

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Joint Strategic Director, Community Wellbeing

Author: Nicola Haymes, Executive Head of Communications and Customer Services

Tel: 01483 444500

Email: nicola.haymes@guildford.gov.uk

Lead Councillor responsible: Councillor Tim Anderson

Tel: 07710 328560

Email: tim.anderson@guildford.gov.uk

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Communications Review

Executive Summary

In response to a request by the Committee, this report provides an overview of the Council's internal and external communications.

Recommendation to Committee

The Committee is invited to comment on the report.

Reason(s) for Recommendation:

The Committee requested a report on the Council's communications.

Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication?

No

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report responds to a request from the Committee for an overview of our internal and external communications.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 Effective communication and engagement is vital for meeting our values of being a transparent Council that listen to the views of residents and is open and accountable in our decision-making. They also allow us to articulate our priorities to residents and engage them in delivery where relevant.

3. Background

- 3.1 As part of the Future Guildford programme, our communications, public relations and marketing functions were centralised within the former Strategy and Communications team. The aim was to promote a corporate 'one voice' approach

to articulating the Council's work across all its channels (digital and traditional) and brands, whilst encouraging behavioural change by supporting channel shift from face-to-face, telephone and paper to digital via MyGuildford on the website.

- 3.2 Initially, the team comprised seven full-time equivalent (FTE) communications officers and three FTE digital content editors, with a number of officers transferring from a variety of services and roles and vacancies being filled through external recruitment. At the end of 2021, one full-time communications officer post was deleted for service efficiency savings.
- 3.3 The pace of work in an environment of ongoing organisational change and the key role in responding to the Coronavirus pandemic has provided a challenging period for the team since its establishment. These factors contributed to higher than normal turn-over and the team often operated at below its full staffing capacity.
- 3.4 However, improvements have been made to how the Council communicates and value for money digital channels have been prioritised. This was initiated through a series of facilitated workshops for councillors and officers to identify quick win changes and longer-term objectives. This report provides an overview of the Council's communication channels both internal and external.
- 3.5 We are also taking a more proactive approach to external communications, particularly with the media. Working with councillors through the Executive to identify and prepare press releases in advance of any announcements to help prevent a reactive approach to any news stories.
- 3.6 The Council's main external communication channels are:

Channel	Details	Evaluation
Staff and councillors	Face to face, telephone and email interactions. Daily communication by officers and councillors with residents, businesses and visitors.	Services monitor interactions.
Website	The main digital communications channel for information and transactions on our services. (This includes our customer service portal MyGuildford.)	Analytics are available on visits to the site.
Visit Guildford (part of the Visit Surrey website)	Part of our strategic visitor economy work.	Visit Surrey provide analytics.
Our sub-brands and project websites	Guildford Community Lottery Guildford Philanthropy Crowdfund Guildford Weyside Urban Village	Each website has its own analytics.

	Shaping Guildford's Future	
Social Media channels	<p>Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Next Door, Linked in and Youtube accounts for the Council.</p> <p>Also social media accounts for:</p> <p>Visit Guildford Mayor of Guildford Heritage Services Guildford Philanthropy Guildford Community Lottery Guildford Farmers' Market Climate Change Guildford for Business</p>	Analytics are reported through the service planning process (see <i>Appendix 1</i>).
Press releases	Our stories proactively issued to the local, national and trade press through an online press management system. We have 24 contacts in our local press distribution group and 126 contacts in our 'regular contacts' (local, national and trade press) group.	Outputs are reported through the service planning process (see <i>Appendix 2</i>). Uptake on press releases is around 55%.
Council 'newsroom' on our corporate website	This relatively new dedicated channel was developed following feedback from officer and councillor workshops. We have a development plan to add more video and podcasts to this area.	Analytics are available for these pages. "Click throughs" from social media to the newsroom can also be monitored.
Video	Video content is provided on our corporate Youtube channel and links provided through social media, our newsroom and press releases.	Youtube and social media provide 'views' analytics.
E-newsletters	We have an online e-newsletter tool to communicate to residents, businesses and community groups.	Volumes are monitored through the service

		planning process.
Formal consultations	We use an online survey tool to run formal consultations and promote them through the other channels.	Services are provided with detailed analysis from surveys.
Partners and suppliers	We cascade information through a variety of partners (e.g. parish councils, resident associations, Experience Guildford, Surrey County Council, Surrey Police etc.).	
Banners and poster sites	Priority is given to arts and culture venues and charities. They are also used for corporate promotions.	

3.6 The Council's main internal communication channels are:

Channel	Details	Evaluation
Staff and councillors	Daily communication between officers and councillors. General all staff emails.	
All staff e-newsletter	The fortnightly newsletter provides information on services, staff support and benefits and events. The format has been improved using Microsoft Sway.	The rate at which the newsletter is opened can be monitored.
Staff surveys	Formal all staff surveys are initiated and led by Human Resources team. The last one was in 2021 after lockdown. In future, Yammer will be used for staff surveys.	Analytics are available as part of the Yammer tool.
Intranet news area	There is a dedicated area called 'latest news' which is to be developed for staff communications.	

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. Risks

6.1 Effective communication is essential to managing reputational risks to the Council.

6.2 Communication systems are spread across different cloud based SAAS (software as a service) systems which minuses the risk of technology failure.

7. Human Resource Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications

8.1 Our communications aim to reflect our diverse communities through their visual, written and accessible content across all channels.

9. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

9.1 Communications and community engagement will be essential to deliver our ambitions to reduce carbon emissions in the borough.

10. Suggested issues for overview and scrutiny

10.1 As requested this report provides an overview of the Council's internal and external channels for the Committee to discuss.

11. Conclusion

11.1 Council communications have improved over the past four years and we have adopted new tools to better provide our residents, businesses and visitors with the information they need on our services and other important developments. We monitor our communications channels regularly, including website visits and social media engagement.

11.2 Whilst not solely responsible for all communications, the Communications Team plays a key role in providing advice, guidance and resource to meet the needs of services and staff.

12. Background Papers

None

13. Appendices

Appendix 1: Corporate social media accounts statistics: 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021
Vs 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022

Appendix 2: Press release output by service area. This does not include media enquiries that we receive.

Please ensure the following service areas have signed off your report. Please complete this box and do not delete.

Service	Sign off date
<i>Finance / S.151 Officer</i>	<i>12th Oct</i>
<i>Legal / Governance</i>	<i>12th Oct</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>12th Oct</i>
<i>Equalities</i>	<i>12th Oct</i>
<i>Lead Councillor</i>	<i>18th Oct</i>
<i>CMT</i>	<i>18th Oct</i>
<i>Executive Liaison</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Committee Services</i>	<i>28/10/22</i>