

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Resource and Governance Scrutiny Committee – 8 February 2022

Subject: Strategic Communications three year strategy and service priorities

Report of: Head of Strategic Communications

Summary

This report provides an update on the Council's three year communications strategy, to be adopted from April 2022.

It also includes the communications priorities for 2022/23, the social media strategy implemented in 2021, and an example of the monthly evaluation template referenced in the report.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to note and comment on the reports.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

The work of the team contributes positively to the city's zero carbon work.

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The work of the team is driven by the OM strategy and the corporate priorities of the council. The campaigns and communications activities included within the plan are designed to support the delivery of these outcomes, by raising awareness, increasing engagement or influencing behaviours
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	

A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

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Background documents (available for public inspection): None

Introduction

- 1.1 The strategic communications service had a three year plan in place until March 2020, and at that time – given the early response to Covid – the service moved to planning for one year only. That was repeated in 2021 with the focus on the response to the pandemic.
- 1.2 However, it is now appropriate to move back to a three-year planning cycle to allow strategic delivery of communications, better planning and to develop the service in line with changing needs.
- 1.3 Meaningful communications plays an important role in everything we do as a council, is the responsibility of everyone and is critical to delivery of the council's role in the community. Our Communications Strategy sets out how we communicate with our local residents and stakeholders. The principal purpose of the Communications Strategy is to support the council's refreshed Corporate Plan, which sets out how we will help make the Our Manchester vision for 2025 a reality.
- 1.4 The three year time frame allows us to plan service delivery in line with budgets, training and development needs, service subscriptions and to take a longer term view of contracts.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Strategic Communications covers a range of services which are far broader than functions traditionally associated with council communications.
- 2.2 The service is structured into two areas - **Content and Strategy** and **Operations and Commercial**.

Content and Strategy plans and develops the strategy for communications activity, drawing out the key messages and shaping the tactics to get the messages to the relevant audiences. They then bring the story to life by providing creative treatments, designing web pages and content presentation/ user journeys. The following services are provided:

- Strategic marketing, account management, insight, research (with assistance from PRI), channel planning, media buying and digital communications
- Press office - promotes the Council via proactive PR, protects its reputation and responds to media inquiries, major events supporting communications (marketing and digital)
- Internal communications – intranet, staff communication and engagement
- Creative design – crafting the look and feel of the messages and campaigns through all mediums based on the target audience
- Digital - creating effective web content that supports residents to access services and information

Operations and Commercial delivers the operational functions for communications - print, mail, distribution and supporting residents with interpretations and translations and supporting events with technical delivery. This team also identifies opportunities to commercialise our operations. The following services are provided:

- Print and mail services – this also includes delivery of the digitisation of operational services, such as hybrid mail and management of the local print infrastructure
- Translations and interpretation services
- Presentation and technical AV services
- Commercial relationship management

- 2.3 The Content and Strategy team works within an annual work programme of communications and marketing campaigns that link directly to the service and council's business objectives and help protect and improve the council's reputation.

The work plan is developed by marketing/communications specialists working with service managers ensuring the council's strategic aims and services objectives are reflected in all communications activity.

There is a clear line of sight of all work coming into the team that can be prioritised by managers on an ongoing basis and resource is used as flexibly as possible to deliver the priorities and projects emerging.

Equalities runs throughout all activity, ensuring inclusion is a key part of service planning. This applies to how we develop and share messaging, the channels and networks we use, and how we listen to feedback.

Similarly, we aim for zero carbon messaging to run through all our communications planning so it is not just focussed around green or environmental messages.

The broad scope of the team's work is as follows:

- **Priority 1** campaigns are those that will have the biggest impact on council reputation and are vital to the delivery of one of our agreed priorities.
- **Priority 2** campaigns are closely aligned to priorities but have a lesser impact on the reputation of the organisation.
- **Priority 3** activity includes smaller campaigns - either aimed at smaller audiences or supporting time limited activity or events.

The Service Priorities document is attached at Appendix 2.

- 2.4 The service has significant income generation targets across services. This is used to fund the service and staffing.

Since 2011/12, there has been overall savings of £1.225m. Since 2016/17 budgets have been fairly stable until the £300k savings in 2021/22.

- 2.5 Service priorities, principles, structure and channel planning are set out in the Communications Strategy 2022-25 at Appendix 1.
- 2.6 Key areas of focus in the last two years have been development of an evaluation framework and the development of a council-wide social media strategy, to support training, evaluation and to demonstrate value for money.
- 2.7 The Social Media Strategy and the evaluation document for December are attached at Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.

3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are asked to comment on and note the reports.