

TASK AND FINISH GROUP – COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Council's communication strategy sets out how the Council plans and manages its communications activities and seeks to explain how the Council will deliver on key projects and corporate priorities. The Communication Strategy 2019-2023 had two core themes: "positive and proactive" and "digital first." This strategy is due for renewal in 2023/4.

The aim of this review is:

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's communications strategy and engagement with the local people and stakeholders; and

To suggest any improved forms of engagement for incorporation into the future Strategy and communications by the Council

Key issues:

- What should be the strategic priorities and aims of a new Council communications strategy?
- What aspects of the communications strategy have been implemented successfully?
- What aspects of the communications strategy have proved difficult to make progress on and why?
- What corporate learning can be identified and how can it be shared?

Key questions to be answered:

- Has channel-shift to 'digital first,' improved engagement with the community?
- Has the communications strategy achieved the aims set in 2019 ?
- How is engagement measured and what strategies are in place around improving engagement in both quality and reach?
- What communication tools should the Council focus on to improve engagement?

Areas of investigation and scope:

1) Implementation of the current strategy: lessons to be learned

- a) To identify areas of success in the implementation of the strategy and understand whether these outcomes shared specific characteristics in common.
- b) To identify areas of difficulty in the implementation of the strategy, establish how and why such problems arose, understand if such issues could have been foreseen and highlight any specific characteristics such problems have in common.
- c) To identify what lessons can be learned from the implementation of the strategy.

2) Best practice in Communications and Engagement

- a) To assess the core publications and channels for communication employed by the Council and consider their effectiveness in engaging with residents and communicating on the Council's message.

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- b) To identify and examine exemplar communications strategies and publications from peer authorities and other sectors
- c) To understand what elements make up best practice in communications strategy and identify new ideas that can be incorporated into future North Herts Council practice

3) Approaching the new strategy

- a) To consider future changes in the communications landscape and challenges the Council may face that a future strategy will need to address
- b) To understand trends evidenced by the implementation of the previous strategy that should be considered going forward
- c) To identify and devise key themes and strategic priorities for the Council in communication and engagement that could be incorporated into a new strategy

The following topics will *not* be considered by this review:

- Community Engagement
- Customer Services
- Consultation
- Close analysis of specific communications content
- The Council's brand identity and rebranding process
- Internal communications

Timeframe

From October to December 2022

Link with Council Priorities

People First, Sustainability

Potential Witnesses and Contributors

To be identified by the Group in consultation with the Communications Team

Methodology

Round table discussions with relevant parties as identified by the Group

Information documents

[North Herts Council Communication Strategy 2019-2023](#)

Examples of other exemplar Strategies from other Authorities

Council Publications including NH Now, Outlook, the public website and social media channels

Membership

5 Members to be confirmed, including officer lead.

Support Officer – Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager

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APPENDIX A: AREAS OF INVESTIGATION – QUESTIONS

Members and Officers have proposed the following questions. These questions are included under each heading of the areas of investigation identified above.

1) Implementation of the current strategy:

- a) To identify areas of success in the implementation of the strategy and understand whether these outcomes shared specific characteristics in common.
 - i) What areas of the strategy have been implemented since its introduction?
 - ii) How have these changes increased engagement?
 - iii) How has public perception of the Council's reputation been measured, and has it improved since the introduction of the strategy?
 - iv) Has the emphasis on digital content increased engagement?
 - v) How has the new website been received?
- b) To identify areas of difficulty in the implementation of the strategy, establish how and why such problems arose, understand if such issues could have been foreseen and highlight any specific characteristics such problems have in common.
 - i) What areas of the strategy have not been fully implemented?
 - ii) Why were these areas difficult to progress?
 - iii) What risks were identified during the development of these projects?
- c) To identify key themes and trends evidenced by the implementation of the strategy:
 - i) What has the implementation of the 2019-23 strategy told us about the communications landscape surrounding the Council?
 - ii) What areas were unaddressed in the 2019-23 strategy that the Council should look at going forward?

2) Best practice in Communications and Engagement

- a) To assess the core publications and channels for communication employed by the Council and consider their effectiveness in engaging with residents and communicating on the Council's message.
 - i) What are the core publications the Council produces?
 - (1) What is their reach?
 - (2) How are they distributed?
 - (3) Do residents engage with these publications?
 - (4) Are they value for money?
 - ii) What are the core channels the Council makes use of?
 - (1) What channels is the Council most active in?
 - (2) What is public engagement like via these channels?
 - (3) Which channels are most effective in engagement with residents?

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- (4) Which groups of residents make use of which channels?
- iii) Is the Council making the most effective use of digital and social media?
 - (1) Is the Council well placed to manage the narrative around Council activity on social media?
- b) Are there any trends in engagement that indicate the digital-first approach has been effective?
- 3) To identify and examine exemplar communications strategies and publications from peer authorities and other sectors
 - a) What are our peer authorities including in their communications strategies?
 - b) What can the approach taken towards communication by other similar organisations tell us about how the Council could communicate with residents?
 - c) What publications and approaches represent best practice in this area?
- 4) To understand what elements make up best practice in communications strategy and identify new ideas that can be incorporated into future North Herts Council practice
 - a) What new channels/publications/projects could the Council incorporate into future communications?
 - b) What do the best communications strategies incorporate?
- 5) Approaching the new strategy**
 - a) To consider future changes in the communications landscape and challenges the Council may face that a future strategy will need to address
 - i) Who are the core audiences of the Council's communications?
 - ii) How does the Council tailor its communications to meet the needs of its audiences?
 - iii) Does the Council know how its audiences prefer to be communicated with?
 - iv) Are there any audiences being excluded from the Council's communications?
 - v) What communications challenges does the Council face going forward?
 - b) To understand trends evidenced by the implementation of the previous strategy that should be considered going forward
 - i) What are the ongoing pressures for the Council in communicating with residents?
 - ii) What are the Council's core strengths and competencies in communications?
 - iii) What areas in communications could the Council improve on
 - c) To identify and devise key themes and strategic priorities for the Council in communication and engagement that could be incorporated into a new strategy
 - i) What should the Council's strategic communications priorities be?
 - ii) What channels and publications should the Council focus on?
 - iii) How should the communications strategy be used to promote the Council's objectives?