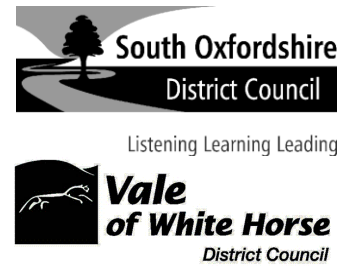


Cabinet Report



Report of the Deputy Chief Executive for Transformations and Operations

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Wards affected: All

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To: CABINET

Dates: South 7 April 2022, Vale 8 April 2022

Joint Communications and Engagement Strategy

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- (a) Approves the councils' Joint Communications and Engagement Strategy, attached in Appendix 1.
- (b) Delegates the approval of the annual action plans that will underpin the strategy to the Head of Corporate Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement (Vale) and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services (South).

Purpose of report

1. To approve the councils' Joint Communications and Engagement Strategy.

Corporate objectives

2. The strategy will underpin and contribute to all corporate priorities but particularly *Working in an open and inclusive way (Vale) and Openness and accountability (South)*.

Background

3. The councils need a communications strategy to govern their communications and ensure consistent and tailored messaging reach its diverse audiences.
4. The strategy also covers engagement as the councils' Public Engagement Charter needed reviewing and given the natural synergy between communications and engagement it was an opportunity to bring the work streams together and reflect the service's structure.
5. A comprehensive Communications and Engagement Strategy that is embedded successfully across the councils will improve customer satisfaction, community engagement and the councils' reputations locally and nationally.
6. The strategy will:
 - set out the councils' approach for communicating and engaging with its audiences
 - describe how we will improve our communications with all sectors and groups in our communities using appropriate channels and methods
 - help deliver the councils' corporate priorities
 - establish that good communication is everyone's responsibility
 - raise awareness of the councils' leadership role in addressing district wide issues and delivering better outcomes for its communities
 - demonstrate the councils' commitment to fully inform and listen to its audiences
 - set the standards for good communications and engagement.
7. The strategy identifies several areas we need to strengthen over its lifespan, based on feedback received, learning from best practice and spotting opportunities for continuous improvement. We will produce annual action plans to achieve these.
8. Evaluation will play an important part in ensuring the communications and engagement strategy is both delivered and effective, we will do this through:
 - Establishing an annual action plan
 - Reviewing progress and outcomes on a quarterly basis
 - Evaluating media coverage and direct engagement through our social media channels
 - Evaluating website analytics
9. We will regularly evaluate the impact of our messaging to learn and adapt on an ongoing basis.
10. The strategy and associated action plans will be live documents and will be updated as necessary to ensure they remain relevant and up to date.

Climate and ecological impact implications

11. There are no direct climate and ecologic implications arising from the strategy. It will raise awareness of the councils' work to tackle the climate emergency and demonstrate they are leading by example in these areas.

Financial implications

12. There are no direct financial implications arising from this strategy. Any budget required for projects included in the annual action plans will be identified and considered through the councils' usual project management and budget processes.
13. Any council decision that has financial implications must be made with the knowledge of the councils' overarching financial position. For South, the position reflected in the councils' medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported to Full Council in February 2022 showed that it is due to receive £2.1 million less in revenue funding than it plans to spend in 2022/23. For Vale, a balanced budget was set in 2022/23 but there is expected to be a budget gap in future years.
14. The funding gap at both councils is predicted to increase to over £3 million by 2026/27. As there remains no certainty on future local government funding, following the announcement of a one-year spending review by government, and as the long-term financial consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic remain unknown, this gap could increase further. Every financial decision made needs to be cognisant of the need to address the funding gap in future years.

Legal implications

15. There are no direct legal implications arising from this strategy. It has been developed in line with the Government's Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Any legal implications arising from any projects included in the annual action plan will be considered during the project management process.

Risks

16. There are risks to the councils' reputations and customer satisfaction if the strategy is not implemented effectively.

Other implications

17. None

Conclusion

18. A comprehensive Communications and Engagement Strategy that is embedded successfully across the councils will improve customer satisfaction, community engagement and the council's reputations locally and nationally. Officers therefore recommend the strategy is adopted.

Background papers

- None