

## Essential Reference Paper “B”

### 1. Introduction:

A new Communications and Digital Media Team was created in early 2017. After reviewing objectives in light of the council’s corporate plan, the following sets out what team is looking to achieve in the next two years:

#### 1.1. Objectives for 2017/18

- Create engaging and relevant communications for internal and external stakeholders
- Identify key messages to promote the benefits and services of East Herts to local residents and press
- Create a brand identity to help shape all comms at East Herts and provide consistency and brand recognition for all stakeholders
- Identify relevant communications channels, with a specific focus on social and digital

#### 1.2. Objectives for 2018/19

- Continue to create and develop engaging and relevant communications for internal and external stakeholders
- Use agreed key messages to promote the benefits and services of East Herts to local residents and press
- Roll out new templates and style guidelines to create an updated brand identity for all council communications
- Continue to develop communications with identified communications channels, with a specific focus on social and digital channels

### 2. Key messages

To engage the right people, East Herts Council needs to offer stakeholders something that is of interest to them and messaging needs to reflect this. While we offer a range of services to our community, we need to focus the messaging to ensure we are creating a consistent and identifiable narrative.

2.1. The following were drafted to broadly reflect priorities in the corporate plan and will form the basis for communications going forward.

**Message 1: Primary message**

We are investing in the future of East Herts to ensure it meets the needs of our residents

**Secondary message**

We have created long term plans to protect and enhance East Herts, while still offering best value for money for our residents

**Message 2: Primary message**

We care about the wellbeing of our residents

**Secondary message**

We are introducing a number of measures to help residents of East Herts improve their health

**Message 3: Primary message**

We are helping to drive and grow business in East Herts

**Secondary message**

We are providing support to help businesses grow and creating plans that encourage business into East Herts

**3. Channels**

The channels used to promote the work of the council were also reviewed.

**3.1. Press**

The key titles we currently engage with are: Hertfordshire Mercury, Herts and Essex Observer, Bishop's Stortford Independent, Three Counties Radio, BBC Look East, Bishop's Stortford Flyer, Axis Magazine, Hertfordshire Life and the recently launched Bishop's Stortford Independent.

3.1.1. The press have moved their focus to online, providing more opportunities to share council news. To make the most of this opportunity, the communications team has been more proactive this year, inviting in press for briefings and engaging them in the bigger

issues, which has led to a better relationship and more positive coverage in titles. Digital coverage is now also being tracked to understand what stories are being shared online as well as in print. This activity will continue into 2018/19.

3.1.2. We have also created media guidelines to help support the Executive Team in press interview situations.

### **3.2. Gov Delivery**

Gov Delivery is an e-mail marketing service that was previously been used to distribute a twice monthly newsletter and share press releases to registered members. From April this year, press releases were no longer shared and instead these were replaced with a weekly enewsletter sharing a round-up of all council news from the week.

3.2.1. We are also currently running a short Christmas campaign to drive up subscribers and test elements such as what stories are most attractive to residents, does sending at different times drive up open rates etc.

3.2.2. We have discovered that Gov Delivery is limited in terms of testing and changing the templates to make it more appealing for the end user, so next year we would like to investigate using a new service that offers better functionality and better value for money. Moving providers may result in the loss of a few subscribers, but we will be able to provide a better newsletter for residents. This launch will also be supported by communications to drive up sign ups.

### **3.3. Link**

Link is the residents' magazine that was previously sent out four times a year, but moved to just three editions from last year, to all households in East Herts to update them on the news of the council. There is a question over whether this is still a relevant form of communication as a large amount of the information is available online, the stories will all go on to Gov Delivery and it is very costly to the council to print and deliver.

3.3.1. From this year, the decision was made to move to just two editions a year moving forward, a spring/summer edition at the same time as sending council tax bills and an autumn/winter edition. More regular news will be provided through the enewsletters, social media and the website.

### **3.4. Social media**

The council has been slowly building its social media presence through Facebook and Twitter and has seen these channels grow significantly over the last couple of years due to additional activity and updates being shared and as a result of the growth of the number of people using social media as their first point of contact.

3.4.1. As a result of this success, we also made the decision to join Instagram in May this year. This has seen significant growth in the few months it has been running; especially with the businesses in the area and younger residents.

3.4.2. Over the next year we plan to continue to grow these three channels with more regular updates, campaigns and by working with partner organisations. We will also be looking to review how we use LinkedIn to engage with businesses in the area, working with the Business Engagement Manager.

### **3.5 Website**

We launched a new website this year, which has been well received both internally and externally. Results have shown that the new website is being well used by customers and research is currently taking place to understand what else customers need from the website and where changes need to be made to make it even easier for them to use.

## **4. Results to date**

The results of this work are tracked quarterly. Overall all channels have seen significant growth in the last 12 months, below compares key figures from October 2016 to September 2017 to show the level of growth:

### **4.1. Gov delivery**

The number of subscribers grew from 8273 followers in October 2016 to 9762 September 2017.

### **4.2. Press coverage**

The amount of coverage has grown marginally from 33 pieces in October 2016 to 35 in September 2017, but the biggest change has been the amount of digital coverage this includes. In 2016 the coverage was purely print, in 2017 14 of the 35 pieces were online.

### **4.3. Twitter**

Followers grew from 7100 in October 2016 to 8171 in September 2017.

Tweet impressions grew from 77.3k in October 2016 to 126k in September 2017.

#### **4.4. Facebook**

The number of likes on the page grew from 498 in October 2016 to 702 in September 2017.

Facebook posts had a reach of 1331 in October 2016 compared to 2700 September 2017.

#### **4.5. Instagram**

Launched in May 2017, followers grew to 188 in September and are now at 305.

### **5. Next steps**

To build on this year's work, in future we will include a focus on:

- Driving proactive media opportunities, especially around bigger announcements, such as Old River Lane and Gilston proposals. A PR calendar has also been created to clearly show what news stories will be promoted and at what time. This will be shared with Heads of Service to ensure all announcements are supported.
- Growing Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and driving further engagement with these channels. We will also review LinkedIn and look at how we can make the most of this channel to engage with businesses in and around East Herts. Our new social media guidelines and policy will be on the new intranet when it launches to help all colleagues make the most of social opportunities.
- We will continue with just two copies a year of Link and look to drive up subscription to our weekly e-newsletter. We will also investigate alternative e-newsletter providers to ensure best value for money.
- We have created a new set of style guidelines and templates to ensure our communications are consistent. These have been introduced to staff at staff briefings and will be rolled out in the new year once the new templates and fonts are available to everyone.
- We will continue to work on the website to ensure it is an easy to use tool for all customers, with the aim of making this platform to first point of contact for the majority of our customers.