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<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Report Track:</b>	<b>Cabinet: 18/03/20</b>

**CABINET**  
**18 MARCH 2020**  
**COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2020-2023**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To introduce and gain approval for a new Communications Strategy which will guide the Council's corporate communications work and activities over the next three years.
- 1.2 This report also brings to Members' attention an emerging issue concerning the future of Chase Matters magazine for residents and the financing of its production.

**2 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That Members approve the Council's new Communications Strategy for 2020-2023.
- 2.2 That Members decide on the future of Chase Matters magazine by agreeing to one of the following options:
- To cease its publication;
  - To financially contribute to its production costs, thereby retaining the magazine;
  - To continue Chase Matters as a digital only option;
  - To merge Chase Matters with Home Talk magazine.

### 3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendations

#### Key Issues

- 3.1 Good communication is fundamental to the work of local authorities including Cannock Chase Council. The Local Government Association sums it up well:

*“Our customers should know what is available, why we have taken the decisions we have and how they can access our services. They must be able to trust not just what we tell them but that we will engage with them and place them at the core of our thinking. Trust builds and maintains our reputation; brings customers, partners, stakeholders and staff on the journey we have mapped out and enables us to achieve our aims and objectives, be they at a broad place-based level or pertaining to specific behaviour influencing campaigns.”*

- 3.2 Having a proper plan or strategy helps understand that good communication is critical and shows how it can be delivered, by whom and by when.
- 3.3 While this strategy is the responsibility of the Policy and Communications Team at the Council, everyone has a role to play in delivering effective communication for the Council, be they an employee or a Member of Cannock Chase Council.

#### *Chase Matters magazine*

- 3.4 The magazine has been produced as a printed publication since 2016 with two copies produced each year. It has 36 pages of which 17 are editorial and 19 are advertising. For the first year the Council paid a contribution of £3,000 towards printing and distribution costs. For 2017 and onwards Cabinet agreed that the magazine should become cost neutral with the advertising paying for all of the printing and distribution costs.
- 3.5 However, the current supplier CIS Press has advised that it is now proving very difficult to sustain this publication on a cost neutral basis following increases in paper, ink, fuel and rising distribution costs. We are struggling to find an alternative supplier to produce on a cost neutral basis. CIS Press has advised that to continue with this publication they would need the Council to make a contribution of £2,500 plus VAT per edition (£5,000 per year).
- 3.6 The options available are as follows:
- 3.6.1 **Cease publication** – this would mean that the only regular communication provided directly to all households in the District is the council tax demand. Other communication including via the Council’s website, social media and through local newspapers and radio requires residents to proactively engage with these sites (with the Council having no control over what is reported by the news media). A magazine distributed to all households is also inclusive, regardless of households having access to the internet or not. Furthermore, on request, copies can be made as large print, as a braille version or in other languages.

- 3.6.2 **Financially contribute towards its publication** – this would safeguard the magazine for the foreseeable future. To continue with two editions would cost £5,000 per annum which would require a supplementary estimate. One edition, which potentially could go with the council tax demand, would cost £2,500 (once again, a supplementary estimate), although publication at that time of year might be seen as `propagandist` alongside a demand for money.
- 3.6.3 **Continue Chase Matters as a digital only option** – the magazine is already available as a download from the Council's website and we have built up a small database of 300 email addresses from residents keen to receive a digital version. However, we currently print 46,000 copies of the magazine which includes a supply to supermarkets (paid for by the Council). To build up a subscription list of email addresses in the thousands would require a major and continuous marketing effort; a large database would have to be created, maintained and comply with data protection regulations; and residents who don't have access to the internet would not see the magazine thereby arguably increasing the digital divide. We would also lose the supermarket presence.
- 3.6.4 **Merge Chase Matters with Home Talk magazine** – Home Talk is produced twice a year by Housing Services for our tenants at a cost of £2,000 per edition, paid for from tenants' rents. It has 12 pages (all editorial). In one edition a housing annual report is included which the Council has a statutory responsibility to publish. It is hand delivered (by paid staff) to over 5,000 households – this is cheaper than using the Royal Mail. It serves a different purpose to Chase Matters, carrying information specific to tenants, where as Chase Matters carries broad information about the District. Home Talk is also published online. Combining Home Talk within Chase Matters could be done but the extra costs to make a 48 page publication would add £1,500 plus VAT to the print costs and £400 plus VAT to distribution costs per each edition (beyond the £2,500 plus VAT contribution cost outlined). The publication might also be unattractive for advertisers.

#### Reason for Recommendation

- 3.7 A new communications strategy is needed to help direct the Council's communications activities, particularly at a corporate level. This will help ensure that available resources are used effectively and efficiently, especially to ensure that the Council's corporate priorities are communicated at all available opportunities.
- 3.8 A decision on Chase Matters is required to enable future planning, and therefore this strategy, to be properly finalised; either with a residents' magazine included in our future work, not included, or continued but with a modified approach to its delivery.

## **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 This communications strategy supports the Council's priorities of Promoting Prosperity and Improving Community Wellbeing. Much of our communications work is directly related to communicating the strategic objectives set out in the plan.

## 5 Report Detail

- 5.1 A number of tools and channels are used to communicate the Council's work and activities overall. These include the Council's website, social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube), Chase Matters and Home Talk magazines; working with our local and regional newspapers, websites, magazines, radio and TV stations; an intranet site for employees, our campaigns, literature including posters and leaflets, video and photography; corporate publications including the corporate plan, the annual report and the council tax leaflet; and a range of internal communications aimed at employees and Members.
- 5.2 With major projects in the District, for example the McArthurGlen Designer Outlet West Midlands in Cannock, the re-development of Rugeley Power Station, the District to host the mountain biking event at the Commonwealth Games, and District Investment and Housing Investment Funds set up by the Council; good communication is vital in order to promote and realise the full benefits of these opportunities for the District over the next few years.
- 5.3 Day-to-day, effective communication is also vital to ensure that residents understand the services we provide and how to access these, as well as to understand how our work sits alongside that of our partner organisations.
- 5.4 In writing this strategy we consulted Council employees about the effectiveness of our internal communications. We asked for their views on the various channels we use to communicate with them, including our intranet, employee briefings, Core Brief e-magazine, Managing Director's online Question Time sessions, and the regular Communications Emails sent to all employees. This has helped to refine the content we now include in Core Brief - where there is a desire to read more about employee and team achievements; identify improvements to how information is provided on the intranet, and to allow employees to submit questions in advance when the Managing Director has his Question Time session in addition to submitting this as the sessions take place. During this strategy period we will also be surveying the views of residents on our external communications.
- 5.5 We have also researched how neighbouring district councils compare in their corporate social media activity, one of the key aspects of our communications work which, with the growth in digital, will only increase in the next few years:

Number of followers and follows on Twitter and Facebook (as at 20 February 2020):

	Twitter followers	Facebook follows
Cannock Chase Council	8,793	5,214
Stafford Borough Council	8,823	267
Lichfield District Council	8,763	2,572
Tamworth Borough Council	6,768	3,141

East Staffordshire Borough Council	4,851	2,444
South Staffordshire Council	8,909	5,225
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council	8,527	4,817

This shows that Cannock Chase Council compares well against the other districts.

- 5.6 The strategy also includes a Communications Action Plan for 2020-2023 which describes the key communications` actions to be delivered over the next three years. The action plan is not exhaustive and does not include ongoing communications activities such as day-to-day media relations, specific campaigns, the full range of design collateral produced, social media posts made each working day and PR issues handled as they emerge (which sometimes can take substantial time to deal with).

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

Actions listed in the Communications Action Plan 2020-2023 at the end of the strategy require either no funding or are funded from the departmental operating budget; or are subject to requests to the Members' and corporate training budgets (i.e. media relations training and social media training). Note: Chase Matters has been excluded from the action plan for now pending Cabinet's decision.

However, if Chase Matters is to continue as two editions per year the financial commitment required from the Council's budget would be a supplementary estimate of £5,000 per annum.

### **6.2 Legal**

There is a Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, issued under section 4 Local Government Act 1986. The Code applies to "any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public" and therefore covers both Chase Matters and Home Talk. The Council should ensure that it complies with the terms of the Code, including paragraph 28 of the Code that states that Councils should not issue newsletters more frequently than quarterly.

### **6.3 Human Resources**

None

### **6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)**

None

**6.5 Human Rights Act**

None

**6.6 Data Protection**

None

**6.7 Risk Management**

Communications activity has inherent risk, particularly through social media use which is instant and can be easily shared. To mitigate, the strategy outlines what is expected of employees and Members when communicating the Council's work.

**6.8 Equality & Diversity**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed to accompany this strategy. When producing our various publications we can, on request, make these available as large print, in Braille or in other languages. A significant concern is the potential exclusion of anyone from our communications, particularly as we channel shift more of our `communications` online. One of the benefits of publications such as a Chase Matters is that it doesn't rely on access to the internet to read it, as it is printed.

**6.9 Best Value**

None

<b>7 Appendices to the Report</b>
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Appendix 1: Communications Strategy 2020-2023

Appendix 2: Communications Strategy Action Plan 2020-2023

<b>Previous Consideration</b>
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None

<b>Background Papers</b>
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Equality Impact Assessment

**Cannock Chase Council**  
**Communications Strategy 2020-2023**

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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Communications Strategy explains why communications is important to the Council, the communication principles we will follow and our approach to the various tactics that are used in modern communications practice to get our messages out and to explain our work to the various audiences the Council deals with.
- 1.2 The strategy is the responsibility of the Policy and Communications Team at Cannock Chase Council. It sets the framework for the delivery of the Council's communications functions at the corporate level and links into the Corporate Plan 2018-23.
- 1.3 The Corporate Plan is ambitious and has two strategic priorities: Promoting Prosperity and Improving Community Wellbeing. It describes the key role the Council plays in delivering a number of high profile projects which aim to bring huge benefit to our District and showcase Cannock Chase as a great place to live in, invest in and visit.
- 1.4 Our communications will help promote and bring to life the Council's work whether described in the Corporate Plan as a specific project or delivered as one of our regular and valued services. Our employees, Members and stakeholders will be provided with timely and consistent communication as these projects develop and come to fruition; while information about our services - particularly when there are service developments or changes - will be supported with appropriate messaging where required.
- 1.5 Nuanced, sensitive communication and responsive public relations is especially important to inform the Council's stakeholders, whether it concerns a change in policy, where some may disagree, or a high profile project.
- 1.6 Communications and public relations - terms we use in our overall communications work - are often confused. They have different meanings. "Communications is about the imparting or exchanging of information or news". Whereas "Public Relations is the professional maintenance of a favourable public image by a company, other organisation or an individual". Poor representation of one of these can damage the other, and vice versa, so in this strategy we will interchange between the two as the PR and communications industry does.
- 1.7 In the Feeling the Difference public opinion survey carried out by the Staffordshire Observatory in Cannock Chase between March 2017 and September 2018, 94% of respondents were satisfied with the local area. However, there were 71% of respondents satisfied with the overall service provided by Cannock Chase Council, compared to 87% for GP services, 96% for the Fire and Rescue Service and 96% for the `local pharmacy`. This is not untypical nationwide but demonstrates that we can always do more to keep people well informed and engaged about the day-to-day operational work we do and the major projects we undertake.

1.8 A Peer Review of Cannock Chase Council carried out by the LGA in September 2016 commented favourably on our communications work. On the review team's return visit in July 2019 a comment made in their report was that we, as a Council, should actually shout more about the good work we carry out for our residents and businesses. This strategy is designed to promote our work proactively, in the manner the LGA intended.

## **2. Why communication matters**

2.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) and the national communications body for marketing and communications in the public sector, LGcommunications, advocate a strategy of building trust among our customers. LGA says:

*“Our customers should know what is available, why we have taken the decisions we have and how they can access our services. They must be able to trust not just what we tell them but that we will engage with them and place them at the core of our thinking. Trust builds and maintains our reputation; brings customers, partners, stakeholders and staff on the journey we have mapped out and enables us to achieve our aims and objectives, be they at a broad place-based level or pertaining to specific behaviour influencing campaigns.”*

2.2 Firmly in mind is keeping our residents and businesses informed, listening to their concerns and involving them when making decisions. Being informed, listened to and having the opportunity to be involved when the Council makes decisions can have a significant impact on people's satisfaction with the Council and the services it provides.

2.3 Informed stakeholders can help the Council in the delivery of its projects and gain overall support.

2.4 Furthermore, it is equally important that people know we are a well-run organisation that provides value for money to our council tax payers and the customers that use our services.

2.5 What follows therefore is a strategy and approach we will use that will enable us to be an organisation that can develop and sustain a District that: delivers quality services at the right time, seeks opportunities for economic growth and is one which seeks to look after its most vulnerable residents. It is a strategy and approach where good communication and well managed public relations is at the heart of everything we do.

2.6 Communications is a two-way process - it is about giving people the opportunity to express their views and opinions as well as providing information. As such it has a close relationship with consultation and engagement, which is referred to in section 11.

- 2.7 Research by polling company Ipsos MORI has consistently found that the more residents and businesses feel informed, the more they tend to be satisfied with public services and their local authority. The research also shows that overall satisfaction with local authorities is further heightened when an informed public feel they can influence local decision making.
- 2.8 This is why we give communications at Cannock Chase Council such a high profile and why all of our communications and public relations work needs to be informed and guided by this strategic approach.

### **3. Aims of the strategy**

3.1 We have two principal aims in creating this strategy:

- i) *“To use a range of communication techniques, with an increasing emphasis on social media and digital communication, to ensure our customers, employees, Members, partners and communities are informed and can become aware about the services, facilities and projects we deliver and have the opportunity to give their views about the work we do.”*
- ii) *“To encourage channel shift but also to recognise, and aim to reach where we can, those residents who are less able to access social media and digital communication, by continuing to use more traditional forms of communication.”*

3.2 In order to achieve this we need to have proactive, timely and well organised communication activities that gain local, regional and, occasionally, national recognition. We also need to be clear and concise in how we communicate.

3.3 Most importantly, we need to learn from what has worked well, by actively seeking feedback from residents, businesses, partners and our employees in order to shape and refresh the ways in which we communicate.

3.4 We must not stand still in our approach to communications. There is always more we can do and will do.

### **4. Our communications principles**

4.1 These are guided by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations definition:

*“Public Relations is about reputation - the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public Relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour.”*

4.2 We also like this definition from the International Public Relations Association:

*“Public relations is a decision-making management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organisations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods.”*

4.3 In order to achieve the aims of the strategy, we are committed to ensuring all internal and external communication is guided by these principles and is:

- Open and honest - presenting a clear picture of what's happening, when and why, and dealing with people's concerns
- Clear and consistent - all communication should be easy to understand, use jargon-free language and simple terms of explanation
- Relevant and timely - communicate what people need to know when they need to know it, with an increasing emphasis on digital communication through our website and social media channels (which can also be more cost effective)
- Targeted - we will use various communication channels to meet the diverse needs of our communities
- Accessible and two-way - using a range of communication channels and feedback mechanisms to maximise reach and encourage dialogue with all sectors of our community

## **5. What we will do as a team - and what we expect of others**

5.1 As a team we will:

- Provide a responsive media relations service working effectively with the local, regional, national and trade media to promote our work, protect our reputation and provide information about our services and activities
- Advise officers and Members on media issues as they affect our work
- Ensure our branding is used consistently across our publications, advertising, signs, information boards and digital communication
- Promote the use of jargon free English in all our communication
- Ensure the Council website and our social media channels are kept up to date, which includes working with internal web editors and training them as required to ensure useful content is provided and standards are upheld, and the sites are accessible to our customers; and continue to develop new website features working with IT
- Assist and promote channel shift to our website and encourage customers to access information online
- Support officers, Members and partners to promote the District as a good place for people to live, work, visit and invest in
- Deliver timely information to stakeholders through the media, social media, our website and publications
- Be alert to emerging issues on a national, regional and local level

5.2 What we expect from others:

*Everyone has responsibility for communications*

**Our employees** must be at the heart of this strategy. They are all potential ambassadors to promote the work and ambitions of the Council, with many living in the District and having family and friends who live or work here. Everything therefore we proactively publicise externally needs our colleagues to be aware of.

***Our Members*** are the eyes and ears of the community. Better informed councillors will help us connect more with those we serve and ensure misinformation is addressed.

***Partners*** - more timely and transparent communication with our partners will promote greater trust and support for what we want to achieve.

### ***Leadership Team***

- To communicate effectively, in a timely manner, using appropriate means and communications channels
- To adhere to the principles of the Communications Strategy when delivering the Corporate Plan and the Council's priorities
- To take note of and contribute to the internal communications produced, ask questions if required and help shape how we communicate to one another inside the Council
- To communicate decisions and the thinking that supports them, clearly and in a timely manner, so essential information can be delivered to employees and stakeholders

### ***Managers***

- To advise the Policy and Communications Team on the key issues that require communications support, or concerns work and activities requiring promotion
- To consider any communications implications or potential media stories within service areas and to liaise with the Policy and Communications Team as appropriate. N.B. Any person managing a project or key initiative must ensure a communications plan is in place.
- Ensure branding and promotional materials adhere to our brand guidelines, are appropriate and understandable to our target audiences
- To be aware of overall web content; working with web editors representing individual services

## **6. How we will communicate the priorities and objectives of the Council**

6.1 As mentioned, the Council's work is guided by the Corporate Plan which has two main priorities: Promoting Prosperity and Improving Community Wellbeing. `Communications` has a key role to play in achieving the ambitions in our Corporate Plan which are expressed through a range of strategic objectives as shown below:

### ***Promoting Prosperity***

6.2 *This priority has six strategic objectives:*

- *Destination Cannock Chase*
- *A more productive economy*
- *Boosting resident skills*
- *Enterprising Cannock Chase*

- *Town centres driving change*
- *Increase housing choice*

6.3 Our communication and messaging will be around:

- Welcoming the opening and establishment of the designer outlet to Cannock as a major catalyst for new job opportunities, business rates income for the Council, retail choice, and as a destination to attract visitors to the area – many of whom will undertake secondary spending in other local shops, accommodation outlets, local attractions and facilities
- Town centres being the lifeblood of our community and needing a boost in uncertain times for the retail and hospitality industries, particularly in Cannock where a development prospectus has been published for major regeneration
- A more skilled workforce and how this can lead to new investment into the District, higher paid jobs and a growing local economy that can help many sectors of industry and service businesses
- Housing to provide places for people to live and address current needs, particularly for affordable homes – at the same time helping to provide income sources for the Council

#### ***Improving Community Wellbeing***

6.4 *This priority has five strategic objectives:*

- *Opportunities for healthy and active lifestyles*
- *Sustaining safe and secure communities*
- *Supporting vulnerable people*
- *Promoting attractive and healthy environments*
- *Aiming for the District to be net carbon neutral by 2030*

6.5 Our communications and messaging will be around:

- Promoting the District as the host of the mountain biking event at the Commonwealth Games for Birmingham in 2022 and the opportunity this gives to encourage the physically inactive to get into cycling and walking, as well as developing opportunities to cycle in the District
- Having healthier communities will reduce the burden on the NHS and social care spending
- Stronger communities will allow earlier intervention to address issues such as anti-social behaviour
- Working closely with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors in key areas of health and prevention of crime and anti-social behaviour
- Promoting the actions to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030

- Supporting consultation and engagement opportunities on the climate emergency through a Citizens' Assembly.
- 6.6 Individual communication plans will be required for projects and major pieces of work which will help identify the appropriate audience and channel to ensure we deliver our key messages and encourage engagement with stakeholders.
- 6.7 Overall we will relate our communications back to the Corporate Plan and its strategic objectives, wherever we can. This can be on the Council's website, our social media channels and when we write press releases. A six-monthly Communications Grid will capture the key Corporate Plan projects, as well as other key communications work.

## **7. The Council's current communications activities**

- 7.1 We currently use a wide range of communications channels and tools including:
- Media relations - newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and online
  - The Council's website [www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk](http://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk)
  - The Council's social media channels - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube sites
  - The Council's intranet site
  - Marketing and campaigns on specific issues, or to promote individual Council services
  - Printed literature including posters and leaflets
  - Video and photography
  - Corporate publications including the corporate plan, annual report and the council tax leaflet
  - Public meetings as required
  - Presenting at external events and exhibitions
  - Entering awards competitions
  - Internal communications techniques including a quarterly Core Brief for employees, Employee Briefings, an online Question Time with the Managing Director, Notice Boards, and Communications Emails
- 7.2 With the pace of communications technology and changes in demographics, it is important that we continually monitor and seek to refresh the ways in which we communicate as an organisation and the channels we use, not least to ensure that our communications strategy is up to date and meets the needs of the community.
- 7.3 At present, people communicate with us face-to-face, by phone, email, post, social media, website feedback forms, third parties (councillors and partners, forums, consultations, and questions at meetings).

**8. Overall strategic approach**

8.1 *We will communicate the right messages*

In line with our communications principles our communications will be relevant and inform people of what they need to know and most importantly when they need to know.

8.2 *We will communicate to the right people (i.e. target audiences)*

It is essential to identify the relevant audiences we communicate with in order to deliver the most relevant messages through the most appropriate channels.

Our main audiences include:

INTERNAL

- Cabinet Members
- Elected Members
- Employees at all levels and locations
- Trades unions
- Partners

EXTERNAL

- Customers and residents
- Business community and potential investors
- Visitors
- Suppliers
- MP
- Community and voluntary organisations
- Central government and government agencies
- Media - online and offline, local, regional, national and trade

8.3 *We will communicate through the appropriate channel - recognising diversity*

Recognising diversity when communicating with our residents is vital. We take diversity in to account by having a flexible approach and being aware of the needs of our different audiences.

We believe the most successful way to communicate with our diverse communities is by ensuring we use a variety of mediums to meet varying needs. The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

Accordingly, through delivery of this strategy and a targeted approach, we will aim to ensure that individuals receive communication which meets their specific needs in a non-discriminatory manner. For example, on request we can make printed publications available as large print.

#### 8.4 *We will develop our use of digital communication tools*

The use of the internet to access information is all pervasive. Even a decade ago, according to the Office of National Statistics, approximately 60% of the UK adult population had accessed the internet every day or almost every day (a staggering 30.1 million adults) in 2010.

What has particularly grown in recent years is the use of mobile phones and especially smart phones to access the internet, social media channels and apps to do a huge variety of tasks, from ordering food from a takeaway to monitoring fitness levels.

It has made a great deal of communication instantaneous and with it a growing demand for responses in real time. Sometimes we can respond in this way but mostly we will need to carefully explain when we will be in the best position to respond.

Such growth in the use of digital is not exclusively among young people, with many older people also embracing new technology to the full.

We will therefore look to innovate and explore new channels as they emerge, to give our various audiences the opportunity to be communicated with in the way that suits them best. One way to do this, which more councils are adopting, is to develop a Digital Newsroom approach to communicate directly with residents as stories are posted, linking this closely to social media output. This is something we will explore as part of this strategy.

It should also be remembered that digital communication, whether through social media channels or enquiries through our website, can provide rich information on our audiences, their queries and how to reach them. It can also be highly effective in reaching audiences quickly and cost effectively.

We use some of this information to plan our campaigns and to advertise via our Facebook site. But there is scope to use more of the information we gather within our communications work.

### **9. Our approach to media relations**

- 9.1 Despite the decline in local newspaper readership, the established media continues to be important in reporting the Council's work and especially in an era of fake news where trust is an issue. The Local Democracy Reporter Scheme, supported by the BBC and the local media, is enabling more Council meetings to be covered.
- 9.2 Our local newspapers are primarily the Express and Star, The Chronicle Week, The Staffordshire Newsletter and the Birmingham Mail.
- 9.3 Locally, radio is served by the community station Cannock Chase Radio, by BBC WM, BBC Radio Stoke and Signal Radio (for Rugeley), and by Free Radio.

- 9.4 Our regional TV news stations are BBC Midlands Today and ITV Central News.
- 9.5 Traditional media has an important role to play in helping us communicate to the hard to reach. For example, The Chronicle Week is free and delivered to households across the District.
- 9.6 We will react and respond to media enquiries, requests for interviews and comments in a timely manner.
- 9.7 We will also be proactive and identify stories that support the priorities within the Corporate Plan, continuing to produce press releases for the media and inviting them to our photocalls and events as these are proven techniques to deliver media coverage. Press releases continue to be appreciated by the media, and where we can we will make connections between stories and the Corporate Plan`s specific priority areas. We will continue to welcome reporters to Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings and provide them with agenda and minutes as appropriate so they can freely go about their reporting.
- 9.8 All press releases will be copied to Members, the Leadership Team and posted on the intranet for employees to see as they are issued. For external viewing they will be posted on the Council`s website and shared on our social media channels.
- 9.9 Where required we will rebut incorrect facts published in the media and we will handle any complaints the Council may wish to make to the media.
- 9.10 As a story befits, we will also conduct press briefings and conferences to communicate with the media face-to-face.
- 9.11 Any media enquiry received by the Council must be directed to the Policy and Communications Team to deal with, who will then involve the appropriate senior officer or Member to provide a comment or to arrange an interview.
- 9.12 We will create updated media protocols within this strategy period which will explain how we manage media enquiries and how we will field Members of the Cabinet and appropriate officers for broadcast interviews or interview comment. We will be providing media training to key Cabinet Members and key officers within this strategy period.
- 9.13 Monitoring of media coverage will continue by using monitoring providers who supply, electronically, a digest of coverage each day. We will share this coverage in a limited way with those officers involved in a particular story, as agreed by our licence undertaking and copyright arrangements.

## **10. Our approach to social media and digital communication**

- 10.1 As communication across digital outlets grows, we will devote more of our time to communicating through our digital channels, on social media and via our website.

10.2 At the time of writing (20 February 2020) we have:

- 8,793 followers to our Twitter site @CannockChaseDC
- 5,214 follows to our Facebook page @cannockchasedc
- 31,887 views to our YouTube site
- 479 followers on our recently set up Instagram account

These figures compare well to neighbouring districts, with only South Staffordshire Council bettering both our Twitter and Facebook figures.

10.3 In the coming years we will develop our presence on Instagram and YouTube with the growing consumer taste for pictures and video content. Instagram, in particular, is becoming increasingly favoured as a channel by young people.

10.4 We will continue to monitor our social media sites during office hours and have made this known on both sites.

10.5 On an adhoc basis we will carry out social listening to understand what is being said about the Council across social media communities and on individual sites. This will help shape our responses and can also inform policy decisions.

10.6 We will interact with posters on social media where it is justified such as correcting misinformation. This includes responding to direct messages on Twitter and Facebook and signposting to other services as appropriate. We will not routinely respond to every post we see about the Council and its work on the basis that we do not have the capacity i.e. a dedicated social media officer (or team) and sometimes engaging on social media, particularly with detractors keen on creating a long conversation, can be time consuming and potentially fruitless.

## **11. Our approach to consultation and engagement**

11.1 Whereas communications can often be a one-way process delivered by the communicator, consultation is very much an evolving dialogue where the exchange of views is encouraged.

11.2 Consultation is: *“A dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups based upon a genuine exchange of views with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action.” (LGA).*

11.3 Engagement can take many forms, and partners can include organised groups, agencies, institutions, or individuals. Collaborators may be engaged in research, promotion or policy making. It is based on the democratic idea that everyone who is affected by an issue that impacts their community should have a say in the decision making around it. “It, moreover, holds the promise that public participation can influence decisions that affect the provision of services, future visions and sustainability”.

- 11.4 The Council consults for a number of reasons including:
- To meet statutory requirements
  - To anticipate public relations reactions
  - To stimulate greater civic awareness
  - To supplement representative democracy with participative elements
  - To educate the public about difficult decisions and to ensure elected Members are accountable
  - To oblige officials etc. to listen
  - To provide opportunities for citizens to express ideas and views and influence decisions and actions that the council provides
- 11.5 Consultation provides the ability to express concerns, views and suggestions for improvement, community sustainability and strong local networks, and to create a greater understanding of local needs and issues.
- 11.6 The Council is committed to consultation as a means by which to supplement its understanding of the local context, to determine priorities and assess the impact of its service delivery.
- 11.7 We will continue to provide support and guidance to services at the Council which need to consult with residents and businesses.
- 11.8 A separate Consultation and Engagement Strategy is to be produced during 2020/21.

## **12. Our approach to employee communications**

- 12.1 Our employees not only deliver on behalf of the Council every working day but, as mentioned, are also ambassadors for Cannock Chase Council. As such they are a key part of the Council's communications.
- 12.2 We use a number of tools and channels to communicate to our employees. These include:
- *The intranet*

The intranet is the go to site to obtain employee work contact details and to understand who works in which particular service, for the latest news from the Council, to obtain information on a wide variety of policies that affect employees' work, for staff news and announcements, and to post private for sale or want messages. Our priority is to keep information on the site as up to date as possible, with the help of our employees.

- *Employee Briefings*

These are held twice a year. The purpose is for the Managing Director and the Leadership Team to update employees on the delivery of the Council's priorities, its recent achievements, to look forward, to cover election results and to report on the Council's budget, within a face-to-face setting using presentations and providing an opportunity for questions. All employees are invited, with a choice of sessions to attend. Questions will in future be able to be submitted in advance as well as asked at the briefings.

- *Online Question Time from the Managing Director*

This involves the Managing Director, supported by HR and the Policy and Communications Team, delivering an interactive session where employees can post questions in real time for the Managing Director to answer. For employees not comfortable about asking questions in an Employee Briefing this is an opportunity to raise questions in another way. Anonymity can be used if desired.

- *Core Brief*

Core Brief is a regular electronic newsletter sent to all employees via a link. It is also posted on the intranet. Printed copies are made available for employees without access to a computer. It is designed to update employees on new policies and announcements, Council activities and achievements, and employee leavers and starters. It relies heavily on contributions from services. As it is quarterly and published at fixed times it has a magazine feel to it and is not therefore used for urgent announcements. Care is taken to avoid duplicating information provided through Employee Briefings, the Online Question Time and the Communications Emails sent out (see below).

- *Notice Boards*

The Notice Boards are located on Civic Centre floors and within Housing Services. The boards display information by subject that is relevant to employees. The boards carry employee vacancies, events posters, campaign material, notices from the trades unions and employee welfare initiatives.

- *Communications Emails*

These are emails sent to all employees. They range from notices about employee fundraising initiatives to updates from the Managing Director. We try to ensure employees are not bombarded by messages hence they can only be issued by the Policy and Communications Team.

- 12.3 As the need arises we might hold employee focus groups during the course of this strategy period to gain greater understanding from our employees about particular areas or issues that may be of concern or could be developed, or improved. Such groups would need to be properly facilitated and be representative of our employees.
- 12.4 The table below has been produced to schedule employee communications throughout the year and ensure they are delivered in a timely manner.

**Employee communications month-by-month**

<i>Month</i>	<i>Employee Briefings</i>	<i>MD's Question Time</i>	<i>Core Brief</i>
January	✓		
February			
March			✓
April		✓	
May			
June	✓		✓
July			
August			
September			✓
October		✓	
November			
December			✓

**13. Our approach to Member communications**

- 13.1 The Members Portal is used to keep Members informed about Council business. From here Members can access agendas, minutes and other Council and committee papers.
- 13.2 Members receive a copy of all press releases issued by the Council, as mentioned, and are able to follow Council news and developments via the Council website and its social media channels.
- 13.3 Members also receive a copy of the Core Brief electronic newsletter.
- 13.4 As a future development, Members will receive an annual Members' Briefing (similar to the Employee Briefings).

**14. Our approach to corporate communications**

- 14.1 Corporate communications includes managing the Council's brand and identity and how it is used (through the issue of brand guidelines), its corporate publications, stakeholder engagement at a corporate level, the design and publishing of corporate publications both printed and web based; and corporate campaigns that are public facing, are internal, or are about corporate issues.
- 14.2 Corporate publications include the annual report, the corporate plan, the council tax leaflet, and Home Talk magazine produced for our residential housing tenants by Housing Services. Chase Matters magazine for all residents has been produced twice a year since 2016.
- 14.3 A key corporate audience for the Council is the business sector within the District. The Council has been proactive in developing relations with many of our local businesses over a number of years. As a new initiative it is proposed to introduce a regular newsletter aimed at businesses. This will be produced in conjunction with the Economic Development Service.
- 14.4 Our corporate campaigns are a mixture of Council initiatives such as a year-long safeguarding campaign (during 2019) and encouraging residents to recycle more; alongside the Council helping to promote campaigns initiated by Government agencies and local partners such as on flood prevention, severe weather and a variety of public health issues as appropriate to our District.
- 14.5 Corporate communications also includes our multi-media graphic design service where we produce artwork for print and digital use and can advise on outsourcing design work to ensure high standards are maintained and consistent branding is used. We liaise with external print companies and advise on specialist print and visual production, such as signage, exhibition displays etc.
- 14.6 We also commission and take photography, and maintain a corporate photographic library, as well as subscribing to external libraries where we can use free and sometimes paid for images to illustrate our designs and publications.

**15. Our approach to emergency communications**

- 15.1 The Policy and Communications Team has a key role to play in the event of an emergency and is ready to provide a communications service which includes being available to assist outside normal office hours on a voluntary basis and subject to the availability of team members.
- 15.2 In emergencies the team would be responsible for handling media relations requests, drafting statements, advising senior colleagues, providing Council website updates, undertaking social media activity, supporting on internal communications and liaising with the communications teams of our partners.

15.3 An Emergency Communications Plan, revised in 2019, guides how we will respond in an emergency situation.

**16. Our approach to evaluation**

16.1 Media - as a communications service we regularly evaluate our work, notably producing detailed media analysis including sentiment in media reports i.e. positive, neutral or negative. We will continue to provide such information as required. We can also assess the amount of media coverage achieved, use of key messages in media coverage and can arrange media satisfaction surveys.

16.2 Social media - we can make available analysis of the Council's performance across our social media channels including followers, follows, the popularity of individual posts and reach achieved.

16.3 Intranet and website - performance data on our intranet site, including the most popular pages visited, is used to develop the site and site content. For our website this includes visits to pages, time spent on pages, and sign ups where these have been established, as well as feedback from the public when they contact the Council via our website.

16.4 Campaigns - for each campaign we run we incorporate measurements to determine the success of the activities undertaken, such as reach achieved through paid advertising, media coverage secured, social media analysis, increase in income or attendance (as appropriate), the number of enquiries or calls received and overall behaviour change (e.g. take up of a service) as appropriate.

16.5 Internal communications - evaluation of our internal communications activities can look at engagement at employee briefings and the results from employee surveys.

16.6 In summary, evaluation in communications can measure any one of the following as required:

<b>Media</b>	<b>Reputation</b>
Amount of coverage	Internal communications and external communications surveys
Sentiment of coverage: positive/neutral/negative	Contact centre surveys
Media reach as % of target audience	Stakeholders contacted
Prominence of media stories	Stakeholder feedback/advocacy
Media satisfaction survey	Survey evidence (awareness, attitude)
Key messages included	Media evaluation

Social media analytics (reach, follows, shares etc) Social media sentiment	Website feedback Partner feedback
<b>Internal Communications</b>	<b>Campaigns</b>
Engagement at Employee Briefings and focus groups Staff survey Action Plan implementation Engagement with Action Plan	Visits to webpages Feedback from public (e.g. surveys, social media, via contact centre) Calls to action (clickthroughs, sign-ups) Behaviour change (e.g. service take up) Recognition (e.g. through awards) Number of enquiries/calls Increase in income or attendance

## 17. Communications Strategy Action Plan 2020-2023

- 17.1 An Action Plan 2020-2023 sits alongside the Communications Strategy. The Action Plan captures a number of actions that have been identified in this strategy for the Policy and Communications Team to lead on/deliver over the course of the next three years.
- 17.2 In addition, the team will produce a six-monthly Communications Grid which will show key communications work, projects, initiatives and known PR issues and how these are being managed through communications activities, and planned campaigns.

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**Appendix 2**

**Communications Action Plan 2020-2023**

Action(s)	Lead Officer(s)	Timescale
<b>Section 9 – Media Strategy</b>		
Create a set of media protocols setting out how we deal with the media and handle media relations at the Council	Communications Officer	Q1 2020/21
Arrange formal media training for key Cabinet members and Leadership Team with a media training company	Communications Officer	Q1 2020/21
<b>Section 10 – Social Media and Digital Communication</b>		
To explore (and potentially implement) a Digital Newsroom approach to reporting Council news to residents and other stakeholders	Policy and Communications Manager / Communications Officer / Information Manager	Explore in 2020/21 and potentially implement in 2021/22
Arrange training for Communications Team to shoot video on mobile phones and develop photography techniques to broaden our content	Policy and Communications Manager	Q2 2020/21
New social media policy and procedures to be approved and rolled out to employees and Members	Policy and Communications Manager	Q4 2019/20 and Q1 2020/21
Members offered training to get best use of social media in their roles	Policy and Communications Manager	Q1 2020/21
<b>Section 11 – Consultation and Engagement</b>		
New Consultation and Engagement Strategy produced	Consultation and Engagement Officer	Q1 2020/21
To survey residents about the Council’s external communications (to inform the next Communications Strategy)	Consultation and Engagement Officer	Q2 2021/22

Action(s)	Lead Officer(s)	Timescale
<b>Section 12 – Employee Communications</b>		
<p>Employee Briefings –</p> <p>Held twice yearly: in January (budget and PDPs for year ahead) and June (context from May election results, half-year progress)</p>	<p>Communications Officer</p>	<p>Each January and June</p> <p>(N.B. months may need to change if there are exceptional items to raise with employees)</p>
<p>Online Question Time from the Managing Director -</p> <p>Held twice a year with employees invited to submit questions in advance as well as putting forward questions as the Question Time takes place</p>	<p>Communications Officer / Information Manager</p>	<p>Each April and October</p>
<p>Core Brief -</p> <p>Refreshed with an increasing emphasis on sharing staff news and focussing on teams and their work and achievements. Consider a re-brand of Core Brief and content it should include.</p>	<p>Communications Officer / Multi-media Graphic Designer / Policy and Communications Manager</p>	<p>Published each March, June, September and December</p> <p>Q2 2020/21 to develop any re-brand - implemented from September 2020 edition</p>
<p>Communications Emails –</p> <p>Issued by the Policy and Communications Team as and when required</p>	<p>Communications Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

Action(s)	Lead Officer(s)	Timescale
<p>Noticeboards -</p> <p>To create a policy on what information can and cannot be displayed, and to review the appearance of the existing boards</p> <p>To provide a noticeboard for the Depot</p> <p>To be monitored on a regular basis to prevent out of date content being put on display</p>	<p>Communications Officer</p> <p>Communications Officer / Information Assistant</p> <p>Information Assistant</p>	<p>Q2 2020/21</p> <p>Q1 2020/21</p> <p>Each month</p>
<p>To survey employees about internal communications every two years</p>	<p>Policy and Communications Manager</p>	<p>During 2020 and 2022</p>
<p><b>Section 13 – Member Communications</b></p>		
<p>Members have a dedicated Members Portal through which they receive Council information</p> <p>Specifically from the Communications team, Members receive a copy of all press releases issued and a copy of Core Brief</p> <p>To introduce an annual Members Briefing (a presentation similar to the Employee Briefings)</p>	<p>Communications Officer</p> <p>Communications Officer / Policy and Communications Manager</p>	<p>As issued (for press releases) and each March, June, September and December for Core Brief</p> <p>Each July</p>

Action(s)	Lead Officer(s)	Timescale
<b>Section 14 – Corporate Communications</b>		
Produce a Communications Grid capturing communications activity for key projects and activities, known PR issues and planned campaigns	Policy and Communications Manager	Q1 2020/21
Complete brand audits with services to determine how the brand is used and applied	Marketing and Campaigns Officer	Q4 2019/20
Update the Council's brand guidelines and issue a summary to all staff and make available the full version on the Intranet	Marketing and Campaigns Officer	Q1 2020/21
Produce a new Style Guide and a Jargon Free English Guide to help staff with their written communication	Marketing and Campaigns Officer	Q1 2020/21
Annual Report -  To re-design the format and its content  To produce and publish the report	Policy and Performance Officer / Multi-media Graphic Designer  Policy and Performance Officer	Q1 2020/21  Q2 2020/21 and Q2 2021/22
To introduce a regular newsletter for businesses in conjunction with the Economic Development Service	Policy and Communications Manager / Economic Development Services	From Q2 2020/21
<b>Section 15 – Emergency Communications</b>		
Review the Emergency Communications Plan	Policy and Communications Manager	Q3 2020/21, Q3 2021/22
<b>Section 16 – Evaluation</b>		
Communications team to include evaluation of campaigns, key media and social media activity in team discussions, and with services as required	All team members	Ongoing

**(In the timescale: Q1 is April to June, Q2 is July to September, Q3 is October to December and Q4 is January to March)**