

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

10 DECEMBER 2019

Title:

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

[Portfolio Holder: Councillor Paul Follows]

[Wards Affected: All wards]

Summary and purpose:

The Communications and Engagement Strategy seeks to improve and modernise the Communications and Engagement service at the Council. It will require a significant shift in terms of operations, expectations, prioritisation and culture. When executed, it will not only provide better value for money for the Council, but will also help to improve relations with stakeholders by ensuring their views are heard and it will be vital in supporting the delivery and success of important council initiatives and priorities. The Executive is asked to endorse the approach set out in the Strategy, and recommend it to Full Council for approval.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

This report relates to the Council's commitment to developing a more open and inclusive approach to communications.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out in relation to this strategy. The way in which we communicate with residents and stakeholders impacts on everyone, so care is always made to provide information in a range of formats and using a range of channels to help reach and cater for all members of the community.

A specific commitment under Objective 10 of the strategy states that we will create communications and engagement opportunities that are accessible to all.

Financial Implications:

No direct implications, the new strategy will be implemented within current approved resources.

An effective strategy will help ensure value for money is achieved both in the communications team and corporately.

Legal Implications:

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Background

The Council's current Communications and PR Strategy runs out this year and since its inception, the role of the Communications Team has evolved and expanded to include community engagement.

In recent years the continuing growth and transformation of digital channels, including social media, has meant the way in which we talk to and listen to our residents and stakeholders has changed dramatically.

The Communications and Engagement Team has previously concentrated on PR-focused communications, however, wants to move to a more audience focused, engaging and listening function. This desire, in addition to the increasing demands on the team, mean that a new approach and clear direction is needed.

The new Communications and Engagement Strategy takes into account changes in roles, expectations and the evolution of the channels we use, while still respecting the value of traditional methods, and sets out a plan of how the team will operate to deliver a best-value service for the Council and residents of the borough.

The strategy outlines 10 objectives, with key themes including improved evaluation and a more scientific approach to our work, better planning and prioritisation of resources and campaigns, and a commitment to reviewing and improving our community engagement offering.

The strategy also commits to adopting and promoting an ethical culture which will underpin everything we do; from dealing with media enquiries, providing accurate, honest and transparent information and handling personal data with integrity to ensuring information and engagement is accessible to all and providing a value for money service.

CIPR, LGA and the Government Communications Service best practise guidelines have been consulted in developing this strategy and in line with our new proposed approach, the team will continue to improve what we do by evaluating our performance and by listening to feedback from stakeholders.

This strategy will support and promote the Council's overarching Corporate Strategy and the other strategies and initiatives that sit under it, including the latest climate change motion.

Conclusion

The Communications and Engagement Strategy seeks to improve and modernise the Communications and Engagement service at the Council. It will require a significant shift in terms of operations, expectations, prioritisation and culture. When executed, it will not only provide better value for money for the Council, but will also help to improve relations with stakeholders by ensuring their views are heard and it will be vital in supporting the delivery and success of important council initiatives and priorities.

Recommendation

The Executive recommends to Full Council that the Communications and Engagement Strategy is approved.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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