

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE CABINET PANEL**

**FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER 2019 AT 2:00PM**



**VALUE FOR MONEY REVIEW: COMMUNICATIONS**

Report of the Director of Resources

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**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 This report forms part of the Panel's value for money review process, the purpose of which is to enable service areas to respond to emerging financial and/or performance issues which the Panel has identified worthy of more detailed discussion from a value for money perspective.
- 1.2 Specifically, this report is intended to inform and build understanding among panel members about the Corporate Communications team – specifically: the why, how and what it does. This will be set against a wider organisational context and a national benchmarking exercise.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 Communications is rarely in the limelight for its own work but is a critical enabler in the successful running of the local authority. The corporate communications team is involved in the vast majority of articles you may have read about Hertfordshire County Council in the local or regional press (and some articles that don't become news), running the corporate social media accounts or internal communications channels. They also focus on leading key campaigns that make a real difference in the community, delivered against the county council's corporate and service objectives.

But how can a single tweet or video increase the take-up of HIV testing kits? Or the use of a marketing campaign save a baby's life from smoke inhalation

before being born. Or an article in a national newspaper prevent an elderly person from being scammed at their doorstep. This report seeks to provide some of the answers as well as informing members as to the modern methods that we use within our digitally led channel strategy.

### **3. Recommendations**

3.1 For Panel are invited to:

- a) Reflect and comment on the key performance information, including key case studies,
- b) Note the recent financial savings, national benchmarking data and incorporating additional responsibilities;
- c) Discuss and feedback on the changing landscape for external and internal communications, against the key communication objectives;
- d) Determine any further review and consideration at a later stage with a follow up paper to Panel.

### **4. Background and context**

- 4.1 “It has never been more important for councils to communicate effectively with residents, media, partners and employees. Whether it’s to encourage greater self-service or to promote understanding of local priorities, effective communication has the power to engage communities, challenge misconception and help your council achieve its objectives.”<sup>1</sup> Local Government Association website.
- 4.2 Communications is a crucial enabling service that can be used in a range of purposes that is tightly controlled and bound by the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Government Publicity <sup>2</sup>. This is even more stringent during the Pre-Election Period such as for the General Election in 2019.
- 4.3 In Hertfordshire, for communications our principal approach is to engage, inform and influence target audiences with the aim of substantially improving service delivery take-up or issues recognition.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support>

<sup>2</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/5670/1878324.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5670/1878324.pdf)

4.4 Within this, our specific service objectives are to:

- a) Keep residents informed about the services we provide;
- b) Support the overall reputation of the county council with residents;
- c) Raise the awareness, profile and influence of the organisation with key local and national stakeholders;
- d) Keep staff informed and engaged to help recruit and retain staff.

Priorities a) and b) are not new and have remained consistent throughout previous communications plans for many years (as well as in other local authorities). Priorities c) and d) have either been added or gained increased emphasis from the council's new Leadership over the past two years. For example, the Growth and Infrastructure agenda - as well as specific issues such as the need for social care reform - has meant that there is an even greater need to work with partnership organisations, our local MPs and Central Government.

## 5. How we deliver communications at Hertfordshire County Council?

5.1 The overall approach to Corporate Communications was set out in the 2019/21 Communications Plan that was agreed by senior officers and Executive Members in Spring 2019. This was reviewed in late October as part of our mid-year performance review. This plan is split into the following three key areas:

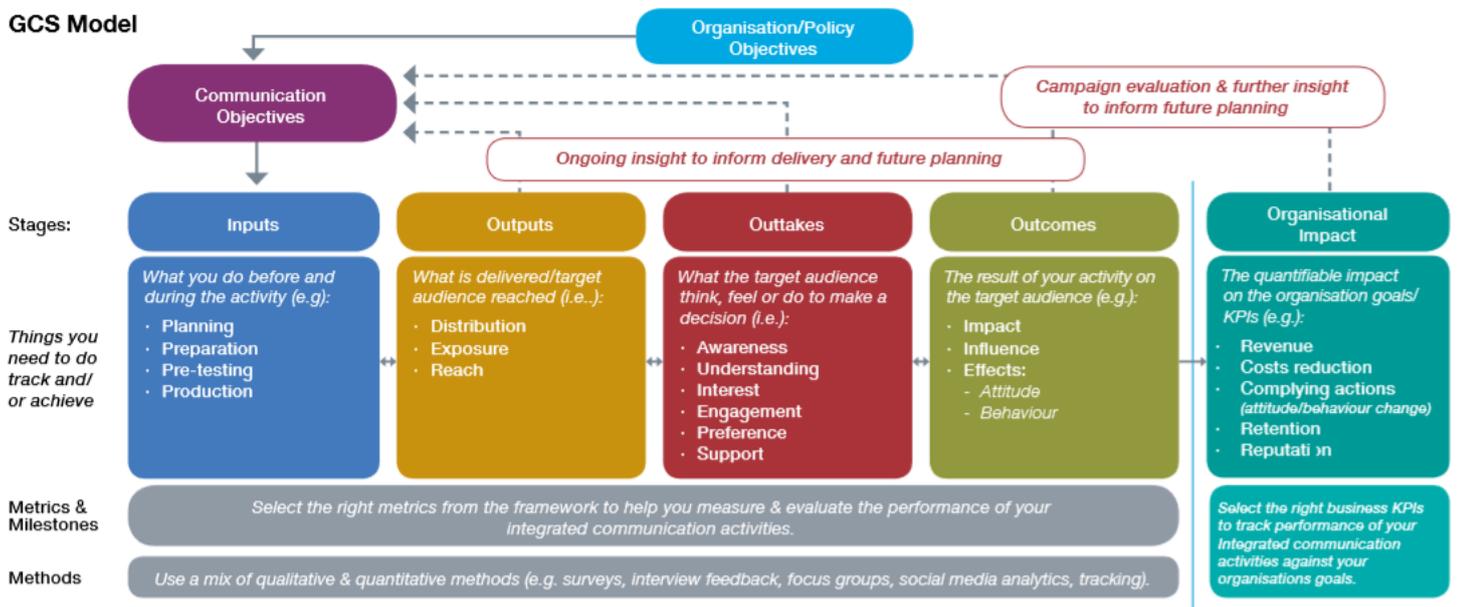
- **Operational Excellence** - to focus on delivering high-quality activity through our key channels on a daily basis as well as an in-depth focus each month based on a theme taken from the Corporate Plan;
- **Campaign based approach** - including service directorate priorities and cross-cutting projects like internal transformation or growth and infrastructure;
- **Communications 101 enabling programme** - helping the wider organisation to deliver service-led comms activity.

5.2 The Corporate Communications team is split into three separate business units that work together on a regular basis:

- **Multi-media team** - including the traditional press (proactive and reactive), digital (social media and Update Me e-newsletter) as well as internal channels;
- **Service campaigns team** - including the key delivery of priority campaigns for directorates, and some internal support (where there is capacity);

- **Corporate campaigns team** - including the delivery of high-impact, cross-cutting campaigns (internal and external) as well as enabling the service-led projects through advice and support.

5.3 All of these business units will deliver a range of planned activities through a monthly grid and the key campaigns will be evaluated against the Government Communications Service model shown below:



5.4 At the same time, the performance of key channels are reviewed on a monthly basis - both in terms of outputs and outtakes - including our own method of scoring traditional press articles for tone and reach. The annual summary of this is shown overleaf:

## Communications key channel statistics Oct 2018 to Sept 2019

	 Social Media	 E-newsletter	 Press	 News Hub
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11.1 million impressions, with a monthly average of 928,000</li> <li>214,654 video views</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>90,466 total subscribers</li> <li>3,538,931 recipients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2,426 Total number of print and online articles (202 average stories per month)</li> <li>Total press releases issued 370</li> <li>Total reactive media enquiries 1,135</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>260 news (blog) articles</li> </ul>
Outtakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>188,102 engagements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>108,1402 unique email opens (29% open rate)</li> <li>172,549 total unique bulletin link clicks (16.2% click through rate)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>95.5% positive coverage</li> <li>3.5% negative coverage</li> <li>2% for info coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>97,556 visits to news articles</li> </ul>

## 6. What is the value of communications at Hertfordshire?

### 6.1 Current costs and recent savings

The annual budget for 2019/20 on Corporate Communications budget is £925,301. Over the past four years, the full value of savings that have been made is £209,013. Over the same period there have been adjustments for pay and income inflation, so the net reduction to the total budget shown below is £170,452.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>Net total budget</b>	£1,095,754	£1,033,599	£943,161	£925,301

These savings were primarily delivered through a restructure implemented in October 2017 and by reducing the number of printed publications from three editions of Horizons, to a single, annual publication called Your Hertfordshire.

## 6.2 National benchmarking data

As part of this review, we undertook two benchmarking exercises:

- Firstly, we analysed an existing LGA Heads of Communications survey from December 2018, which we have extrapolated the data across seven county councils and provided average results;
- Secondly, we carried out our own qualitative research on a small number of similar county councils (with a rural and urban mix), including financial data, with the results being shared on a confidential or anonymous basis.

The combined and key anonymous results can be seen below:

	LGA Heads of Comms Survey	County Council A	County Council B	County Council C	Hertfordshire County Council
<b>Overall spend</b>	N/A	~£1.5 million	~£1 million	~£1,007,000	£925,301
<b>Total staff (FTE)</b>	19.54	24	12 (currently being revised)	12.8	18.5
<b>Total comms staff outside of corporate team</b>	Only x2 answered this question. There was an approximate split between Corporate Comms (45%) and Service Comms (55%)	Approx. 40 employees, not FTEs	~8 FTE	All comms staff work in the corporate team	There are approximately 10-20 officers who do over 50% of their FTE role on communications activity

- In terms of overall spend, Hertfordshire spends approximately 5-10% less than similar county councils we spoke with and significantly less than the outlier at £1.5m;
- All the local authorities covered similar functions to Hertfordshire: media, digital, internal comms and campaigns (or marketing) as well as public affairs. A much smaller number included print and design – which is not run by the communications team in Hertfordshire.

### 6.3 Current performance assessment

Earlier this Autumn (28 October 2019), the Corporate Communications team took a mid-year performance report to the Strategic Management Board (SMB). This included a number of key achievements from April – September 2019 and we have included a summary of these by key objective:

#### a) Keeping residents informed about the services we provide

**Overall summary:** We continue to deliver a number of strong, service based campaigns. We also manage the indicator for how informed residents feel - which is now stable - after a number of years of decline. This endorses our digital led approach, as well as successfully utilising the most effective publications such as Your Hertfordshire, for those audiences that still prefer printed materials.

#### Recent examples:

1. Our targeted approach to promoting the extra investment in Local Roads was recognised by 23% of residents (taken from our bi-annual communications survey) - if this was extrapolated across Hertfordshire this would be seen by more than **250,000 residents**;
2. We continue to liaise with the social work team and **BBC Radio 4's World at One** programme to produce a final, well balanced documentary series, showcasing of social work in Hertfordshire.

#### b) Support the overall reputation of the county council:

**Overall summary:** Although overall satisfaction for the county council is down in Hertfordshire over the past few years, it remains significantly above the national average. Communications, as well as other services such as Corporate Policy and Customer Services, continue to focus on the key drivers<sup>3</sup> of satisfaction, measured through the bi-annual residents survey.

#### Recent examples of work:

1. **Promoting the Corporate Plan** - this campaign was launched in July 2019 by sharing an engaging and emotional video that demonstrated the breadth of council services to coincide with the launch of the new Corporate Plan. We have also celebrated the achievements of our

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<sup>3</sup> Ipsos MORI have historically identified the 5-10 key statistical drivers of satisfaction that typically include: traditional media relations, customer service, whether a resident feels informed and the perception of value for money. This is explained more thoroughly here: <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/public-satisfaction-local-government>

schools in August with the Hertfordshire Yearbook and a further video in September on the fire service – both videos reached over 100,000 users on social media;

2. **Brand refresh** - the Comms champions' survey showed **70% were aware of our refreshed branding** and are using our new templates;
3. **Regular and sustained media relations** - we secured strong broadcast coverage on our Pollinator programme, funding for adult social care, and responded to the fire at Warner Brothers Studio in Leavesden.

**c) Raising our profile amongst key local and national stakeholders;**

**Overall summary:** Delivered through our new External Advocacy Strategy – this new action plan attempts to both celebrate key successes amongst national stakeholders (eg local MPs) but also to address key areas which need to be tackled in order to mitigate rising demographic pressures (eg social care reform).

**Recent examples of work:**

1. Over the past year we have developed and sent out two **e-bulletins to our local MPs** as well as hosted a meeting in the Houses of Parliament;
2. We've drafted and implemented a proactive forward plan that has resulted in an **increase in trade articles** on a range of service issues;
3. On **Growth and Infrastructure** – we've developed a consistent narrative for good growth and used this to produce a stakeholder video that was launched at the **Herts Forward Conference**. This has had over 300 views to date and been shared on the MP's bulletin as well as LinkedIn.

**d) Keeping staff informed and engaged**

**Overall summary:** this is a crucial area to support in order to recruit and retain staff. Communications have supported HR in terms of follow up activity to the most recent staff survey, as well as evolving some of our internal channels. We're also helping to upskill staff working in the directorates to deliver service-led comms activities.

## Recent examples of work:

1. **Chief Executive Roadshows** - we supported the Chief Executive to deliver the annual series of face to face briefings with staff across all county council's buildings. There was extremely positive feedback with over 90% of attendees saying the sessions were informative. High levels of engagement were gained through the use of technology, such as video and sli.do (an online tool for asking 'live' questions during presentations);
2. We've set up a new helpdesk system called **Comms 101** and delivered over 14 drop-in sessions for staff. In addition, we have run 15 separate **masterclass training seminars** for staff across the council - on topics such as practical techniques to make videos, how to use social media and the new branding - with excellent feedback ratings from over 100 attendees.

### 6.4 Putting a value on what communications does

We have highlighted the following case studies as examples on how it is possible to put a measurable and specific value on some of our recent and historical activity:

- Our recent scams campaign featuring a case study film from an elderly woman, Maev, who was a victim of fraud and led to a **27% increase** in scam reporting (156 extra cases) compared to the same timeframe last year. With the average scams victim loses £3,000, this campaign **could have saved £468,000 in total cases.**
- During Good Care Week 2019, Sixty-four people registered their interest in careers in care during Good Care Week in July. Thirty-two of these are now placed into caring roles and are delivering an **additional 36,000 care hours a year.**
- Our 2017 '**Join our Team**' campaign to recruit more on-call firefighters won a bronze award at the Public Service Communications Excellence Awards. The football themed campaign generated a huge amount of engagement on social media, where our videos have been viewed more than 500,000 times. and secured. During the two key periods of activity of 79 people applied for the roles – approximately three times the usual number.
- During the **Year of Volunteering (June 2016 – May 2017)**, 590 people completed our online form, around double the number from the previous year. If each of these gave up an hour of their time a week, this would result in 37,908 volunteer hours, that's a potential saving of **£272,937** (based on paying the National Living Wage of £7.20\* that was the rate at the time).
- The 2015/16 '**Spot the cheater**' campaign generated reports to the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) helping to identify approximately

£400k of fraudulent activity, against an outlay of £11k investment in the campaign.

- As a result of our **Good care campaign** between October 2015 and September 2016, 101 people have been directly employed into caring roles through our campaign website. A further 104 were either waiting to be placed into roles or signed up to care certificate training. That represents a saving of £65,650 on recruitment costs (based on £650 for recruiting someone via a leading recruitment website), potentially rising to £100,750. The new recruits will provide an extra 116,150 hours of care each year (based on 0.6 FTE), this could rise to 178,250 hours.

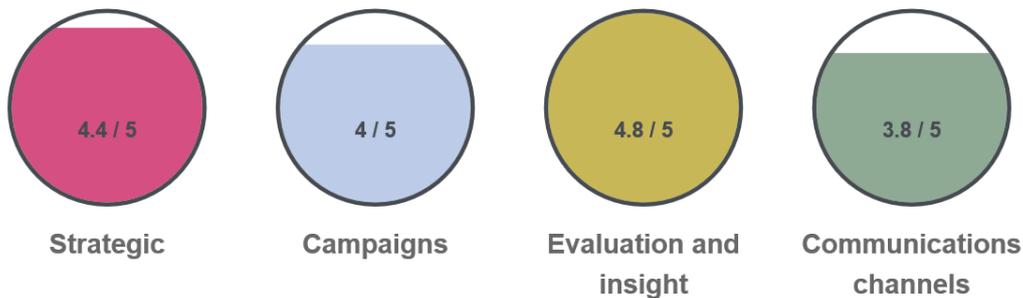
- 6.5 An additional indication about the effectiveness of the key services campaigns has been the national awards that we have been won or been shortlisted. Over the past few years we have won several in the area of Public Health for 'Love your Bump' which was a hugely successful campaign to reduce the number of mums-to-be smoking during pregnancy. In addition, we have run a number of successful recruitment campaigns across Adult Care Services for Good Care and in Community Protection for Firefighters.

This year the team have won a Silver Award for the Trading Standards campaign at the joint Local Government Communications and Government Communications Service awards. This was against stiff competition from Central Government Departments, NHS and the Met Police. The Council were also shortlisted by the Health Service Journal (HSJ) for our Just Talk Public Health campaigns which encouraged teenage boys to talk about mental health. Both these campaigns have also just been shortlisted for an 'Unaward' by Comms2.0, a well-respected public sector comms website.

- 6.6 As part of this review, the corporate team has carried out a self-assessment against the LGA's #FutureGov project<sup>4</sup>. This asks 20 key questions – matched against key competencies. Overall, Hertfordshire County Council has scored well across all areas in the below summary analysis. The team will review the detailed feedback to make further, iterative improvements:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/future-comms>



## 7. Key challenges and modern ways of working

7.1 The reduction in budget has been particularly challenging for the Service Campaign team with the key support staff having been reduced from around 2.5 FTE to 1 FTE per Directorate. In this context, they have been able to deliver some very positive results by working in a much more focussed, campaigns based approach.

7.2 The whole corporate communications have attempted to deliver the other, non-priority activities through a greater emphasis on an enabling approach. By utilising the more general skills of up to 70-100 members of staff - or champions - within the directorates, it has been possible to deliver a far greater range of communications activity.

7.3 Within our Multi-Media team, they continue to be able to respond to emerging crisis comms and significant operational issues such as Brexit. Equally our corporate campaigns team manage the key cross-cutting projects (eg Growth and Transformation).

## 8. Continual improvement and evaluation

8.1 The corporate communications team is constantly looking to improve the way they work. Whether this is by using new channels (such as Snapchat for the #JustTalk campaign) or amending existing publications (like Horizons evolving into the annual edition of Your Hertfordshire). The team is also at the forefront of trialling social marketing techniques that attempt to 'nudge' residents or staff into behaviour change. Many of our public health campaigns follow this model, as well as our Connecting Lives pilot in Letchworth which recruited over 50 'connectors' to encourage (primarily elderly) people to join our 'chatter tables' during a number of organised events.

8.2 The Corporate Communications team run bi-annual quantitative research for both staff and residents to ensure that their work is effectively measured and

evaluated. In addition, the team utilise much shorter 'pulse' surveys and focus groups being used to test specific campaigns and key messages.

## **9. Financial Implications**

9.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this paper.

## **10. Equalities Implications**

10.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered, the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.

10.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

10.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

10.4 Although this specific report has no implications for any persons with protected characteristics, the Corporate Communications team fully incorporates equality considerations within their work. For example, in 2018 while making recommendations to maintain a publication that was distributed all residents, (now called Your Hertfordshire), the team took into consideration the higher readership rates among older residents for printed materials.