

Report For:	Executive
Date of Meeting:	26 April 2021
Report Of:	Head of Communications and Marketing
Report Author:	Adam Kearney
Subject:	Luton Council Communications Strategy
Lead Executive Member(s):	Cllr Sian Timoney
Consultations:	Councillors <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scrutiny <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Others <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Recommendations

- The Executive is recommended to approve the Luton Council Communications Strategy 2021-2024 set out at Appendix A to the report.**

Background

- Modern communications functions are evidence-led, have a greater emphasis on digital channels, audience insight and evaluation.
- In the two years prior to the pandemic the communications team had moved away from being a traditional reactive and press office function to a more strategic service which delivered campaign-led and outcome-focused communications where activity was well-researched, targeted and measurable.
- However, Covid-19 and the decisions we were forced to make as a result of the emergency budget, scuppered this momentum by:
 - taking up the majority of the team's focus and resources
 - drifting communications back to being much more reactive and ad-hoc
 - the team delivering communications which doesn't always align to the mission of the organisation
- A new communications strategy is therefore needed to reset the approach and ensure it aligns with Luton 2040, the new corporate plan objectives and the council's values.
- Our new strategy sets out a modern, innovative and strategic approach to communications with a core aim of delivering positive outcomes to help us realise our Luton 2040 objectives by influencing positive behaviour and changing perceptions and attitudes.

The Current Position

- Since the last communications strategy was written we've had a local election, changes within the senior leadership team, a new vision and corporate plan, a global pandemic, a recession and an emergency budget – all of which have significantly changed the local landscape and priorities.
- Following the 2020 emergency budget the communications team lost 4.5 FTE posts which needs to be accounted for when agreeing the priorities and work programme.

9. With the available resource it is far more effective for the team to deliver fewer well-researched and planned campaigns than trying to stretch all of our resources to deliver 'a bit of everything'.

Goals and Objectives

10. The high-level objectives of the communications strategy are:
- to help meet Luton 2040 and Corporate plan objectives by influencing attitudes, behaviours and life choices
 - to ensure there is clear and consistent dialogue with our target audiences, ensuring messages are effectively communicated
 - to provide sound communications advice for members, officers, staff and partners
 - to ensure our staff are informed, healthy, motivated and empowered
 - to carry out consultations effectively, legally and ethically
 - to manage the council's reputation locally and nationally with residents, businesses, partners and key stakeholders
 - to show effective and visible Luton council political and managerial leadership
 - to manage and protect the Luton Council and Luton 2040 brands

Proposal

Campaign approach

11. To manage demand the team should focus its limited resources on a set of corporately agreed priority campaigns that help meet the organisation's objectives.
12. By prioritising campaigns, the team will be able to deliver planned, well researched, targeted and measurable activity which directly deliver on Luton 2040 outcomes.
13. The campaign list will be agreed with the Executive and CLT and reviewed and evaluated every six months to ensure they are delivering positive outcomes against our objectives.
14. While some existing communications activity, deemed less of a corporate priority, will have to be put on hold, it also ensures resources are allocated appropriately.
15. There will be more methodical and evidence-based campaign planning rather than 'blanket' approaches. We will use existing audience insight, Mosaic information and ongoing community engagement to understand our audiences and better target our campaigns.
16. This approach is based on best practice and frameworks developed by the Government Communications service (GCS) and LG Communications. The plans will be built around the OASIS model championed by the GSC.
17. While an outcome-focused campaign methodology is at the core of our communications approach, building trust within our communities is also a focus. The strategy outlines our approach to this through:

- ongoing engagement and transparency with our communities
- communicating how the council's work is benefitting the town/people
- continuing to showcase our industry-leading work and initiatives

Internal Communications and staff engagement

18. The council's values sit at the heart of our internal communications approach.
19. The strategy sets out the approach to internal communications in the 'new normal' and ensuring staff are happy, healthy and motivated to achieve great things.
20. The approach ensures that:
 - staff will be well informed about the council's ambitions and priorities, understand how their role fits into the bigger picture and feel empowered and motivated by the senior leadership team
 - core messages are consistently and effectively communicated and is 'two-way'
 - we place more emphasis on engaging with 'offline' teams, make better use of digital technology and support managers as 'communicators'

Consultation with our communities

21. Following the emergency budget there is no longer a central consultation team so council services are now responsible for delivering their own consultations.
22. The communications team is able to support and advise services to ensure they are carrying out consultations effectively, legally and ethically.
23. All council consultations will be hosted on Luton's 'Let's Talk' consultation portal: engage.luton.gov.uk

Brand, style and tone of voice

24. The Luton brand remains the council's corporate identity and the Luton logo will continue to feature on all council documents, marketing materials and digital channels.
25. Luton 2040 is much wider than the council and therefore has its own visual identity. Partners will be encouraged to feature the Luton 2040 visuals in their own marketing to show this is a joined-up vision.
26. As Luton 2040 is the council's and town's central and unifying focus, the visual identity will be the standout feature on many of the council's documents and marketing materials, which will also carry the corporate logo.

Other

27. The strategy also sets out the council's approach to media management, social media, trading, evaluation, advertising and sponsorship and emergency communications/resilience.

Key Risks

28. By not prioritising communications activity the communications team will continue to be pulled in a multitude of different directions, leaving no time to properly plan and deliver priority campaigns and improve outcomes by influencing and changing perceptions and behaviours.
29. Resourcing levels – the demand for communications activity across the organisation far exceeds the resources we have to deliver it. This is why we have set out the approach for prioritisation.

Consultations

30. The strategy and approach was based on best and modern practice.
31. We will use existing audience insight and Mosaic information to understand our audiences and better target our campaigns. To strengthen this we will also undertake consultations with local communities to gain a better understanding of how they prefer to receive information.

Appendices Attached

32. Appendix A: Communications Strategy 2021-2024
33. IIA

Implications - an appropriate officer must clear all statements

For CLMT only Legal and Finance are required

Required

Item	Details	Clearance Agreed By	Dated
Legal	All communications activity will continue to follow the Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity.	Samantha McKeeman, Senior Solicitor	12/04/2021
Finance	By prioritising communications campaigns and ensuring they are well researched, targeted and measureable; we will ensure resources are appropriately targeted.	Darren Lambert, Finance Business Partner	Previously agreed 17 April
Equalities / Cohesion / Inclusion (Social Justice)	Images on our publicity are carefully considered to ensure they reflect the population of Luton. We write in Plain English to ensure messages can be understood, and images, videos and infographics are used so communications can still be understood by those who don't speak any English and for those with learning disabilities.	Maureen Drummond, Equality and Diversity Adviser	13 April 2021

Item	Details	Clearance Agreed By	Dated
	<p>All communications on our website is fully accessible in line with accessibility legislation.</p> <p>In relation to specific religious observance and local and national cultural events, we will raise awareness through our internal and external communications.</p> <p>In addition to mainstream channels, and as part of the new approach, we will ensure community leaders receive vital information in order to relay important messages to their communities (whether written, audio/visual or face-to-face).</p>		
Environment	<p>Campaigns such as #KeepLutonTidy, #WasteLessRecycleMore, #KeepLutonSafe and our sustainable transport campaigns aim to improve the environment by encouraging positive behaviour change.</p>	<p>Shaun Askins,</p> <p>Service Manager Strategy and Sustainability</p>	14/04/2021
Health	<p>Public health campaigns aim to improve health knowledge and personal health choices, thereby improving the health and wellbeing of Luton residents. A more strategic and researched approach will help ensure more successful outcomes. Campaign priorities are being agreed in principle with service managers, service directors, CLT and members.</p> <p>It should be noted, however, that public health can be subject to unpredictable demands such as health emergencies, and the need to support commissioned services during times of high demand and this needs to be borne in mind for contingency planning.</p>	<p>Sally Cartwright (Deputy Director of Public Health and Service Director Healthcare)</p>	12/04/2021