

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee – 13 October 2016

**Subject:** Digital Communications Strategy

**Report of:** Head of Strategic Communications

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**Summary**

This paper outlines the Council's current digital communications activity and its effectiveness and outlines a plan to improve that activity over the coming year.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to note and comment on the proposed digital strategy for the Council.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):** None

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Council's Communications Strategy for 2016/17 sets a clear ambition to drive forward digital communication approaches. The vision is to deliver a centre of excellence model to support the Council's organisational priorities. This can, in part, be delivered through digital innovation and collaboration.
- 1.2 Communications protects and enhances the reputation of the Council and city, supports directorate and Council wide priorities, delivers a sustainable income for the Council and should be seen as a market leader in the delivery of strategic and operational communications. Digital innovation can support the core objectives in the Communications Strategy, these are:
- Delivering communications that recognise Manchester's diverse audiences, targeting to their needs and preferences
  - Identifying communication opportunities that take advantage of digital lifestyles in the city and increase digital skills
  - Developing communications that use and recognise the tools and voices available us
  - Supporting staff with the tools to act as advocates for the Council and the city.
- 1.3 This Digital Communications Strategy outlines how the Council can better use digital approaches to engage and communicate with its range of stakeholders. The strategy puts forward a future, improved approach to how social media and e-marketing can be used. It also looks at how the Council's press office can become more digitally focused. The strategy will:
- Provide a fair overview of where we are now – highlighting successes and opportunities for improvement
  - Provide an ambition for digital communications for 12-18 months time based on best practice across the public and private sector
  - Provide an action plan and a set of performance measures to ensure we meet that ambition
- 1.4 The digital strategy in particular outlines how digital conversations can support the emerging principles for Our Manchester approach:
- Better lives – it's about people
  - Listening – we listen, learn and respond
  - Recognising strengths of individuals and communities – we start from strengths
  - Working together – we build relationships and create conversations
- 1.5 The strategy outlines the digital tools and approach that can help the Council to communicate according to our stakeholders' communication preferences and provide opportunities to develop new conversations with a broader audience. This approach has been taken with the recent Budget Conversation, which has resulted significant engagement about what people value, why and what they could do to support those things. A complete report about the

results from the Budget Conversation is included a later paper - The Council's approach to Budget Setting 2017/18-2019/20.

## **2. Introduction: the case for digital marketing and communications**

### **2.1 Online behaviours are changing**

2.1.1 Over the last decade UK (and worldwide) citizens have undergone a digital revolution. People are more connected than they have ever been before and the way they search for and receive information and news and also the way they behave has changed significantly as a result.

2.1.2 People spend more time using media and communications (TV, radio and online) than they do sleeping – on average 8 hours and 45 minutes of every day<sup>1</sup>.

- 90% of UK adults go online every day, 86% have internet access at home and 97.8% of UK premises now have access to 4G mobile services
- Adult users in the UK spend an average of 25 hours per week online
- 71% of UK adults own a smartphone rising to 90% among under 35s
- 56% of 16-34s feel their smartphone is the most important device
- 59% own a tablet
- 59% of users consider themselves hooked on their connected devices
- 75% of internet users consider the web important to their daily lives and 80% agree that it keeps them up to date about current affairs and social issues, with 44% using the internet to find health information and 42% accessing news online
- 66% credit the web with inspiring them to do new things.

#### **2.1.3 Use of social media:**

- 99% of 16-24s, 84% of 25-34s, 77% of 35-44s and 64% of 45-54s, 51% of 55-64s and 24% of over 65s use social media
- 78% of UK adults use Facebook and 64% of UK mobile users use Facebook Messenger
- 47% of mobile users use Whatsapp, 44% use LinkedIn, 42% use Twitter, 33% use Instagram and 14% use snapchat
- 43% of adults now use services like Facebook Messenger or Whatsapp once a week – up from 28% in 2014
- Photo and video messaging (Snapchat or MMS) is used by 20% of UK adults weekly – up from 14% in 2014
- Use of text and email has fallen with 70% of UK adults emailing weekly (down 7%) and 63% texting (down 8%)

2.1.4 In Manchester, there is also a tangible impact to this digital revolution in resident behaviour– for example over half of those visiting the Council website do so from a mobile device and this increases to over 70% where they are accessing information on things like parks.

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<sup>1</sup> All statistics taken from the Ofcom Communications Market Report 2016

- 2.1.5 The city has a growing population of younger people for whom digital is second nature. Since 2001 there has been a 40% increase in 0-4 year olds and a 50.5% increase for 25-29 year olds. By 2020, there will be a further 6,500 children and 8,500 working adults in the city.
- 2.1.6 While there will always be a small population who cannot or do not want to engage digitally that group is shrinking every year. The Council does not continue to develop its digital approach it will be left behind with a shrinking audience.
- 2.1.7 This provides opportunities but also challenges – the faces increasing competition for its messages with individuals facing up to three times as many messages as they did in 1986 – how does the Council make its messages stand out?
- 2.1.8 Users of digital platforms expect that activity is increasingly two-way. More people than ever before are able and more willing to share their views on organisational communication and messaging. Like Our Manchester, this means the approach must be to build better conversations and engagement, and to significantly reduce broadcast activity. This means developing activity that is conversational, multi layered and that is flexible to the needs and responses of the audience. The model must change from broadcast communication to one of engagement – this means more focus on targeting messages, both through the channels used and the tone and language.
- 2.1.9 Understanding of effective channels by audience but also by message, what do people care about, what do they value, what will inspire them and use this to address them.

## **2.2 Budgets are reducing as costs and demand increase**

- 2.2.1 Alongside changing audience and organisational behaviour we have to adapt to reflect our changing budget position. Originally the switch to digital communications was considered a way to reduce the budget profile for Communications. However, as the social and digital platforms recognise the value of their tools, they increasingly monetise them for 'business' users, keeping them free for citizens.
- 2.2.2 Alongside this the Council's need for communication support has increased with an increasing focus on influencing behaviours and two-way communication activity – which take more time – over traditional information provision.
- 2.2.3 Organisational marketing and sales behaviours are changing to keep pace with this digital shift. In the last year total UK expenditure on internet marketing increased by 16.4% to £8.6 billion. Figures for the Council's investment in digital communications to support Council activity, reaching the harder to reach and encouraging action, reflects this shift. Spend on digital communications, specifically Facebook, has increased over the last five years in recognition of the changing communication preferences of residents.
- 2.2.4 The figures below show the total marketing and advertising spend held by Communications. The amount spent on advertising includes statutory and non

statutory advertising. Statutory advertising includes elements such as public notices, traffic notices, legal notices and recruitment.

Year	Print costs	Total marketing and advertising spend	Amount spend on advertising	Amount spent on Facebook
2011/12	-	£1.371m	£729,470	£8,575.00
2012/13	-	£1.201m	£710,917	£18,745.81
2013/14	£1.084M	£1.348m	£948,454	£19,054.81
2014/15	£989,000	£1.044m	£839,924	£21,504.20
2015/16	£882,028	£1.028M	£422,767	£60,473.65

### 3. Where are we now?

- 3.1 The Council is increasingly seen as a leading local authority for digital communications and marketing. Since the first Digital Strategy in 2013 there has been a success shift to online communication and engagement activity. The team has delivered year-on-year growth in social media followers and interactions, and has won a number of industry awards, particularly for the redevelopment of the website. It manages some of the most successful social media channels (for both quantity of people engaged and the quality of our output) across local government and is regularly named as a leading council in this area.
- 3.2 Communications has adapted its approach to focus much more on digital channels but also to target audiences using the most effective channel and tone of voice for the campaign or message. To do this the team has had to evolve, it has adapted its structure, the way it works, and improved the skills and expertise of its members considerably. This has included an investment in an industry-leading digital marketing course – Google Squared.
- 3.3 However, there is a need to move further, faster to keep up with digital developments and the expectations of our audiences.

### 4. Digital ambition

- 4.1 To articulate the ambition for the strategy, five core principles have been identified that drive better quality digital communications for the Council. Digital communications will be:
- I. **Ahead of digital developments** - Digital and social communication approaches and channels change quickly. If the Council is to keep pace with these changes there needs to be time to learn, trial and pilot new ways of working. This means managing the demand for communications from across the organisation to ensure time for research and development.

Alongside this there is a need to replicate communication approaches that have worked elsewhere – looking to the public and private sector for best

practice examples. Communications will look to form partnerships with other leading digital organisations, like Government Digital or Manchester City, to learn from their work.

- II. Insight based** - The approach will be set by the audience and tailored to their needs. To understand audiences, what channels they use, and how they want to speak to the Council and understand their values and the things they care about can support targeted messaging.

There is a need to tap into existing communities and channels rather than creating new and go where our audiences are and where conversations are happening organically. This means spending more time understanding the digital communities that exist in the city and identifying the key digital influencers for various communities and issues.

- III. Led by quality content** - Good quality content is vital to the successful delivery of all of our digital communications activity, in the first instance because search engines reward organisations that publish quality, consistent content. Content must attract and hold attention immediately to compete with all the other messages trying to grab our audiences' attention. It also supports PR activity – as the most successful PR strategies address the issues readers care about.
- IV. Engagement and not broadcast** - As set out, if the Council is always on broadcast and never on receive, people will engage with messages less. To support the Our Manchester approach, digital activity will always set opportunities for a conversation. Furthermore, what has been learnt from these conversations will be shared across the organisation.
- V. Proving benefits** - Clear objectives will be set based on the priorities of the Council and will be used to benchmark the success of digital activity.

## 5. Challenges

5.1 Delivering this scale and pace of digital transformation within the Communications and across the organisation will rely on the support of key stakeholders. Key areas of challenge include:

- **Capacity to deliver** – As we shift to an Our Manchester approach there is increasing demand for activity that inspires and influences behaviours. Doing this right will mean freeing up capacity and reducing current traditional approaches – stopping print activity where it can be done better online and delivering fewer, better campaigns based on the organisation's priorities. There are currently 5 FTE responsible for digital engagement.
- **Organisational buy-in and support** - this level of change will require engagement and buy-in from across the organisation and the discipline and consistency to embed the new way of working and change expectations.
- **Access to effective IT** – the IT infrastructure is improving and new systems that support digital activity better will be available in the near future. This needs to continue at pace to support the strategy.

## 5. Where we need to be: Content

5.1 Effective and engaging content is central to the delivery of excellent digital communications. There is a need to show our audiences, not just tell them, what we are, what we do and why. Content has to compete with hundreds if not thousands of other messages our audience see that day – so it needs to be good. The principles for good content are:

- **Tell powerful stories** – find the stories worth telling about what the Council does and about what’s happening in the city. A more human approach will help people to connect and keeping the approach simple and concise will ensure engagement with core messages.
- **Open and honest** – this means addressing issues that those viewing the content will pick up on in a frank way and not treating all content as a simple PR opportunity. It also means not hiding from the feedback and, if possible, addressing it in future content.
- **Personalised** – most simply by addressing content to ‘you’ not to ‘local people’ or ‘residents’. Where possible, creating different pieces of content to resonate with specific groups or platforms – accepting that one size won’t fit all in such a diverse city.
- **Focus on quality over quantity** – there is a need to reflect on the amount of content produced. Too many messages can overwhelm and encourage people to switch off; this is true for both paid for and organic activity.
- **Employ visual content at all costs** – this is a requirement for any content. The Council’s digital channels are the organisation’s shop window and no shop window would be empty. There should not be text only posts and design, video or photographic elements should be included in all content.

## 6. Where we need to be: social media

6.1 Social media channels allow users to share content, interact and collaborate. They form a central part of the digital approach. The most popular social media channels in the UK are:

Platform	Description	Size
Facebook	Social sharing and networking	32m
You Tube	Video uploading and viewing	19.1m
Twitter	Micro blogging	15m
Instagram	Photo and video sharing social network	14m
Google+	Social networking	12.6m
Pinterest	Photo sharing	10.3m
Snapchat	Sending images and videos with a short lifespan	10m
LinkedIn	B2B platform for professional networking	10m
Tumblr	Microblogging platform	9m
Reddit	Entertainment, social news and networking	6.6m
Vimeo	Video uploading and sharing	412k

- 6.2 The Institute of Customer Service reported in 2015 that one in four social media account holders used these platforms to make a complaint in the last four months. This is a rise of 3% in 2014. Despite the rise, 64% of those that complain report a positive experience and only 14% saying the result was negative.
- 6.3 This method of managing customer interaction is being seen as low cost, convenient and transparent. But it also offers the opportunity to engage in two way conversation and ultimately make the interaction with the Council a positive one.
- 6.4 Contact with the Council for service requests via social media has increased over the last 12 months from just 10 contacts in the month of October 2015 to 71 in August 2016.
- 6.5 To date the digital marketing focus has primarily been on social media and how it can be used to engage with residents and businesses. Social media accounts have grown organically over time based on the joint objectives of providing helpful information about services and as a channel for pushing campaigns.
- 6.6 Despite the fact the Council is seen as a leading authority on social media, however, there are a number of areas where improvements can be made. This includes reducing the focus on the quantity of followers and interactions and increasing focus on the quality of content and interactions driving engagement and user satisfaction. In a truly strengths-base way - joining and engaging where channels, groups and online communities exist already instead of creating our own, primarily broadcast channels.
- 6.7 Our current channels** - The Council currently operates 78 social media accounts across Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube and Vimeo. These roughly spit into three distinct groups –corporate Council channels, place based accounts and those established to tap into a service or issue of interest. These include:
- 6.7.1 Twitter @ManCityCouncil:**
- 84,000 followers
  - 55% of users are female, 45% are between 25 to 34 year-olds
  - Has the highest number of followers of all English local authorities
  - Tweets 24/7 via scheduled and live tweets
- 6.7.2 The reach and the number of interactions delivered is increasing, for example, over the three month period from 29 June to 27 September 2016, the Council has had 5.8m impressions on Twitter, with 11,000 link clicks and 5,700 retweets. Over the same period in 2015, this figure was 1.3m, an increase of 346%. In fact, at the current growth rate (120 new followers each day), the account will hit 100,000 followers by February 2017.
- 6.7.3 Tweets and replies are managed by Communications with the exception of service requests (flytipping reports, complaints etc.) which are responded to by the Customer Services team.



6.7.4 Current insight shows that content containing images and videos receive the most responses. Videos with captioning are effective as they are more likely to catch the attention of someone viewing without audio and will tend to see the video automatically play within their feed as they scroll past.

## **6.8 Facebook – Manchester City Council**

- Over 60,000 likes – or around 10% of Manchester’s 600k active Facebook users (some hold more than one account)
- 54% are male and 32% are between 25 and 34
- Posts are made 24/7 via scheduling and typically include an image or video to boost engagement
- Peak engagement typically takes place alongside major events such as the Christmas light switch-on.
- Largest Facebook page for a Local Authority in the UK with over 60,000 likes, (Wigan has 16.3k, Leeds 14.2k, London Assembly 12k, Glasgow 11.5k, Edinburgh 11.2k, Birmingham 7.8k, Cardiff 7.5k)

6.8.1 Posts and replies are managed by the Communications Team with Customer Service staff picking up service queries and reports.

## **6.9 Instagram - @manchestercitycouncil**

- MCC account launched October 2015
- 6,200 likes – the most of any UK local authority
- 46% of users are under 24 – making it a great channel for the city’s young population

6.9.1 Instagram has proved successful in driving debate and encouraging discussion around high-profile campaigns like our budget conversation and for sharing images and videos of key events like Manchester Day.

## **6.10 Place based social media accounts**

6.10.1 In addition to the corporate social media accounts, there are 24 place-based Twitter accounts that were established over a 12 month period starting with Cheetham in May 2013.

6.10.2 The objective of these accounts was to support the Council’s ambition of thinking digital first and empowering residents to get online and vitally to support local communications on neighbourhood delivery such as waste and recycling or information about local services or advice. It was also designed to support Customer Services – supporting the channel shift messages of ‘do it online’.

6.10.3 For a number of reasons, including resident recognition of the chosen ward name or area, the broadcast based approach, residents choosing to spend their time in other channels and varying skills of particular areas, Twitter accounts aren’t being utilised as originally intended. The following table outlines the number of posts made from each account and the number of followers. The engagement levels for posts from these accounts are low – and

algorithms in social media platforms will not push them to move them up in people's news feeds – missing the opportunity to share messages.

<b>Ward Twitter account</b>	<b>Posts</b>	<b>Followers</b>
MCC Gorton <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCGorton">twitter.com/MCCGorton</a>	6092	1880
MCC Chorlton <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCChorlton">twitter.com/MCCChorlton</a>	3391	1393
MCC Levenshulme <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCLevenshulme">twitter.com/MCCLevenshulme</a>	2446	833
MCC Harpurhey <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCHarpurhey">twitter.com/MCCHarpurhey</a>	2096	718
MCC Crumpsall <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCCrumpsall">twitter.com/MCCCrumpsall</a>	1991	594
MCC Moston <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCMoston">twitter.com/MCCMoston</a>	1908	646
MCC Fallowfield <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCFallowfield">twitter.com/MCCFallowfield</a>	1802	823
MCC Whalley Range <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCWhalleyRange">twitter.com/MCCWhalleyRange</a>	1529	689
MCC Longsight <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCLongsight">twitter.com/MCCLongsight</a>	1436	604
MCC Cheetham <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCCheetham">twitter.com/MCCCheetham</a>	1387	518
MCC Burnage <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCBurnage">twitter.com/MCCBurnage</a>	1190	475
MCC Ancoats and Clayton <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCAnctsClaytn">twitter.com/MCCAnctsClaytn</a>	1175	556
MCC Wythenshawe <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCWythenshawe">twitter.com/MCCWythenshawe</a>	1074	954
MCC Charlestown <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCCharlestown">twitter.com/MCCCharlestown</a>	953	388
MCC Withington <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCWithington">twitter.com/MCCWithington</a>	881	730
MCC Bradford <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCBradford">twitter.com/MCCBradford</a>	790	412
MCC Higher Blackley <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCHBlackley">twitter.com/MCCHBlackley</a>	778	465
MCC Didsbury <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCDidsbury">twitter.com/MCCDidsbury</a>	703	826
MCC Rusholme <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCRusholme">twitter.com/MCCRusholme</a>	359	721
MCC Miles Platting and Newton Heath <a href="https://twitter.com/MPandNH">twitter.com/MPandNH</a>	329	331
MCC Hulme <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCHulme">twitter.com/MCCHulme</a>	229	612
MCC Moss Side <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCMossSide">twitter.com/MCCMossSide</a>	226	671
MCC Ardwick <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCArdwick">twitter.com/MCCArdwick</a>	143	492
MCC City Centre <a href="https://twitter.com/MCCCityCentre">twitter.com/MCCCityCentre</a>	89	394
<b>Total place-based accounts</b>	<b>32997</b>	<b>16725</b>

## 6.11 Theme and service based social media

6.11.1 The remaining social media accounts have been established to support specific themes or services. In essence these accounts work best where, there is a community of people with a specific interest in an issue or service – for example, if residents do not recognise that they live in a certain ward, they won't have the desire to engage with an account called by the ward name; that level of interest could not be fulfilled by the corporate account – a single platform that does not split smaller audiences will be more successful unless it is a universal service or interest such as Galleries, and there are identified resources manage these accounts within the service.

6.11.2 There are approximately 50 theme or service social media accounts including libraries and Archives+. Performance varies, Manchester Libraries has almost 6,000 likes on Facebook, which is more than the corporate Facebook account for Bolton Council at 4,000. Others have not been as successful.

<b>Themed/bespoke accounts</b>	<b>Posts</b>	<b>Followers</b>
HOME <a href="https://twitter.com/home_mcr">twitter.com/home_mcr</a>	15515	32216

<b>Themed/bespoke accounts</b>	<b>Posts</b>	<b>Followers</b>
Manchester Libraries twitter.com/MancLibraries	10325	16696
Archives+ twitter.com/archivesplus	9491	11463
Manchester Art Gallery twitter.com/mcrartgallery	8359	40557
Mcr Active twitter.com/mcractive	4432	1683
Manchester Markets twitter.com/MCRMarks	3869	20627
Safer Manchester twitter.com/SaferManchester	2239	1830
Our Mcr Crowdfunding twitter.com/OurMcrCrowdfund	2094	1115
Grow twitter.com/MCRGrow	1620	1557
M4 Print Design Studio twitter.com/M__FOUR	1231	1494
Mcr Santa twitter.com/MCRSanta	1086	2602
Mcr Run twitter.com/mcrrun	891	344
Manchester Gritters twitter.com/MCCGritters1	781	1202
Manchester ASBAT twitter.com/ManchesterASBAT	676	478
Manchester ASBAT twitter.com/ManchesterASBAT	676	478
BIPC @BIPCManchester	574	933
Manchester Day twitter.com/manc_day	464	605
MCC Commissioning twitter.com/mcc_comhub	402	520
Manchester Active Schools twitter.com/MCRActiveSchool	310	316
Manchester Leader's Forum twitter.com/MCRLeadersForum	211	186
Mcr Sports Awards twitter.com/mcrsportsawards	208	161
Ask Little Bill twitter.com/asklittlebill	190	276
<b>All MCC Accounts</b>	<b>65644</b>	<b>137339</b>

## 6.12 A new approach to social media

6.12.1 The annual BDO Social media usage in Local Government Report (2015) highlighted that whilst 100% of councils had a Twitter account and 90% had a Facebook account only 43% of councils have a social media strategy. A social media strategy is vital to understand how different platforms can be used to support communications aims and objectives.

The approach will be to see social media as a relationship channel facilitating conversations with residents with the objective to:

- Share information and talk to residents about council services ranging from waste and recycling, traffic updates and information about local or city wide events.
- Provide online customer services whilst supporting channel shift to online from more expensive traditional channels.
- Engage in conversations with residents to help develop positive perceptions of the council - moving away from being perceived as a faceless organisation broadcasting to one who engages, listens and responds.

6.12.2 To do this, the Council should:

- **Use the right social media platforms** –utilise existing accounts to engage the most appropriate audience for that channel and to share the most appropriate messages – using insight to plan activity. For example,

using Instagram to reach Manchester's growing younger population.

Continue to review which new platforms and accounts will enable the successful achievements of the objectives and disestablish those that are not working. This would include closing the place based Twitter accounts and some of the service or issue based accounts, over time as the strategy's action plan is delivered. It would not be a universal 'switch off' – rather a planned move to ensure that conversations are happening in local areas as defined by social media users.

Communications will create a virtual team of supported staff from neighbourhood teams and individual services to ensure they are given the tools and techniques to engage where conversations and audiences are – even if this isn't through the development of their own channels or platforms. This approach has been discussed with the management team within Neighbourhoods and it was agreed that it would be a sensible way forward to enable better place based conversations.

- **Build a network of influencers** – investing time to research who has influence in the city within communities, and collaborate to use these influencers to support better engagement. It will take time to build relationships with these key influencers to exchange information for mutual benefit, but will be a more successful approach.

Regular audits of social media accounts used at a city and ward level will be undertaken, including those which are outside of Council control. This potentially opens up a network of channels to access without having to own and manage them.

- **Develop excellent targeted content** – as outlined above. Communications will create a content guide (across all channels, not just social) to provide guidance on the type of content that will help achieve objectives.
- **Develop an appropriate and agreed voice, tone and brand** – to enable conversations and demonstrate the Council's 'personality' agreed voice, tone and brand that reflects an Our Manchester approach will be developed. This will include the way content is phrased, the questions asked and the vocabulary used. The corporate brand guidelines will be reviewed to include guidance on how Council social media accounts should be branded creating a recognisable family.
- **Update the social media policy and guidance** – update existing policies to provide further guidance on what is expected of staff when using social media and to inspire and empower staff to use their own digital networks to share and support content – acting as ambassadors for the Council. This will deliver substantial impact as we know that around 70% of council employees are also Manchester residents and is reflected in other successful accounts such as Wigan's.

- **Targets and measurement** –agree KPIs to show how the social media strategy has had an impact and feed this back to on a regular basis. Whilst measurement will include metrics like the number of followers, likes and retweets, it will also include qualitative analysis of what people are saying to the Council and about the Council, how the Council responds, who these people are; and whether the fact they are engaging online is related to any new behaviour offline.

## 7. Where we need to be: email marketing

- 7.1 Email marketing allows the Council to build and develop strong relationships with residents through direct contact. It is easy to measure the effectiveness of email with immediate access to data such as open rates and click-throughs. It's a low cost option and allows for audience segmentation, which means messages can be targeted at the right people using the most appropriate content.
- 7.2 The corporate e-bulletin currently has 172,755 subscribers with a 19% open rate and 1.9% click through rate. The majority of views take place on mobile devices (70.6%). The average unsubscribe rate is 0.23 – in line with signupto.com's 2016 average for local government.
- 7.3 In addition, a number of services send out issue or service specific e-bulletins to their own subscriber lists (some individually gathered by services and some as sub sets of the corporate subscriber list).
- 7.4 Subscribers are currently gathered through sign up forms on the Council website, promoted on the annual Council tax and business rates mailout, via the Council Facebook page plus an option to join the mailing list when signing up for a My Account. The information is stored within the email broadcast platform, Mailchimp.
- 7.5 To encourage existing subscribers to provide the Council with more information an 'update profile' link has recently been added on the e-bulletin. This will allow Communications to increase the personalisation of content by gathering where subscribers live in the city, their interests and the type of news they want to receive.
- 7.6 Other data sets held within the council are used on a campaign by campaign basis for email marketing. For example, Revenues and Benefits hold email data for Council Tax account holders, which allowed further segmentation on billing behaviour. Results show that more people signed up to e-billing and Direct Debit payments over the period marketing emails were sent to the database.
- 7.7 Whilst email marketing is one the most effective channels currently used it could be improved by developing a consistent email marketing approach. This includes:
- **Continue to build our audience** - Continue to work with Customer Services to grow the audience and keep building the database updated so

that emails can be targeted effectively. This will include ending all face-to-face, telephone and online transactions with a request to sign up to the e-bulletins.

- **Developing great content** - Build on both the open rate and the click through rate by creating easily browsable emails which are visually stimulating with eye-catching graphics and easily skimmed text.

## 8. Where we need to be: Press office

8.1 The Council's Press Office has a strong reputation among internal stakeholders and among the local media. Their work and the effective media relationships they have developed are valued and vital to the organisation. Over the last few years the team have developed some good practice around digital engagement – both with the media and directly with other audiences using social media and email marketing. However, to keep pace with changing demand there is a need for a greater focus on the core activity required to drive a digital approach to media management.

8.2 In addition there is a need to bring the media and wider communication teams together so that individual skills are shared to drive forward our campaigns more effectively and that the wider team have a broader understanding of the drivers of media and resident reputation.

8.3 Earlier this year Communications commissioned Comms 2.0 to review how the press office could make better use of digital channels. The ambition was to build a press office team with the digital skills and tools to improve the reach and impact of council messages. They would also act as content creators – developing content that the media will want to use and/or the public will be engaged with and use digital approaches to deliver an element of self-serve, enabling the media to get easier access to simple information and content they need. To determine the best approach to driving digital press office the team carried out:

- Desk-top research on national and Manchester media landscapes
- A six-day review of leading Manchester media channels
- Interviews with Press Office and wider communications team staff
- Interviews with local and regional media

8.4 This research found that:

- **Behaviours around news consumption have changed significantly** - Consumer behaviour around gathering information and news has changed significantly over the last decade or more. The age of the daily, printed newspaper being the primary source of local information is long-gone and residents have a much wider set of tools to gather news from a wider range of media stakeholders than ever before.

The vast majority of Manchester residents are online and have access to smartphones and tablets and these are their primary tool for accessing

news. In fact, residents now spend twice as long on social media as they do reading newspapers or visiting traditional news sites. As well as accessing news differently they can also share, react and comment on it instantly – becoming media stakeholders in their own right.

In line with the changing approach to content development driving the take-up of news content also requires quality photography and video – with video an increasingly important tool - particularly for younger audiences. However, TV and Radio is still a heavily used channel for many groups of people

- **Media behaviours and ways of delivering have made a digital shift -**  
The long tradition of printed daily news in Manchester has shifted to increasingly digital news channels either through directly accessed news through media websites or through media –owned social media channels.

Because of this (and the advent of 24 hour rolling TV news) the pace of news stories has changed as publications can no longer afford to wait until their next edition to run stories. This is driving a growing ‘breaking news’ culture both broadcast and online. This has led to a growing use of live-blogs to ensure the media keep ahead of changes in a story. This requires much more active ongoing support by the press office in providing regular updates and additional content (video, photography and statements). This also means that journalists are busier than ever and there is growing demand for self- service tools such as pre-recorded sound files and images.

The ease of access and the growing audiences on social and digital media have led to a much more varied media landscape – the Council’s core stakeholders are no longer just the MEN, local BBC and Key 103 and there is a need to change the approach to media monitoring to reflect this.

Audiences now gather their news using channels or communities appropriate to their values and needs, for example, hyper local sites or those specifically aimed at demographics e.g. LadBible or MancBible.

This means a need to create more tailored content for key audiences and channels rather than a one size fits all approach via a press release. It also means evaluating what we do more effectively so we can learn from successes and improve.

Not only are social media users sharing content, they are creating it with more stories gathered from social media everyday. Not only can journalists gather stories from existing content but they are also more available through their own social media accounts.

- 8.5 To remain at the forefront of reputation and media management the Press Office needs to increase the pace of digital transformation and this includes, addressing and changing current ways of working within the team, investing in staff development and equipment and focusing on content aimed at end user

with increased knowledge and insight about both audience and media behaviour and needs. This will be delivered by:

- 8.5.1 Transforming the role of Press Officers to become 'cross-channel publishers'** - delivering training on creating sharable content and renaming team as News and Media Office to reflect changing role, as well as reviewing the approach to the email bulletin (jointly between Marketing and Media teams).
- 8.5.2 Driving greater awareness of the wider role of Press Office among internal and external stakeholders** - developing a Communications Dashboard showing upcoming and delivered activity – both proactive and reactive and a radar of upcoming issues as well as redeveloping the team approach to campaign development and management to ensure earlier involvement in communications and planning.
- 8.5.3 Improving evaluation of press office activity** - developing an evaluation framework and reviewing the approach to media monitoring.
- 8.5.4 Developing better tools and approaches to analyse media landscape** - monitoring published content, relevant blogs, forums and social media platforms. With shared responsibility (between Press Office and Marketing) for social media monitoring.
- 8.5.5 Improving the use of audience insight when developing media strategies and creating engaging content** - Training Press Officers on available insight tools (MOSAIC etc.) and the development of regular learning sessions to share media lessons learned across wider communications team.
- 8.5.6 Trying new approaches to publishing and sharing content in appropriate formats** - development of a media image library, using and creating more audio files, video clips and interviews
- 8.5.7 Driving a more proactive news culture across the service and organisation** - Sharing responsibility for development of forward plans between Communications Business Leads and Media Leads and the development of agreed messages on key reputational areas or areas of interest – for use on social media and media.
- 8.5.8 Reviewing and redeveloping the Press Office web pages to drive self service** - including links to social media and sharing icons and audio, video and image files where suitable.

## **9. Action Plan 2016-17**

- 9.1 Alongside the actions identified for the Press Office there are a number of actions required to support the delivery of this strategy over the next 12 months. Many of these actions focus on creating a digital culture and developing the skills and experience of the Communications team and of our wider Council staff, elected members and other stakeholders. There is also need to develop a range of support tools, guides and policies to ensure



consistency in the digital approach. These activities have been split under the five core principles at the heart of this strategy.

9.2 To ensure that the Council are **ahead of developments** activity includes:

- Establish weekly digital scrums across the Communications Team encouraging sharing of knowledge and best practice from individual team members or completed campaigns (October 2016).
- Review the briefing processes and campaign planning approaches to ensure they reflect the digital approach (November 2016).
- Develop a cross sector digital group to share digital best practice (January 2017).
- Set aside time for the Communications team to invest in research and development – learning about new digital approaches, writing case studies or sharing learning with other team members. Which will shared widely with colleagues to develop cross organisational skills.

9.3 To drive an **engaging rather than broadcast** approach the plan is:

- Review the social media policies to enable services (where its is appropriate) to engage with existing online communities and channels (March 2017).
- Develop an agreed tone of voice and brand for social media to support staff to communicate on behalf of the Council but ensure that our online brand is consistent (December 2016).
- Establish Council staff digital network to share best practice with services responsible or keen to engage digitally with their identified audiences (November 2016).
- Commission training for members to enable and inspire them to engage with their own digital communities and influencers (December 2016 / January 2017)
- Develop an approach to building the audience for email marketing – ensuring that there is greater clarity about peoples' interests and values as well as increasing the Council's reach (January 2017)

9.4 To ensure delivery of **quality content**:

- Develop a best practice content guide and training resources to ensure all communications team and wider Council digital staff network understand the principles of quality content (January 2017)
- Review current email marketing content to ensure it is fit for purpose (October 2016 – already underway)
- Invest in video and editing training for communications team to ensure quality video content is developed quickly and cheaply (ongoing – already underway)

9.5 To become more **insight based**:

- Develop a working database of digital influencers, communities and ambassadors by geographical area, issue or service (ongoing – already underway)
- Roll out training for the communication (November 2016)

9.6 To **prove the benefits** of digital:

- Implement mandatory evaluation reports for all priority campaigns – focusing on digital engagement and delivery against established outcomes. (December 2016)
- Develop quarterly reports on effectiveness of digital and social activity for senior leaders (November 2016)
- Develop an internal communications campaign to educate and inspire staff about the benefits of digital engagement and communications (January 2017)

**10. Conclusion**

- 10.1 The need for a more digital approach to communications and engagement is clear as audience behaviours and organisational need are driving transformation away from more traditional 'broadcast communication methods to more targeted digital delivery.
- 10.2 This strategy outlines the Council's current digital communications activity and its effectiveness and outlines a plan to improve that activity over the coming year. Delivery of this action plan will allow the Council to engage audiences better rather than broadcasting, targeting activity by using insight to pinpoint audience preferences and values taking an Our Manchester approach. It will also support the challenge of competing messaging available to our audiences by creating excellent industry-leading content and finally proving the benefits of digital engagement by evaluating and learning from it.
- 10.3. Activity against this strategy will be monitored with updates provided to senior managers and members on a regular basis. Committee's views about the approach are sought.