

Appendix 2 - LGA Communications Health Check – October 2020 - Draft Response and Action Plan

Recommendations	Response/Action	Completion Date
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY		
Commission a 'who reads what?' survey to establish how Thurrock residents consume news and prefer to.	A consultation which contains a combination of the LGA's pre-set and Thurrock specific questions will commence this month.	March 2021
Consider commissioning an externally facilitated workshop involving members and officers to help develop the new strategy.	The LGA are facilitating a workshop with Cabinet members and officers to help develop the new communications strategy on 2 March 2021.	March 2021
Use the new strategy to set out how the Thurrock story will be communicated.	The new communications strategy will provide a framework for the wider Thurrock narrative. It will incorporate elements of the council's vision and priorities as well as provide an overarching narrative which sits above existing successful campaigns such as Transforming Thurrock.	June 2021
Ensure the refreshed communications strategy includes measurable objectives and an annual campaign plan.	<p>A campaign plan for 2021/22 will be included alongside the new communications strategy, this will be updated annually for the duration of the strategy.</p> <p>All communications campaigns will include measurable objectives and regular evaluation reports on all communications activity will be produced.</p> <p>A forward plan/calendar of all celebratory days and events will be agreed for the 2021/22 municipal year – this will include national days as well as awareness weeks that the council is actively supporting</p>	June 2021
LOCAL MEDIA		
Consider more productive ways of engaging the local media (e.g. briefings) rather than relying on press releases.	<p>This will be discussed with members at the upcoming LGA facilitated workshop and agreed approach reflected in the communications strategy.</p> <p>The local media will also be consulted to inform the approach.</p>	June 2021

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<p>Establish a priority system for triaging queries, keep media updated on progress of queries and explain when a query will be answered or why no response is to be issued if that needs to be the case.</p>	<p>A new process has been implemented which sees a standard response acknowledging receipt of an enquiry. Further refinements to this system will be implemented after discussion and the upcoming LGA facilitated workshop.</p> <p>In January, the communications team received 31 media enquiries – 21 from local media, 3 from regional media and 7 from national media. Enquiries can often be complex, involving several different services across the council, and 52% were responded to within 24 hours.</p>	<p>March 2021</p>
<p>Agree a strategy for how the council engages with online news outlets and stick to it.</p>	<p>This will be discussed and agreed with Cabinet members at the upcoming LGA facilitated workshop.</p>	<p>March 2021</p>
PROCESSES		
<p>Replace the current sign off process for media statements with a simpler system which reduces the number of people involved and includes timeframes for both officers and members to agree lines.</p>	<p>The sign-off process has been reviewed and changes implemented, this will be further discussed and refined in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Communications.</p>	<p>June 2021</p>
<p>Involve the communications team in the council's decision-making process at an earlier stage to improve relationships and trust with members.</p>	<p>Members of the communications team attend all Directorate Management Team meetings and Portfolio Holder meetings for a dedicated communications slot to assist with forward planning. A weekly comms look ahead meeting takes place with the Leader and PFH for communications. Members of the communications team also participate in strategic project meetings as appropriate.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Introduce a more outcome focussed approach to evaluating communications activity (e.g. the impact of a campaign rather than the number of 'likes').</p>	<p>A review of our evaluation has taken place and services are now more engaged with the evaluation process at an earlier stage, meaning that comms objectives are more clearly linked to service objectives and direct outcomes can be more clearly measured and demonstrated.</p> <p>An updated monthly evaluation report format has been introduced.</p>	<p>January 2021</p>

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<p>Try and cut out the little errors (i.e. mistakes in draft press releases) which have an impact on the communications team's reputation.</p>	<p>New processes are in place which include building in time for extra proof reading and making sure all draft copy is seen by at least a second pair of eyes prior to final sign off.</p>	<p>January 2021</p>
<p>ENEWS</p>		
<p>Focus more on the council's own communications channels which are read by more people (e.g. e-newsletters).</p>	<p>This approach will be built in to the new communications strategy. Our main Thurrock News enewsletter currently goes to almost 102,000 people and frequently has an open rate of over 50%, well above average for a local authority enewsletter.</p> <p>Our Facebook page has 11.1k likes and our top performing posts can achieve a reach of almost 70k people, with impressions (the number of screens our posts appear on) hitting up to 150k.</p> <p>Our Twitter account has 13.3k followers and regularly sees impressions (the total number of times a tweet has been seen) of 300k.</p> <p>Our LinkedIn (4.7k) Instagram (1.5k) follower numbers continue to grow from month to month, and our YouTube channel is also growing in subscriber numbers.</p>	<p>June 2021</p>
<p>Set ambitious targets for increasing the number of subscribers to the council's Thurrock News e-newsletter and develop a plan for achieving this.</p>	<p>A plan is currently being developed for this, and will be included in part of our overall approach in the new communications strategy.</p>	<p>June 2021</p>
<p>SOCIAL MEDIA</p>		
<p>Consider if customer services can support more with social media responsibilities by managing day to day enquiries received on that platform – and whether other departments can also play a greater role in creating content.</p>	<p>Training has taken place with some members of the customer services team who can take a role in answering specific service request based queries which come through on social media. Training has also previously and continues to be provided to staff who taken an active role in developing content for service specific Facebook pages such as the Fostering page.</p>	<p>March 2021</p>

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	The communications team actively monitor and respond to social media comments on emergency or significant issues with recent examples including flooding, changes to national COVID restrictions and local COVID-19 testing arrangements.	
Get to know your social media platforms and audiences better, and avoid posting the same content across all channels.	Work is underway on reviewing our approach to content across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, it is being informed by the latest Ofcom Adults' Media Use & Attitudes report and the ongoing 'who reads what' survey. The outcome will be reflected in the new communication strategy.	June 2021
Introduce more local faces to social media and video content.	<p>Work is underway through our partnership work with Stronger Together and Business Board as well as other community links to include more trusted local figures in our video content.</p> <p>Content from pupils at Woodside Academy, Belmont Castle Academy, St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School and Reverend Canon Darren Barlow were included in the January Holocaust Memorial Day.</p> <p>Ways to enable all Members to share the council's social media content more easily are being explored.</p>	Ongoing from January 2021