

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET
25 NOVEMBER 2010

REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET DECISION

Access and Communities – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor David Coleman

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

1. Summary

A key recommendation of the EIT review of Communication, Consultation and Engagement (CCE) was the need for a clearer strategic focus in the way Stockton Council communicates.

The review resulted in the development of a centralised communications unit, bringing together the press office, marketing, internal communications and website all in one place with a Head of Communications providing strategic leadership.

This Communications Strategy provides a high-level framework under which the new unit operates and also sets out the wider principles of effective communications which guides the entire council's approach.

One of a suite of three strategies that includes: this Communications Strategy, the Engagement Strategy and the Consultation Strategy, the purpose of the document is to set out how the Council intends to communicate with its many audiences and the main messages it wants to get across.

It brings together the recommendations made through the EIT CCE Review and wider consultation and provides a long-term approach to taking those forward.

2. Recommendations

1. Cabinet approve the Communications Strategy (Appendix 1)

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

1. To provide a high-level framework to improving council communications as a key recommendation made in the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation Review of Communication, Consultation and Engagement

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held:

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

SUMMARY

A key recommendation of the EIT review of Communication, Consultation and Engagement (CCE) was the need for a clearer strategic focus in the way Stockton Council communicates.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cabinet approve the Communications Strategy (Appendix 1)

DETAIL

1. The EIT Review of Communications, Consultation and Engagement was carried out by the Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee and approved by members at cabinet on 26th November 2009. The Committee concluded that there was a need for better coordination of internal communications functions and a clearer strategic focus in the way Stockton Council communicated.
2. The development of an overarching communications strategy is vital to providing this clearer strategic focus and is a key deliverable for the new Head of Communications who has been appointed as part of the review's recommendations.
 - a. Other progress made following the EIT CCE Review has been the centralisation of the communications unit and the budget to support its activities. There has been a

rationalisation of the campaigns and key messages to make the role and function of the council clearer and a greater control on the quality and cost-effectiveness of the information and messages being issued by Stockton Council.

- b. The CCE review involved consultation with a number of groups including: elected members, the Viewpoint Panel, the young people's panel, Council staff and trade unions. Best practice approaches were also taken from other local councils and the IDeA. This strategy sets out how the recommendations of the EIT CCE Review and the views from these consultations are now being taken forward by the new centralised communications unit under the leadership of the Head of Communications.
 - c. Specifically, the Communications Strategy aims to achieve the following overall outcomes:
 - To improve public understanding, support and confidence in the Council providing information about our services, policies, decisions, and delivery achievements.
 - To support the development of effective relationships with Council partners, and in particular the business community and national government.
 - To support Council Members and Council staff to highlight their role, responsibilities and achievements.
 - To encourage participation and involvement in the Council's work and decisions.
 - To raise the profile of the Borough to a range of opinion formers, policy-makers, visitors, business investors and potential relocators regionally, nationally and internationally.
3. A number of principles underpin the Strategy. They are to provide communications that:
 - Are open, honest and timely
 - Are accessible and appropriate to each audience
 - Use language that is easy to understand
 - Are cost-effective and efficient
 - Support feedback and influence from residents and other audiences
 - Use new forms of communications technology
 4. The Communications Strategy sets out how the Council will communicate to the many audiences that have an interest or a say in the council's work. It explains the key messages and communications campaigns the Council will deliver in the year and also the communications channels it will use and the audiences to reach.
 5. The Communications Strategy supports the Council's Consultation Strategy and Engagement Strategy in helping communities to get more involved and have their say in the council's many and varied areas of work.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

The proposal within the Communications Strategy is funded from the centralised Communications budget that was one of the main recommendations of the EIT CCE Review.

Legal

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The Communications Strategy is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

This report supports all themes within the Sustainable Community Strategy, particularly in promoting and raising awareness of the opportunities for communities to get involved in the council's work and projects affecting them across the borough.

There are no specific implications relating to Community Safety.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and has been judged to have a positive impact. No remedial actions are required.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

This strategy has been produced following the consultation with members, Viewpoint panel and staff that formed part of the EIT CCE Review

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Background Papers

Report to Cabinet, 26 November 2009, EIT Review of Communication, Consultation and Engagement.

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Not ward specific

Property

None