



TOWER HAMLETS PUBLICITY PLAN 2015-16

INTRODUCTION

The Council recognises the importance for local residents, staff and the democratic process that there is full understanding of and confidence in all aspects of its operation. It is our duty to ensure that residents, staff, key stakeholders, media and the wider public have a clear understanding of the council's role, the services we provide and the way in which we deliver continuous improvement and value for money.

An effective communications plan for the Council has a number of key purposes. To achieve our Community Plan vision of improving the quality of life of all who live and work in the borough requires us to communicate with and engage local people. In addition, effective communications activity:

- promotes openness and transparency in the work of the council;
- promotes key messages to achieve policy goals around ways in which residents can live more healthily; improve their employment chances; help us tackle crime, anti-social behaviour and create a greener, more sustainable environment.
- underpins accountability and effective reporting to residents about our delivery in response to local priorities;
- engages residents in key activities and encourages their feedback and engagement;
- promotes cohesion and cultural interchange; and
- builds effective working relationships and ensures staff feel informed and motivated.

To achieve these aims, the Council has a detailed Forward Planner (Appendix 1) which sets out the wide range of communications activity planned on a monthly basis over the course of a year. In addition, this cover report highlights the key strategic and operational communication priorities which the council proposes to focus on over the next year to ensure that our communications and publicity activity is effective in achieving the above goals and delivers best value. These areas are set out in an action plan format within the Council's Best Value Plan to respond to the Secretary of State Directions of December 2014.

The key aim for the 2015/16 communications are to re-focus the Council's media profile around positive messages in pursuit of the key purposes outlined above. To achieve this, there are six key issues that we will focus on during 2015/16.

First, we will build our publicity activity around the **Community Plan**, currently the focus of widespread borough wide and stakeholder consultation. This will ensure our communications activity is focused around the areas agreed as priorities for the Council and its partners..

Second, we will focus on communicating **value for money** as we operate in an era of intense internal and external scrutiny. Third, the current **Communications Protocol** will be strengthened and further disseminated providing a robust, clearly understood mechanism to ensure that the work of, and relations between Communications, the Mayor's office, council officers and elected members is carried out transparently and appropriately at all times.

Fourth, in this **general election** year, work is underway with the Electoral commission, the police and other stakeholders to address difficulties which arose in previous campaigns. Communications will play a central role in ensuring the smooth, efficient running of the poll and count and build public confidence in our democratic processes.

Fifth, a new far-reaching **internal communications** function, in partnership with the Council's Human Resources, will shape organisational culture, delivering key messages and engaging with staff.

Sixth, we will build a stronger focus on **best value** in the way in which we deliver our communications function, challenging existing models, exploring the potential for new and existing revenue streams and considering the best use of the Council's overall spend on Communications to achieve objectives.

We will base our activities on available research such as media monitoring and resident and staff surveys. Above all the purpose of this plan is simple; to increase public awareness of the bread and butter services provided by Tower Hamlets and enable residents to have a real informed say and improve local accountability.

THE 2015 COMMUNITY PLAN

The developing Community Plan (2015 onwards) is well advanced following an extensive consultation process with a wide range of stakeholders. The plan will build upon existing partnership work retaining themes that partners have organised themselves around for some years. They are:

- A great place to live
- A fair and prosperous community
- A safe and cohesive community
- A healthy and supportive community

Tower Hamlets is a place of immense opportunity, but poverty and inequality can stop local people achieving their full potential. The community plan aims to bring different parts of the community together, encouraging positive relationships and tackling divisions between communities – as well as providing strong leadership, involving people and giving them the tools and support to improve their lives.

Partnership working to pursue these priorities is well embedded and overseen by a range of partnership bodies.

To build on and complement this work, the Community Plan sets out proposed cross-cutting partnership priorities for the 4 years from 2015. Using this plan, partners will work together to harness the efforts of all partners and accelerate progress in four important areas.

As the plan develops, communications activity will 'wrap around' it ensuring that our publicity reflects and informs residents' priorities. The communications forward planner at appendix 1 is the beginning of this process setting out as programme to support each of the four priorities.

Our approach will be to focus on long-term, solid, evidence based reputation building designed to build public confidence in the council and our services.

TEN NEW GOALS FOR 2015/16

The Tower Hamlets model of communications has, by necessity, been reactive and media relations driven. Much of our everyday work, supporting frontline services and promoting key messages to promote policy objective continues largely unheralded and it is our aim to develop and improve this service development role.

Appendix 9

We will continue to develop and improve our two-way communications in a linked, digital, tweeted world where power is flowing back to communities. A number of key activities are planned to further improve communications. They are described below and included within our best value action plan.

- 1. Strategic Review:** A root and branch critical appraisal of the services provided by Communications will be undertaken. Along with our customers and other stakeholders, we will look dispassionately at how and why we provide services, analyse our relative performance and draw up plans embedded in best value principles.

To achieve this we will;

- challenge why, how and by whom a service is being provided
- secure comparison with the performance of others (including local authorities) across a range of relevant indicators, taking into account the views of both service users and suppliers
- consult local residents, service users, partners and businesses in the setting of new performance targets.

We will use this to develop a new Communications Strategy alongside a refreshed Communications protocol.

- 2. Digital Focus:** We will accelerate the delivery of our digital communications strategy. We want to improve the ability of people to interact efficiently with Tower Hamlets, reduce unnecessary transaction costs and identify new ways of engaging with the community. Building on the learning from the Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy, we will target digital activity appropriately based on the different needs and motivations of sections of our community.

In doing this, we will consider whether we can move over time to digital communication methods to replace our existing paper based methods and East End Life. This would need to be a gradual and staged process, recognising the level of digital exclusion in elements of our current population.

Procurement of a new web content management system (CMS) will support our aims by providing a much more accessible, user-friendly web platform for engagement and transaction. Simple to use and content-rich, our digital offering will extend the reach and penetration of our messages and the quality and quantity of our stakeholder engagement.

- 3. East End Life review:** The newspaper is currently the council's primary communication / community cohesion tool and is highly valued by local residents. East End Life continues to be the most cost-effective way for the council to communicate information about council services and community cohesion in Tower Hamlets, and at the same time fulfilling its statutory duties in relation to public notices and advertising. A review of East End Life review was conducted in 2011 which concluded that: *"Further to an analysis of advertising costs with alternative newspapers, the 2011 review referred to above, found that the closure of the publication would cost between £600,000 and £2.1million. The cost of placing statutory notices in the main local newspaper would be £635,007, rising to over £2.1m for a 'suite' of packages in a range of local newspapers to increase reach."* We will revisit the findings of this review and a range of options around frequency, financing and delivery, including moving to digital platforms over time, will be explored.
- 4. Refreshing Internal Communications:** We will work with Human Resources to build team based communications structures enabling colleagues at all levels to improve communication within and across directorates. A network of communications champions will facilitate two-way communication up and down the council and Communications will support departmental newsletters, "road shows" and

intranet activity. The primary aim is to build a knowledge-sharing culture across departmental and organisational boundaries

- 5. Campaign Planning and Co-ordination:** The media Forward Planner is attached at Appendix 1 and will be extended to cover three years activity. It is a flexible and developing document linked to a new suite of media monitoring and engagement tools. A key campaign underpinning this year's work will be a 50th Anniversary Campaign. From April 2015 a range of events will take place (independently and with London Council colleagues) to mark the founding of Tower Hamlets Council. Our plans will be self-financing or, where possible, revenue raising in partnership with appropriate organisations including the media.

A new web-based print and design tool will transform commissioning of materials for internal customers improving efficiency, reducing costs and ensuring uniformly high standards across the organisation. To ensure value for money, the Council has just completed the procurement of a new print and design framework which will enable the council to strategically manage all of its external print and design-related suppliers, and to ensure that all printed publicity and design output complies with procurement processes and the council's branding and communications protocols. In practice, the framework will be supported by a web-based print and design project management system, Panacea, which is being used to centralise and manage all communications jobs involving print or design in one system.

This will be supported by an improved Communications Protocol and Style Guide enabling greater freedom of action for specific services and specifying the roles and responsibilities of Communications staff, Mayoral Advisers, Officers and members

- 6. Income optimisation and value for money:** The finances of the Communications function will be reviewed with a new emphasis on revenue generation. This will include development of options with the aim to make communications a self-financing function within three years. This means real new money from external sources eliminating costs to the council and therefore our residents. For example, we will explore opportunities for Tower Design, our in-house design agency which runs at a small-profit, to be put on a commercial footing to fully exploit opportunities and become a significant profit centre for the council. In addition, we will review Council wide spend on a range of publicity functions, including advertising and poster sites, to ensure a co-ordinated approach which supports our strategic objectives and priorities.

The Panacea system outlined above will also enable the council to interrogate prices from all suppliers in real-time for any given print job specification, to support continuous benchmarking of prices, stimulate competitive pricing and produce best value.

Budget information for 2014/15 is included at Appendix 2. Costs and income will be reviewed to inform the strategic approach for the service for 2015/16 and beyond.

- 7. Promoting Cohesion and equality:** We will explore ways of hearing from the local community and our staff to ensure our work actively promotes equality and diversity issues and builds community cohesion and engagement.
- 8. Accountability and performance:** Current performance of the Communications function is measured against basic media monitoring data on a quarterly basis. The work of the team will be evaluated on a monthly basis with new key deliverables developed and reported on in a regular performance report. We will partner and benchmark with the best across the UK and internationally setting the standard for local government communications

9. Supporting Managers: We will provide communications learning and development for managers to cover compliance with the Communications Protocol, and developing skills in areas such as presentation, broadcast and social media.

10. Mayor's Media Advisors: The Mayor appoints two media advisors on a flexible basis to advise him and the Cabinet on local community media including BME and Bangladeshi media and to work with him to raise the national profile and awareness of Tower Hamlets and highlight the borough's investment and development potential. This support has been competitively tendered to ensure value for money. The need for these advisors reflects the disproportionate national media interest in the Mayor in his role as Mayor as opposed to in the Council more generally. Safeguards are being developed to ensure that the appointees abide by the Communications Code of Conduct and that the work they undertake is formally recorded and signed off within the Council to ensure that it represents legitimate local authority expenditure. Contract management of Mayors' advisors will be the subject of future audit [tbc].