

Cabinet	 TOWER HAMLETS
31 July 2019	
Report of: Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director Governance	Classification: Unrestricted

Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Challenge Session recommendations: Communications

Lead Member	
Originating Officer(s)	Andreas Christophorou (Divisional Director Communications) Andreas.Christophorou@towerhamlets.gov.uk Genevieve Duval (Strategy & Policy Officer) Genevieve.Duval@towerhamlets.gov.uk
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Forward Plan Notice Published	Yes
Reason for Key Decision	Impact on Wards
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Priority 3 A dynamic outcomes-based Council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough. Outcome 9 - People say we are open and transparent putting residents at the heart of everything we do. Outcome 10 - People say we work together across boundaries in a strong and effective partnership to achieve the best outcomes for our residents. Outcome 11 - People say we continuously seek innovation and strive for excellence to embed a culture of sustainable improvement.

Executive Summary

This report submits the response to the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Challenge Session on the Council's Communications.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree to the responses to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (OSC) Challenge Session recommendations (at Appendix 1); and
2. Support officers' reporting of progress to OSC as required.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Council's constitution requires the Executive to respond to recommendations from the OSC.
- 1.2 The action plan within this report outlines the Executive response to the recommendations arising from the Challenge Session recommendations.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 To take no action, or not to agree the action plan is not recommended as the report outlines work undertaken by Councillors, officers and external partners to identify areas of improvement and the Council's response which identifies actions it will take to respond to these scrutiny recommendations.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 Since 2018 the council's Communications Service has been fully consolidated – moving away from a model where communications was carried out by individual service areas, and now follows a more coordinated and systematic approach. The Council has been able to coordinate its communications activity to be able to more accurately link to corporate priorities. Communications is now a key strategic function of the organisation, and while much improvement has been made over the last four years, there are still questions around its overall effectiveness.
- 3.2 The OSC identified the Council's communications with residents as the focus for this Scrutiny Challenge Session. Resident engagement is a key priority in the council.
- 3.3 There were a number of reasons for holding the scrutiny Challenge Session, including concerns from Members about the limited readership and reach of 'Our East End', a magazine published every three. Concerns were also raised about limited access for digitally excluded or disabled residents, and the potential adverse impact of the demise of the East End Life newspaper on digitally excluded residents and protected equality groups. Members have also raised concerns about the continuous negative image of the Council and lack of a clear and consistent engagement with mainstream and BAME media outlets. Members also wanted to ascertain whether our internal communications support the pace of organisational change given the Council's transformation agenda.
- 3.4 The Challenge Session aimed to ensure that communications promotes increased engagement with residents and stakeholders, and effectively tells the Tower Hamlets 'story' to strengthen the relationship. It also aimed to ensure the communication function supports corporate objectives and identify how Members can support the function. Members wanted to review the quality of communication with local residents in order to develop a clear

understanding of the communications issues facing the service. The Challenge Session was underpinned by key questions:

- What is the current readership and reach of Our East End and digital media?
- What are the different avenues to inform and engage stakeholders?
- What areas are we looking to develop in the future?
- How does TH compare with neighbouring boroughs?
- Who are we not fully reaching? What will we do differently to support residents who are digitally excluded or have language difficulties?
- How were the objectives in the new strategy developed? Who did we consult? How they are going to be monitored and evaluated in future?

- 3.5 The Challenge Session was chaired by Councillor Bex White, Scrutiny Lead for Governance on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.6 Andreas Christophorou, Divisional Director of Communications and Marketing at LBTH, provided an overview of communications in the Council and detailed further plans for improvement. Polly Cziok, Director of Communications, Culture and Engagement from Hackney Council, also attended as a guest speaker to provide an overview of how Hackney's communication campaigns strengthened their brand and engagement with residents.
- 3.7 The resulting Communications Challenge Session Report 2018- 2019 was tabled at the March 2019 meeting of the OSC. The Committee welcomed the recommendation's contained within the report and agreed that any specific comments should be referred to the Chair and Councillor Bex White the Scrutiny Lead for Governance for further consideration.
- 3.8 This report and the actions presented at Appendix 1 form the response to OSC Challenge Session recommendations.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The session aimed to improve communications with residents. Through the developments of the recommendations a consideration was given to improving communications for all protected groups.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,

- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

5.2 No other statutory implications.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report. It should be possible to deliver the recommendations using existing Council budgets and resources.
- 6.2 However, should the need arise for any additional resources; officers will be obliged to seek appropriate financial approval before making a commitment.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The Council must comply with the Code Of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011 in respect of all its communication activity. The broad recommendations highlighted in the report comply with the code of practice.
- 7.2 However, the method of implementation will also need to be reviewed at the point of implementation in the light of the code. Also, the Code requires a increased level of care in times of heightened sensitivity, for example, during the time immediately prior to an election. The method of implementation will need to have regard to this.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

Communications Challenge Session Report 2018- 2019:

<https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s145639/OS%20Cover%20Sheet%20Communications%20with%20legal%20comments%20URGENCY.pdf>

Appendices

1. Communications challenge session action plan

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

None

Officer contact details for documents:

SCRUTINY CHALLENGE SESSION ACTION PLAN

Action	Responsibility	Date
Recommendation 1: That the council utilise its staff members to be bold and innovative and to be ambassadors, communicators, and thought leaders to tell the council and borough's story.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More work needs to be done to ensure that the gap in knowledge and education about the borough is filled Ensure the council is telling its own story rather than it being told by others <p>The new Corporate Communications Strategy 2019/20 to 2021/22, due to be launched in June, will include both an enhanced corporate (council narrative) and an enhanced Tower Hamlets place narrative. Implementation It is clear that elements of these narratives should be built into the work of all officers and members including any strategies and plans. This has been agreed by CLT. There will be internal promotion to staff including TH now, posters and intranet. In addition, all DLTs will be visited with it and it will be presented to the Senior Managers Forum. The place narrative will be promoted to partners and stakeholders to endorse and advocate. This will be done by better stakeholder engagement through cultural programmes and our upcoming place campaign.</p>	Andreas Christophorou (Comms)	Corporate Communications Strategy launched in June/July. Narratives to be used ongoing from then.
Continuation of embedding our values enables staff to be confident at work and work to review our performance appraisal approach to include two way feedback and development can support us to create engaged and motivated employees. A range of development is available for our staff from having conversations to presenting with confidence and the corporate communications team publishes much more about what LBTH is undertaking, what it is achieving and all the things we do well as Council we celebrate this through staff awards and through achievement of IIP silver accreditation. All these activities continue on a regular basis.	Amanda Harcus (HR)	Ongoing
A clear vision and the move toward outcome based measures across the council mean that staff can have clarity on how the work they undertake supports and contributes to the overall outcomes for LBTH	Amanda Harcus (HR)	Ongoing
Recommendation 2: That the council explores how it could work better with partners to develop its brand and support its communications.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key partners include Canary Wharf Group, in order to better incorporate the financial hub into the overall brand of Tower Hamlets. Engage with partners through the Partnership Executive Group (PEG) in order to get buy in from a broad range of stakeholders outside of the authority. 		
We will continue to build our relationship and shard communications with Canary Wharf Group. If	Andreas Christophorou	Ongoing this financial year and

<p>possible, it would also be good to build relations with individual businesses and stakeholders in Canary Wharf.</p> <p>The council will start to build a central stakeholder database in Communications and Strategy Policy and Performance so we have a corporate knowledge of different stakeholders that we can segment. This work will take time and will include the Partnership Executive Group/Tower Hamlets Partnership businesses and organisations in Canary Wharf. We will need to liaise with services in the council to work with their stakeholders to sign them up to the new centralised database.</p> <p>In June the Divisional Director of Communications is presenting the findings of our place campaign research and will outline the next steps in promoting the borough including signing up their stakeholders to our new stakeholder database.</p> <p>Canary Wharf Group represents a key part of our Tower Hamlets place narrative and will be a key player in promoting the borough both in our upcoming ace campaign and outside it. We will encourage Canary Wharf Group and organisations that are a part of it use the name Tower Hamlets in their narratives.</p>	(Comms)	remaining two years of Communications Strategy.
<p>The Partnership Board, comprising of the Tower Hamlets Partnership, the Cabinet and the Council's Corporate Leadership Team is meeting on 26 June. The Board meeting will focus on the positive place campaign and identify opportunities for partners to support this work. The campaign will include a proposed launch event, branding suggestions and underpinning activities.</p>	Afazul Hoque (SPP)	June 2019
<p>Recommendation 3: That the council use best practise examples from other boroughs and organisations to improve how we can better hear the voice of seldom heard groups, and ensure we hear all voices rather than just speaking to the 'gatekeepers'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The London Borough of Hackney is an important best practise example, having suffered similar reputational challenges to Tower Hamlets in the last decade, and is a useful reference for the council as it embarks on its own journey and shapes the strategic direction of the Council. • Work with Hackney Borough to continue strengthening the work the council is doing around resident engagement • Explore other organisations to use for best practise examples 		
<p>The Divisional Director for Communications has shared Hackney's approach to mass public engagement with the Chief Executive, the Mayor and the Divisional Director of Strategy, Policy and Performance.</p> <p>The need to expand from broadcast communication to conversations with and reconnecting with our residents is one of two central themes in the new Corporate Communications Strategy.</p> <p>Tower Hamlets Council is currently working with Hackney on some of the creation of new brand guidelines for the council.</p>	Andreas Christophorou (Comms)	Corporate Communications Strategy to be launched in June/July. Ongoing after that for this financial year and remaining two years of the strategy.

The Divisional Director of Communications and the Communications team will attend conferences and training to pick up best practice including case studies of award winning work by other councils. This has already begun. A representative from the Communications Team attending a Comms 2.0 Masterclass for Award winning communications. In addition, Best practice communications tools such as Granicus (electronic communication) and Orlo (social media) have been brought in and we will continue to work with those companies and other councils that have used them successfully, to ensure we get the most of them.		
Recommendation 4: That the council provide a weekly update on the Member Hub about upcoming events and issues, which Members can send out to local residents via social media.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members value the support they are offered to help them better communicate locally but feel more could be done to help them stay informed and act as ambassadors of the brand. There would be value in introducing a weekly ward-specific briefing for all Members on upcoming events and issue in their wards. This would be in conjunction to the existing briefing that Members receive. 		
The team is going to be reviewing the existing bulletin as part of the Strengthening Local Democracy work, and will ensure the social media friendliness gets added to that.	Matthew Mannion (Democratic Services/ Member Support)	Ongoing
Communications will ensure the new Corporate Communications Strategy including the new council and place narratives are put on the members hub and promoted to members to use through the Members Bulletin.	Andreas Christophorou (Comms)	Summer 2019
Recommendation 5: That elected Members act as ambassadors of the council's brand and assist the communications team with outreach and consultation.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amid the restructuring and the centralisation of the council's communications service in recent years, the service lacks the resources to execute full scale community outreach in the borough. There is room for elected Members to facilitate more outreach and consultation. 		
The new Corporate Communications Strategy is clear that officers (non comms) need to get out in the borough more to talk to residents. Communications will support them with strategic advice and materials. The Communications Team will continue to look for opportunities for outreach during consultations and campaigns where appropriate and where budget allows.	Andreas Christophorou (Comms)	Ongoing and key part of new Corporate Communications Strategy.
Members can help to make a big impact in terms of outreach by helping to deliver the new Corporate Communications Strategy and giving elements of the place and council narratives to the public and others at every opportunity.		
Members would be happy to help where they are given information to do so (subject to the usual political environment caveats).	Matthew Mannion (Democratic Services/ Member Support)	Ongoing

People running consultations need to make sure to include them when circulating information about these activities. I've recently seen a Consultation guidance brochure that Oduwa was working on. I did comment that more needed to be made of involving members in that so I would suggest you talk to her about what could be included in that.		
Recommendation 6: That the council better utilize the communication function to inform and enable residents to engage in the lifecycle of its strategic and operational decisions making		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council's culture toward resident engagement has not traditionally emphasised the importance of resident voices in the earliest stages of its decision making cycle and often will involve residents at a point when they have to inform or validate existing council decisions as opposed to having input from the inception of a project. 		
<p>It will be raised at CLT and with the Divisional Director of Strategy Policy and Performance, and promoted by Communications, that consultation on issues should be done at an early stage to cocreate solutions rather than to just pick options.</p> <p>A Consultation Hub will be procured which, for the first time, will put all consultations through an online portal. This will include new standards for consultation encouraging officers to engage earlier, make it easier for the public to see consultations and receive notifications for them and also make it easier for all council staff to see the intelligence gained from all consultations and use it in other work.</p> <p>Promotion of how to use the Consultation Hub and the high standards we expect will need to be done through internal communications by Communications and SPP.</p>	Andreas Christophorou (Comms)	Ongoing. Consultation Hub and new standards to be launched by Q3
Recommendation 7: That the communication team develop a digital tool to allow residents to share views and concerns		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggested tools for development include Commonplace, which is already used in some council functions, but such tools could be more widely applied. <p>A Consultation Hub will provide a greater degree of consistency, lead to better promotion of consultations and also make it easier for all council staff to see the intelligence gained from all consultations and use it for research in other work.</p> <p>It will be overseen by Communications but used by services, using the new standards developed by SPP.</p> <p>The new Consultation Hub will include elements such as interactive maps where residents can drop pins and make comments. It will also be promoted through our Love Your Neighbourhood app.</p>	Andreas Christophorou (Comms)	Ongoing. Consultation Hub and new standards to be launched by Q3
Recommendation 8: That the council appoint a named lead Member for resident engagement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of the Member would be in support of the Mayor's role, given that the Mayor is the current lead for resident engagement, The Mayor's Office is to select a Member to lead on engagement with residents in the borough. 		
In response to the O&S recommendation the Mayor included specific reference in the Cabinet responsibilities following the Council AGM on 15 th May 2019 that as Mayor he holds lead	David Courcoux (Mayors Office)	May 2019

responsibility for 'communications and resident engagement'.		
Recommendation 9: That the council ensures that data and intelligence from communications is being used strategically to plan within the council		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a plan to ensure data and intelligence are captured and used accordingly 		
Data from the new Consultation Hub will be available for all officer to see and also used by SPP for research into new strategies and trends. Data from research commissioned by communications will be shared with officers such as information from the place campaign research. Progress in building the stakeholder database will be shared as services can work with communications to use them (within GDPR rules) to target messages as campaigns about specific issues to an interested audience. Note: We can only do this once we have developed a good number of stakeholders (50,000 to 100,000 plus) and we start segmenting them based on the issues they are interested in. Communications will promote new research by services outside Communications such as SPP. An example of this is the Annual Residents Survey.	Andreas Christophorou (Comms)	Ongoing