

## **CABINET**

<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>	<b>2 DECEMBER 2021</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Communications and Engagement Manager</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio:</b>	<b>Digital and Communications</b>
<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	Non Exempt

### **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval on the proposed Communications and Engagement Strategy alongside the proposed Content Strategy.

### **2 OFFICER RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 Cabinet approves the adoption of the two strategies for the period of 2022 – 2026. Both documents are living documents and will be reviewed regularly during their lifetime.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The council is committed to ensuring that the whole organisation communicates effectively and efficiently. This is critical to deliver quality services,
- to help and inform our residents about our services,
  - to help people how they can access our services
  - to ensure we comply with statutory obligations around public engagement
- 3.2 We also recognise it is important to establish a two-way conversation between the council and its communities to help us remain sighted in changes in the way they wish the council to deliver services into the future and plan for any transformation.
- 3.3 To this end, a new Communications and Engagement Strategy had been developed which sets out the council's approach to delivering its communications activities and outlines the principles which will underpin this work.
- 3.4 The aims of the strategy are:
- We aim to build confidence in the council through effective communications and engagement with our residents, businesses, partners, councillors and staff.

- We will build trust by communicating with integrity and providing consistent and accurate information in a timely fashion.
  - We aim to provide accessible communications as a priority, reflecting our desire to make Hart a community that respects inclusion and diversity.
- 3.5 Alongside this, a Content Strategy has been developed to set out how the council can get information to the right person at the right time, for the right reasons.
- 3.6 It aims to help in the planning, creation, delivery and governance of news, updates and information to our residents, councillors, businesses and other key partners as part of Hart District Council's goals and ambitions, set out within the Hart 2040 Vision and Corporate Plan.
- 3.7 Both strategies will enable the organisation to make a more joined up approach to communications and will help position effective communications at the core of the council.
- 3.8 This report was discussed at the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 November 2021. Members praised the team and the council for its transparency in producing this strategy. Members approved both strategies with the following comments:
1. Climate change implications to be included in the document.  
This has been included as an objective in both strategies.
  2. Changing the length of the review – currently it is four years, could it be done annually.  
Both documents are living documents and will be reviewed regularly during their lifetime.
  3. The inclusion of links to resident's items of interest, not just statutory obligations (3.1). Noted.
  4. Political implications need to be carefully managed and considered when planning, creating and delivering news (3.6). Noted.
  5. The inclusion of more links to parishes and parish councils (4.1).  
While parishes and parish councils are mentioned in the strategy, this will go into more depth in the Communications and Engagement Action Plan.
  6. More description on how the council provides news to people who are not as digitally enabled.  
This will be included in the Communications and Engagement Action Plan.
  7. How the team manages and archives historical content on the council's website.  
The Content Strategy has been amended to include, 'in line with our data retention policies'.

## **4 MAIN ISSUES**

- 4.1 Local authorities are facing financial challenges and this position is unlikely to change over the next four years so effective communication, along with community engagement will form a key part of managing this difficult process.

- 4.2 The way that people receive, digest and share information is changing, so it is important that we keep communication and engagement activities up-to-date and at the forefront to make sure we are engaging with all audiences whether through more traditional channels well know and used by some of our communities, or the new opportunities favoured by others.

## 5 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

### 5.1 Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or The Hart Vision 2040

This Strategy aims to help in the delivery of two key priorities in the Hart Vision 2040:

- Increasingly use digital solutions to provide the services that our residents both need and expect, helping them to get the services 24/7 and enabling the council to focus resources on the digitally excluded and most vulnerable or complex cases.
- Continuing to build a great sense of community, reducing social isolation, celebrating our diversity, and strengths and through this increasing community connectedness and resilience.

### 5.2 Service Plan

Is the proposal identified in the Service Plan?	Yes
Is the proposal being funded from current budgets?	Yes
Have staffing resources already been identified and set aside for this proposal?	Yes

## 6 EQUALITIES

- 6.1 All communication activity will comply with the authority's statutory duties.
- 6.2 The Communications and Engagement strategy compliments the Equality Objectives 2021 – 2023 which states;  
*To develop a communication and engagement strategy and guidance in order to enhance our approach to engagement across the Council and to ensure we hear from our diverse communities.*

## 7 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 These strategies will work alongside the council's ambition to become a carbon neutral authority by 2035. No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

## 8 ACTION

- 8.1 It is requested that Cabinet approves the adoption of the Communications and Engagement Strategy and the Content Strategy.
- 8.2 Once adopted, a communications and engagement action plan will be produced to support the delivery of the strategy.

**Contact Details:** Amy Summers – [amy.summers@hart.gov.uk](mailto:amy.summers@hart.gov.uk) – 01252 774460

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 Communications and Engagement Strategy

Appendix 2 Content Strategy