

Joint Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Corporate Strategy Clare Kingston

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Wards affected: All wards

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To: Joint Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 15 November 2016

Communication Strategy

Recommendation

To consider a joint communication strategy for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and provide comments on it, in particular concerning those elements requiring review of resources.

Purpose of Report

1. This is the first joint communication strategy for both councils. It sets out the structure, aims and objectives for communicating with our audiences, including helping to deliver the corporate plans, roles and responsibilities, our commitment to keeping customers and staff fully informed and encourages good practice internally and externally.
2. To seek the committee's views on the strategy including which elements they consider most useful and any other suggestions they would like included.

Strategic Objectives

3. The strategy contributes towards South's objective to provide services that reflect resident's needs and for the Vale towards running an efficient Council.

Background

4. In the last year we have jointly delivered a host of communications and campaigns using a mix of channels including; the councils' websites, press releases, publications and electronic newsletters, Twitter and YouTube.
5. We have also kept colleagues informed of important information, campaigns and activities via the Intranet, through the staff newsletters and via planned staff briefings. Regular newsletters are also issued to all councillors.
6. The councils are delivering a number of major milestones over the next 18 months/two years, including finalising Local Plans, launching delivery plans for Didcot Garden Town and Berinsfield, promoting two Enterprise Zones and new leisure centres in Didcot and Wantage, and securing a permanent council office location.
7. These are important issues for our residents and local businesses and other influencers, which will likely be debated by community groups and reported by the media. It is vital therefore that these stakeholders, including local residents continue to feel informed about the councils' business, understand the benefits of any changes we are making and are aware of the positive impact our services are having.
8. This communication strategy sets out how we are going to deliver our communications during the last quarter of 2016 and during 2017, including testing new social media activities and how these will be measured to evaluate their success.
9. The strategy, attached at appendix A, also includes a grid template which will set out the communication activities we will be focusing on over the coming year – it is a rolling document that will be regularly updated – working with heads of service and their teams. This will help us to align our work, package up news stories where possible and ensure we have integrated handling plans in place.
10. An Equality Impact Assessment has also been completed and is attached at appendix B.

Financial Implications

11. There are financial implications to two elements of the strategy, which are:
Providing a more active approach to media handling and monitoring coverage, and analysing and recording in-depth data from our campaigns. Depending on which mix of elements that are approved by cabinet as part of the strategy we will review the resources of the communications team.

Legal Implications

12. Legal Services have commented on the communication strategy and there are no legal implications.

Risks

13. It is important for us to continue to communicate with our audiences using all the channels available, including looking at ways of engaging people through low cost social media activities and signposting people to important information online wherever possible. If we fail to do so, we risk alienating younger and working age people and some older people, who mainly communicate through social media. However, we also recognise that some members of the public, particularly the older population will not have access to the internet or do not choose to use social media and so we must ensure they are also kept informed about important information using traditional methods.

Conclusion

14. The Joint Scrutiny Committee is asked to provide comments on the communication strategy attached at appendix A.

Background Papers

- Communication activity grid
- Equality Impact Assessment
- A slide presentation will be given at the meeting (not attached)