



Communities Scrutiny Group

Thursday, 6 October 2022

Council's External Communications Strategy

Report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services

Cabinet Portfolio Holder Finance and Customer Access, Councillor G Moore

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. A new External and Internal Communications Strategy was published in June 2022.
- 1.2. This Strategy builds on the External Communications Strategy 2017-2021 with a new internal element highlighting the increasing importance placed on communication to and from the Council's internal stakeholders including councillors and staff.
- 1.3. This Strategy is included at **Appendix One** for information and the Communities Scrutiny Group is asked to consider a number of points outlined in paragraph 4.11 of this report in relation to the action plan contained within the Strategy.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group review the action plan contained within the External and Internal Communications Strategy 2022-2025 and make any further suggestions to officers they feel appropriate.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The External and Internal Communications Strategy has been created to continue to oversee the information residents need about Council services, what's going on in the Borough, who to contact and what the Council is doing. The development and production of quality communications over the next three years, highlighting the strategic development work of the Council as well as the delivery of direct, frontline services and updates, is an essential factor in continuing to make Rushcliffe a great place to live and work.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. Between 2017 and 2021, the Council built upon its previous reputation of being a good communicator with the introduction of a weekly electronic subscription newsletter, more diverse and accessible web content and electronic transactional services, and more video footage to suit the

preferences of younger residents and in particular social media. These new additions complement our longstanding and well-regarded thrice-yearly Rushcliffe Reports, social media standing, website and positive relationships with local media outlets.

- 4.2. The COVID-19 pandemic saw the Council's communications team working at an extremely high-level over a prolonged period of time to ensure both external consumers of Council information, our residents, businesses and partners, and internal users such as councillors and staff, were kept up to date with ever changing information related to the pandemic. New skills were developed, effective short-cuts established and the Council is keen to capitalise on these developments over the next three years.
- 4.3. The Council is also committed to timely and engaging, clear and accurate, inclusive and informative communications to ensure as many residents as possible are informed about its services. This can strengthen relationships and engagement with residents and the communities they live in and support delivery of the Council's vision for the Borough, priorities and activities.
- 4.4. Equally, keeping internal stakeholders fully engaged with a comprehensive range of channels is increasingly more important in an era when the COVID-19 pandemic has further changed the manner of where and how people perform their roles and communicate.
- 4.5. Acknowledging the increasing need to keep councillors, staff and other internal parties up to date consistently and effectively is key to ensure an integrated and connected Council that can meet its internal objectives and further influence its external priorities and communications.
- 4.6. Ipsos MORI, and others, have carried out research which confirms that the more informed residents are, the more satisfied they are with their council. If residents aren't informed, there is more reluctance to engage positively with Council services, activities, plans and proposals.
- 4.7. There is also some information to suggest that residents are more likely to engage with a council where it is clear that residents' views are taken into account and where they feel they can influence decisions. This means that the production of quality communications highlighting the strategic development work of the Council as well as the delivery of direct, frontline services is an essential factor in continuing to make Rushcliffe a great place to live and work.
- 4.8. Therefore, the Council's External and Internal Communications Strategy 2022-2025 addresses priorities for the Council's engagement across its channels. It will aim to ensure all stakeholders continue to receive information and updates in an accessible way in conjunction with listening, reacting and continually assessing the channels to ensure they act as convenient ways to contact and engage with the authority.
- 4.9. For external audiences, over the life of this Strategy, the Council will:

- Create short instructional videos/guides for key council services such as recycling, benefits, council tax and environmental issues
- Continue social media 'advocacy' featuring front line colleagues and business owners in the Borough - 'A day in the life of' – waste, customer services, revenues and benefits and internal teams
- Increase promotion of residents' email subscription topics and include replacement of Rushcliffe Gardener magazine to regular garden updates
- Develop further social media campaigns, including sharing residents' photos of the Borough, developing Instagram/ Facebook story use during event and appropriate infographics for key council decisions such as council tax, budget setting and major projects
- Consider the skills held within the team and use training and specific project work to address any gaps. Specifically, it will include review of the Performance and Reputation team's capacity to address increasing accessibility and website demands
- Introduce an annual Local Government Association advised 'who reads what' survey to further inform content of communications to different stakeholders
- Further develop annual communications planner to assist resourcing and focus of activity
- Include behavioural change campaigns in line with possible Environmental Bill key themes in 2023 and beyond
- Assist with the development of a new council website and communicate the Council's priorities more prominently whilst signposting further digital access to Customer Service functions across all Council channels
- Make more direct links between corporate and communications priorities
- Identify closer links with schools, YouNG, Positive Futures and other groups to connect further with new generations of Council service users.

4.10. For internal audiences, over the life of this Strategy, the Council will:

- Build on the 2021 staff survey key findings to further guide content in internal updates
- Further staff newsletter and video features on staff from across the organisation such as 'A Day in the life' video 'behind the scenes' and 'Why RBC is for me' and their connection with the Executive Management Team
- Continue to identify ways of engaging staff and councillors to news and updates
- Balance corporate messages with interactive updates that are relatable to staff and councillors in line with priorities and key strategies
- Review the Council's internal Brightsign and screensaver channels to relay relevant messages and use engaging digital content
- Review internal poster sites to further influence Councillors and staff on key messages
- Assess video usage of staff newsletter and email such as with a round-up of compliments every quarter reflecting and recognising achievement and effort
- Further animation in newsletter updates for staff, councillors and town and parish updates to freshen accompanying static content

- Annual staff newsletter poll via updates and email to gauge how content can continue to engage and influence
- Work with the Employee Liaison Group and Workplace Health Champions on identifying staff to drive internal campaigns and goals
- Produce and evaluate content that focuses and engages on themes from the Council's Smarter Ways of Working policy
- Introduce reference to corporate values in line with HR updates in induction process
- Assess, identify and evaluate annual internal communication projects as another barometer to influence content.

4.11. The Communities Scrutiny Group is asked to consider the following points:

- Firstly, considering communication with the Council's external stakeholders:
 - Do the eleven tasks in the action plan build upon the existing and established core external communication channels the Council's residents expect?
 - Do the eleven tasks reflect the Council's corporate priorities and approach to communications?
 - Will the eleven tasks increase resident understanding of the Council's activities and services enhancing the Council's reputation within the community?
 - Can the Group identify any concerns related to external communications that will not be resolved by tasks outlined in the Action Plan?
- Secondly, considering communication with the Council's internal stakeholders:
 - Do the thirteen tasks in the action plan build upon the existing and established core internal communication channels the Council's councillors and staff expect?
 - Do the thirteen tasks reflect the Council's corporate priorities and approach to communications?
 - Will the thirteen tasks increase councillors' and staff understanding of the Council's activities and services enhancing the Council's reputation amongst internal stakeholders?
 - Can the Group identify any concerns related to internal communications that will not be resolved by tasks outlined in the Action Plan?

5. Risks and Uncertainties

5.1. There are no risks or uncertainties involved in bringing the External and Internal Communications Strategy Action Plan to Communities Scrutiny Group for discussion. However, there are significant risks to the Council in not developing services that meet resident needs and keep residents informed about Council services and development projects.

5.2. Equally, a risk exists if the Council does not review its communication strategies to ensure they are timely and engaging, clear and accurate,

inclusive and informative and utilising a variety of channels to ensure as many residents as possible are informed, designed to meet their needs and how they engage.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

The developments outlined in the External and Internal Communications Strategy will be contained within budgets.

6.2. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications contained within the recommendations of this report.

6.3. Equalities Implications

There are no equalities implications contained within the recommendations of this report.

6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no Section 17 implications contained within the recommendations of this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	There is evidence to suggest that feeling informed about Council services is a significant contributing factor in how satisfied residents feel with their quality of life and satisfaction with their community as a place to live.
Efficient Services	
Sustainable Growth	
The Environment	

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group review the action plan contained within the External and Internal Communications Strategy 2022-2025 and make any further suggestions to officers they feel appropriate.

For more information contact:	Pete Linfield Director – Finance and Corporate Services 0115 914 8439 plinfield@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	
List of appendices:	Appendix One – External and Internal Communications Strategy