; leading to even higher levels of satisfaction and engagement.
- to place communication at the centre of all council activities – one organisation with clear, strong, messages underpinned by consistent standards.
- to provide a framework and advice for effective communication across the organisation.

2.0 Key Principles

- **Achieving measurable change or action**
We will continue to roll out an outcome focus on all campaign planning - ensuring that resources are utilised in the most efficient way possible, with the greatest impact.
- **Deliver effective and efficient communication**
We will use the most appropriate communications channels to reach customers and target our efforts on the channels that have the biggest impact and give us the best return.
- **Proactive, customer focussed approach**
Currently a disproportionate amount of officer time is taken up handling media enquiries that do not result in key information about services being delivered to our customers. Our new approach will prioritise media activity according to corporate priorities, decision making and service delivery.
- **Digital first**
Some of our customers do not and will not access our information or services via digital channels and so we will continue to provide this in person, on the telephone, in writing and in printed publications. However the demand for information from our website and social media illustrates the growing expectation from our customers for information and services to be delivered in this way. For those customers who already turn first to the web to find information, we will continue to grow the availability, quality and accessibility of our digital communication.
- **News delivered at the heart of our communities**
Waverley has a strong network of communities who share information and news. At the same time we often experience unfairly negative headlines in the local print press, bearing in mind these have an increasingly limited reach to, and impact on, our customers. Broadcast press tend to offer a balanced approach but again have limited reach. Digital and offline communities present us with excellent opportunities to own our message to the point of delivery. Digital media also enables us to deliver messages in almost real time, in a way that cannot be achieved through the local media.

- **Connected councillors**

Our councillors are already well established as ambassadors of the Council. We will continue to deliver existing communications to councillors and develop new ways of keeping them informed. Participation in social media is now a mainstream activity and will only continue to grow. If local government does not keep up with the pace we will become increasingly less relevant. We will support those councillors who wish to, to share our news and better reach their communities through social media.

3.0 Key Aspirations and Issues

Consultation has taken place with the Deputy Leader, the Portfolio Holder for Communications and other councillors, the Executive Director, Corporate Management Team, Heads of Service and Connectors (a broad selection of team leaders).

Feedback from these groups has identified consistent aspirations and issues for the Council's communications.

- Some are customers happy with no engagement unless they instigate (pull rather than push)
- Wider consultation needed – e.g. the voluntary and business sectors
- VALUE (our Corporate Plan) really works, need to promote more
- Consistent Waverley tone of voice & image
- Contractors delivering Waverley's services shapes our reputation
- We don't promote our treasures well
- Plain English should be used more
- Being better informed of Council news
- Knowing who customers are and what they need (customer profiles)
- Word of mouth the most effective way of building satisfaction and reputation
- Time lag from delivering better service to improved customer perceptions
- Everyone has a partial view
- Do we get quantity of response in our surveys? Do we reach everyone we want to?
- Our website is good, but tries to do too much
- Look at wider use of text message system
- Increase our communication with town and parish councils – via press releases or newsletters
- More proactive PR
- A clearer approach to communication strategy in emergencies

4.0 External Communications

4.1 External key audiences and how we want people to feel about us

Waverley has a vast range of external audiences, which whilst having common threads running through them, each form different perceptions from their experiences of us and all have only a partial view of what we do.

Residents are by far our largest audience and some will welcome regular information from us whilst others prefer to have no dialogue unless we offer a new service, make a change or if something goes wrong.

Residents

A well run organisation - a safe pair of hands

Provide VALUE for money and forward thinking

To know about the range of services offered

Waverley is a great place to live – the Council helps protect and enhance the beautiful Borough

Customers that have direct contact with us

A well run organisation - a safe pair of hands

Provide VALUE for money and forward thinking

Efficient and get the job done

Honest and trustworthy

Visitors

Useful, welcoming and valued - the Council helps protect and enhance the beautiful Borough

Government / partners

A leading local authority

A well run organisation – a safe pair of hands

Innovative and forward thinking

Contractors

A well run organisation

Good to work with

Suppliers & businesses

A well run organisation – a safe pair of hands

Providing VALUE for money

Good to work with / do business with / partner

Efficient – not officious or bureaucratic

4.2 Publications Strategy

Printed publications will continue to lie at the heart of our communications and we will provide 'hardcopy' alternatives to digital communication, whilst encouraging customers to move to digital channels.

We will

- continue to develop ways to make these the best possible value for money by generating advertising revenue and reducing design and print costs through effective design and print procurement.
- ensure that content is timely, relevant and purposeful.
- provide digital alternatives and signpost to these on all hardcopy publications.

4.2.1 Making Waves

3 x per year

Delivered to all households and businesses

Content is planned around VALUE (our Corporate Plan)

4.2.2 Waverley Homes and People

3 x per year

Delivered to all council tenant homes

Content reflects corporate priorities Affordable Homes, Life and Leisure, Understanding Residents Needs.

4.2.3 A-Z of Services

1 x per year

Available on our website to download and as an interactive tool.

Comprehensive directory of Waverley Services, updated periodically.

4.2.4 Housing Annual Report

1 x per year

Delivered to all council tenant homes

Reflects work undertaken over the last year on our corporate priority Affordable Homes.

4.2.5 Email Newsletter

Statistics show that the digitally active community is continually growing, particularly in older age groups and we need to be part of this culture; embedding what we do into peoples' lives and ensuring that customers have the opportunity to get the best out of what we do.

Electronic newsletters provide a timely, highly cost effective and targeted form of communication to our customers. They are quick to produce in-house with little training and can be distributed to a large population at minimal cost. Electronic newsletters provide the most reliable way to ensure that our message is delivered without unbalanced reporting that often occurs in the local press. They can also be accessed via all forms of online device – PC, laptop, notebook, tablet and smart phone, giving our 'digitally active' customers information in a format they want.

The electronic newsletter and Making Waves will complement each other, with the newsletter providing a more frequent channel for latest news whilst also driving traffic to our website. It will provide the opportunity to link to more detailed information on our website and to social media.

We will

- publish a minimum of four editions of the electronic newsletter in the first year with an ambition to publish monthly editions.
- include news from all council services as it is available – creating the opportunity to 'cross market' services and initiatives to different customers.

4.3 Website Strategy

A Website Strategy was adopted in 2012 and is successfully embedded in the strategic planning and operational running of the Waverley website.

It is widely recognised that most visitors to local government websites do so to perform a specific task and many will arrive at the website without visiting the homepage. In 2011 58% of our web visitors came to the webpage they wanted from a search engine. This means that key information contained in latest news and the opportunity to cross sell other 'do it online' services, do not reach enough of our website visitors.

We will

- continue to invest in efficient processes for 'do it online'.
- develop an even more effective and efficient system for website updates whilst retaining the central management of the website in order to maintain the quality of content and customer experience.
- focus on delivering content and functionality that customers want and find easy to use.
- continue adopt new technologies, including mobile applications for our top tasks, social media and electronic newsletters to drive customers to digital information and services.
- benchmark the website's success against our peers and customers and monitor customer satisfaction and how they contact us.

4.4 Media Strategy

There is much more to media than column inches in local papers. Waverley has a well established and ever growing network of communities, particularly online, through which we can deliver our messages quickly and directly.

More formalised social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook have rapidly grown in stature as core communications channels in both business and consumer markets and our social media literate customers expect to be able to interact with us in this way. However the local press still provide a useful channel by which we can reach some of our customers and a number of opportunities are available to us to deliver a more effective, efficient and proactive press office function.

4.4.1 Press Office

Responding to media enquiries uses a disproportionate amount of staff time which reduces our opportunity to deliver a proactive media service and in turn reduces the potential impact of our more comprehensive message further down the line.

- We will adopt a more pro-active approach to issuing press releases and in doing so, aim to reduce the number of re-active media statements issued.
- We will identify proactive media opportunities at Executive Briefings for release after Executive, on decisions and / or recommendations to Council.
- We will distribute the decisions bulletin direct to the press after Executive.
- We will align our response to media enquiries with service delivery and project timetables and, where appropriate, provide reporters with provisional dates in the future when information will be issued by the Council via our press releases.
- Our Annual Communications Plan will be based on corporate priorities and Service Plans from across the Council.
- We will issue press releases to town and parish councils and to digital community networks.

4.4.2 Social Media

Waverley has an established and successful approach to social media; utilising Facebook and Twitter on a daily basis. We have a number of automated feeds set up including new planning applications, job vacancies and press releases. We also schedule messages in advance and we are able to quickly issue individual messages.

The real time nature and sharing culture of social media is a major benefit to Waverley that other media can not achieve. We regularly see peaks in traffic to our social media during events such as the Olympic Games Torch Relay and Freedom Parade and more recently in emergency situations such as the storms and flooding.

Social media is also a highly cost effective way to reach customers, particularly those who may not usually choose to engage with us and we need to explore wider uses of social media - in consultations for example.

Analysis of other similar size local authorities shows considerable opportunity to further develop our social media relationship with our customers.

We will

- replicate good practice from elsewhere in our approach.
- encourage staff and councillors to follow us on Twitter as our communications ambassadors.
- follow industry best practice in the quality, timeliness and relevance of social media communication.
- explore ways to improve our reach to customers during consultations utilising social media

4.5 Community Signposting

Whilst in real terms this area of work is embedded in other areas of the Strategy and in other Service Areas' work, it is a key area that deserves prominence.

Three tiers of local government all delivering services to residents can be confusing. Customers want to know who does what and rightfully expect to be able to find this information quickly and easily. Waverley already aims to communicate what we do and what other councils do and we will strengthen this to support our customers' needs.

We will

- continue to signpost to Surrey County Council in our A-Z and website for the services they deliver.
- continue to signpost to Town and Parish Councils in our A-Z and website for the services they deliver and from 2014, we will include contact details for all the town and parish councils in our A-Z.
- make it clearer to residents the services we deliver in their communities, such as playgrounds and leisure pursuits.
- ensure that our frontline staff are equipped with the knowledge needed to signpost customers to the right place.

4.6 Emergency Communications

Corporate Communications plays an essential role in Emergency Planning and Business Continuity; advising on communications needs, opportunities and risks in terms of internal, media and customer communications. A draft Protocol & Action Plan was drawn up in January 2014 that brings together previous good practice and more recent experience over the severe weather of Christmas 2013 and early 2014.

We will

- produce a Corporate Communications Emergency Information Action Plan
- continue to review and evolve Emergency Planning communications so to capture all available channels; reflecting the growth in, but not overly relying on, digital communication channels, to include working with Town and Parish councils to jointly communicate with residents and including, but acknowledging the limitation of, digital communication channels in emergency situations.
- continue to be an active member of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Information Cell in order to share information and approaches, deliver a coordinated approach where appropriate, develop good practice and identify a 'fall back' option for power outages.
- ensure that all officers involved in Emergency Planning communications have the skills and experience needed to fulfil the broad ranging communications needs during Emergencies.
- ensure that media are aware of our response during emergency situations.
- publish communications on Waverley's response during recovery phase.
- list emergency information in every edition of Making Waves and other publications.

5.0 Internal Communications

5.1 Internal audiences and how we want people to feel about us

Councillors

A leading local authority
A well run organisation – a safe pair of hands
Providing VALUE for money
Innovative and forward thinking

Staff and Contractors

Waverley is a great place to work
Aiming to be one of the leading authorities in the country
To take responsibility for providing excellent customer service
A listening authority that wants to hear my ideas for improvement
Providing VALUE for money

5.2 Councillors

Councillors are key ambassadors for the Council. Access to the latest news and knowledge of where to signpost customers to, is essential in their role. Executive members also need to be directly involved in corporate publicity on their services. Councillors are also an excellent source of information and insight into our customers – what works, what doesn't and areas for improvement.

We will:

- ensure that all councillors receive regular news items.
- work with executive members to plan proactive press releases and campaigns.
- support councillors in their knowledge and skills in all media; including training for interviews and newer digital media channels.
- develop an ongoing programme of councillor engagement and shaping of our communications.

5.3 Staff and Contractors

Waverley comprises of over 400 staff, many office based but also a high number working in the heart of the communities we serve. We also have contractors who interact with our customers whilst cleaning our streets and places, repairing homes and collecting rubbish and recycling.

All our staff and contractors have a key role to play in representing the values we hold close and the corporate priorities we are committed to, as well as shaping what we do and how we do it. Internal communication is a two way relationship; staff and contractors need to be able to draw information down and feed information back up.

Waverley as a place to work is continually evolving by improving services, introducing new ones and by adopting new, more efficient and effective ways of working. Internal communication is a critical factor in implementing successful organisational change.

We will:

- continue to use a range of channels to ensure all staff can access information and give feedback.
- support contract managers to ensure that contracts with our suppliers reflect the same standards of customer service we expect from our staff.
- Support our Foresight programme and other future change initiatives to ensure that staff are aware of and have the opportunity to engage in organisational change.
- explore new, effective and efficient ways of communicating with staff, particularly when we introduce new services and during times of significant change.

6.0 Making it happen



6.1 Customer engagement & insight

Our approach begins and ends with our customers. Effective engagement can be achieved through a range of tools to provide effective and actionable two way communications with our customers. This in turn provides us with customer insight; that is up to date information on customer priorities, how our customers perceive us, how they wish to engage with us, where we succeed and areas for improvement and so shapes our objectives and strategy. We capture customer insight from a number of different sources.

6.1.1 Citizens Panel

Corporate Communications runs a Citizens' Panel survey at least once a year to benchmark our performance and we consider the results from other Service Area Citizens' Panel surveys to capture insights.

The panel is made up of more than 1,100 Waverley residents, specially recruited to reflect the Waverley population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, belief, disability and socio-economic group. The Council has done its best to ensure representation by parliamentary ward.

Every two years the Council refreshes the panel by one-third. Those who no longer wish to be members step down and around 350 new panellists are recruited. This ensures that more people who live in Waverley get the chance to have their voices heard.

6.1.2 Website feedback and comments

Our website now incorporates a feature that allows visitors to the site to tell us if the information was useful and to provide other comments. This information is sent directly to Corporate Communications, which we take note of and share with the relevant service area.

6.1.3 Website usability testing

We regularly undertake testing for our website to assess how easy it is for visitors to find the information they want and use our online services. This information shapes our ongoing website development and is a key element of our Website Strategy.

6.1.4 Social Media feedback and comments

We monitor what people are saying about Waverley. We respond directly where it is appropriate to, note and share with the relevant service area.

6.1.5 Email comments and feedback

We receive a high number of emails, including email enquiries from the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page of the website. We respond directly where it is appropriate to, note and share with the relevant service area.

6.1.6 Service Area feedback and surveys

We receive feedback from Service Areas and their customers. We respond directly where it is appropriate to, note for future planning.

6.1.7 National and industry trends

We closely follow trends in the communications sector and consumer behaviour and use this information to forward plan communications strategy and operational developments.

6.1.8 Compliments and Complaints

We listen to and respond any complaints or compliments about our communications.

6.2 Objectives and measurement

Measurement is a key element of any strategy, which whilst captured on paper is frequently neglected in the life span of a strategy. We have identified realistic measures and measurement tools. We recognise that some areas of activity are difficult or not cost effective to measure locally and allow our direction to be shaped by national trends.

- to secure and strengthen the reputation of the Council as a community leader and an effective and efficient provider of high quality services.
Measurement: Customer perceptions monitoring via Citizens Panel, Compliments and Complaints
- to ensure that all communication is underpinned by our corporate priorities.
Measurement: Ensure that annual Communications Plans support Service Plans and are developed in consultation with Heads of Service and the Corporate Management Team.
- to maintain a professional corporate identity for consistent and co-ordinated use throughout the organisation and Waverley.
Measurement: Monitoring of brand guidelines policy, community signage and quality of publications.
- to ensure that communications are consistent and co-ordinated across all channels to ensure the highest of standards, consistent information and alignment with customer priorities.
Measurement: Customer perceptions monitoring via Citizens Panel, website feedback, Compliments and Complaints
- to ensure that our communications activities reflect the full diversity of the community and help ensure equality of access to all our services.
Measurement: Web and digital media reporting, Compliments and Complaints, Citizens Panel
- To ensure all staff understand our corporate priorities and are willing ambassadors of our key messages.
Measurement: Staff survey, informal feedback.
- To evaluate our performance in effectively reaching customers and to continually improve the effectiveness of our communications channels.

Measurement: Web and digital media reporting, Compliments and Complaints, Citizens Panel, benchmarking and exchanging good practice with other local authorities of similar economic, geographical and social profiles.

6.3 Implementation

Implementation brings together key messages, audience identification and appropriate channel selection to support both national trends and the drive for 'channel shift', whilst including our non-digital customers.

Day to day implementation of the Strategy is the responsibility of Corporate Communications and is supported, as a corporate priority, by Heads of Service, Corporate Management Team and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Communications.

It is important that we continue our efforts to understand what local communities are saying. This strategy will dovetail with our Citizens Panel, other consultations and customer insights and the increasing use of new technology devices to generate instant feedback on topical issues.

In addition, working with public sector partners on joint communications is important to us, for example, through the Local Resilience Forum (jointly with the police and district councils, planning for and responding to emergency situations). We are also in constant contact with our counterparts within the other district and borough councils, health and the police to share good practice and explore joint working opportunities.

6.4 Evaluation

A key part of any strategy is evaluation, both during the life cycle of the strategy and at its conclusion. With a range of customer insight tools to draw from, we will continually evaluate our strategy against these, with our officers and councillors, via our Annual Communications Plan and by capturing lessons learnt at individual project and campaign level.

6.5 Annual Communications Plan

The Strategy will be supported by Annual Communications Plans which bring together corporate and service level communications needs and communications operational needs; underpinned by the direction set by the Strategy.

6.6 Resourcing

As part of its Service Plan for 2014/15 the Corporate Communications team is evolving in to a multi-disciplinary team so to provide a more rounded and responsive service that better reflects the evolving demands for Corporate Communications services.

6.7 Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity

The Strategy and its subsequent annual communications plans will be implemented in line with the Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity which is summarised by the principles of:

- lawfulness
- cost effectiveness
- objectiveness
- even-handedness
- appropriateness
- having regard to equality and diversity.