

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY – 18 MARCH 2014

REPORT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMMUNICATIONS AND REVISED
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2014

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To introduce the findings from the annual review of communications and the revised Communication Strategy and social media principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY: That:

(A)	Members review and provide feedback on the 2014 Communication Strategy; and
(B)	The figures from the annual review of communications be noted.

1.0 Background

1.1 East Herts Council formally adopted the Communication Strategy at the Executive meeting on 10 July 2012. At the meeting it was agreed that the report should be amended on an annual basis. This report recommends a revised strategy which builds upon the content in the previous version.

1.2 The strategy seeks to both, review the way we use traditional channels of communication, and to develop a range of other channels such as social media and councillor engagement, to ensure that we engage and communicate with our various audiences in the most efficient and cost effective way.

1.3 This report also details the successes against the strategy and areas of improvement for council communications in the form of a light touch review.

2.0 Report

2.1 The draft version of the revised Communication Strategy is attached as **Essential Reference Paper 'B'** with track changes.

3.0 Annual Review (April 2013 – Feb 2014)

3.1 Press and broadcast media profile:

The communications team have a robust process in place for responding to press queries, and delivering information via external media. The number of press releases issued has increased, despite the communications team being one officer down for half the year. The communications team will continue to work with services to identify newsworthy stories to promote via all our communications tools.


Total number of press releases issued	
April - Feb 2013	April - Feb 2014
69	80 ↑

Total number of statements issued	
April - Feb 2013	April - Feb 2014
15	17 ↑

Total number of press queries	
April - Feb 2013	April - Feb 2014
128	116 ↑

3.2 The following table identifies the range of press coverage the council received. Quarter 3 has been chosen as monitoring for 2012/13 was only introduced midway through the year so it is not possible to undertake a full year analysis. The methods of monitoring have also improved so the communications team have access to additional detail for later months.

Press coverage analysis				
Type	Qtr 3 2012/13 Mentions	Estimated ACE Value	Qtr 3 2013/14 Mentions	Estimated ACE Value
Regional	15 positive	£15,825	26 positive	£27,430

and local press				
National press	0		0	
Consumer press	2		0	
Trade press	1		2 MJ and LocalGov	
Online national press	1		1 BBC	
Online regional and local press	73 total		46 positive 32 Neutral 7 Negative	
Radio	1		0	
TV	0		0	
Online blogs	2		0	

The most covered topics in the media during 2013/14 include:

- Bishop's Stortford North
- Parking
- The District Plan

3.3 For the 2014/15 the communications team have progressed their monitoring so that information trends can be collated. This will allow the team to identify which topics are of most interest to the media and the public and which topics receive the most positive response.

3.4 Social media profile:

3.5 Twitter continues to be an excellent communication tool for the council. In the last year the number of followers has grown considerably. For every tweet delivered in the last year the council twitter account gained approximately three new followers.

Within the last year twitter has been developed to include the following:

- The names of the officers representing the council on twitter
- Business hours, where local businesses can tweet promotion requests

- Additional photo and video media
- Additional retweeting of partner messages.

3.6 The number of followers continues to advance at a steady pace so the communications team will continue to use twitter as a primary communications tool.

Twitter Statistics	
February 2013	February 2014
Tweets in total = 800	Tweets in total = 1356 ↑
Following = 98	Following = 173 ↑
Followers = 1878	Followers = 3349 ↑

3.7 The council's Facebook page has also been developed in the last year. It links suitable stories back to our website. It is an additional tool for engaging with residents. At the moment the number of likes is small so one of the aims for the communications team in the coming year is to continue encouraging public interaction with our page.

Facebook Statistics	
February 2013	February 2014
Likes = 113	Likes = 170 ↑

3.8 During February an external audit of the council's social media usage was undertaken. The findings were not available when this report was written. However, informal suggestions to continue to expand the council's use include using social media to consult with residents and promoting the work of the social media champions. Once the findings are released the communications team and CMT will review them and work to develop any practical and value adding suggestions.

3.9 Within the last year video has become a major emerging communications tool for the council. The communications team have introduced video features for Link magazine, one example being the video demonstrating where residents should put their recyclable waste. In addition to this a small number of councillors have engaged with the communications team to record videos on member community leadership. Video will continue to be a focus for the upcoming year as it is engaging, low cost and it is becoming an increasingly popular medium. It is set to become much more central to the communications team work.

4.0 Internal communications:

4.1 The communications team undertook an internal communications review with staff at the beginning of the financial year. The findings were used to outline in the Communications Strategy (Essential Reference Paper B) how internal communications could be improved. Some of these have already been undertaken, however due to the introduction of Here to Help many have been postponed whilst it is embedded across the organisation.

5.0 Email Marketing:

5.1 In February 2013 the communications team introduced email marketing as a communications tool. It is branded as Stay Connected. The public can sign up via our website (and partner websites) to receive information of their choice direct to their inbox.

5.2 Our current subscriber rate for quarter 3 2013/14 is as follows:
Subscribers = 1004 (previous 449)
Engagement rate (Percentage of recipients who opened or clicked on a link in a bulletin) = 40.1%

5.3 The communications team will be looking to encourage a greater rate of sign up to the service when the new Communications Officer is in place.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None.

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