

Communications Review Report

This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee with an update on the Communications Review.

The Communications Review has a goal to establish Surrey County Council's communications as the best across local authorities to ensure that we are able to offer the best possible service for residents.

The Corporate Strategy drives everything that the organisation does and communications supports and enhances the corporate strategy.

How and what we communicate is also vital in supporting HR and OD in their work to shape the culture of the organisation to help employees offer high quality services for residents in completely new ways.

The vision for communications is that:

Surrey County Council's communications are clear, focused and engaging.

How we will achieve the vision:

- Having clear communications priorities that support the corporate strategy
- Improve value for money and cost effectiveness – and maximise resource.
- Define a 'one team' communications and engagement approach
- Improve ways of working
- Ensure quality and consistency
- Enable proactive communications and engagement

Communications activity supports the Corporate Strategy. Communications will be configured to ensure we are able to engage residents, employees, members and partners effectively to support services and the priorities outlined in the Corporate Strategy.

Principles

We will improve communications to ensure:

- Residents, members, employees and partners are informed about and engaged in the changing ways public services are delivered
- The organisation informs about and engages on Surrey's key strategic priorities outlined in the Corporate Strategy

- Communications and engagement are carried out in the most cost effective way to optimise impact and engagement in line with public value
- Communications helps members carry out their role in the most effective way
- We support employees through extensive cultural change
- The council has a clear and well understood brand that assures people about the quality of services.

The recommendations, principles and vision are based on feedback from key stakeholders including districts and boroughs, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, Surrey Community Action, Members, officers and communications teams as well as visits to a number of external organisations including the National Trust, The Design Council, Which? and a number of councils.

Recommendations

The Communications Review has eight recommendations:

1. Refresh the communications and engagement strategy
2. Improve communication support to members
3. Establish a Surrey County Council digital communications strategy – digital by default
4. Enhance internal communications
5. Improve self-service
6. Develop income generation
7. Ensure skills are in place to support the future organisation
8. One team delivery model for communications, that is cost effective and gives value for money

More details about each recommendation are outlined below:

1. Refresh the communications and engagement strategy to focus on new council's Corporate Strategy

The corporate strategy sets the direction for the organisation. The communications and engagement strategy supports the corporate strategy.

The communications and engagement strategy will be developed alongside the corporate strategy during the business planning cycle so it ties in to the corporate planning and Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP) processes. The approach used to communicate the priorities – supporting the vision to be clear, focused and engaging - will also form part of the communications and engagement strategy.

Cabinet and CLT will decide the communications priorities based on the corporate strategy and review progress at regular intervals. Regular evaluation will be provided to ensure activity is effective against agreed criteria.

To enable effective evaluation an organisation-wide communications management team is being established where the communication priorities are reviewed and impact is measured. The communications management team – made up of communications managers from directorates and the communications service – is the group that will oversee the implementation of the communications and engagement strategy. The management team will advise and report back regularly to a senior officer Communications Board on priority communications activity.

2. Communications support to members

Feedback from members, along with the outcomes from the Community Partnership Public Value Review (PVR) has highlighted that there is scope to improve the communications support to members. The PVR has recommended the implementation of a communications strategy which supports councillors in engaging and communicating with residents, businesses and partners. The review will work with members to ensure improvement measures meet members' needs.

Improving access to local information and increasing the use of electronic communication and social media is a key element of this. Communications will work with Local Partnership teams to establish the most effective ways of supporting councillors in their local areas.

This part of the review links with the “Think Councillor, Think Resident” culture change programme to deliver the vision of a member-led, customer-focused Council.

A members' communications strategy will be part of the communications and engagement strategy.

3. Establish a Surrey County Council digital communications strategy – digital by default

Digital by default means that the council is using digital as the preferred delivery channel for communications and engagement for the majority of people the majority of the time. It does not mean that this is the only delivery channel. We will communicate with people in the ways that are effective for them and we will tailor approaches for specific groups of people, this will include the full range of tools and techniques including face to face, telephone and paper-based communications.

To ensure that we are able to communicate and engage effectively we must have a clear approach to digital communications – including social media – and this means the strategy as well as the most effective technological options. A clear digital strategy and approach will be defined that enables digital communications and engagement to be truly effective and utilises the latest technology and tools.

The strategy will clarify the roles and responsibilities of all functions that play a part in the digital agenda, Communications, Digital Delivery Team, IMT and

Customer Service as well as individual services. This clarity is needed to ensure the strategy is effective and enables the council to deliver greater interactivity and dialogue with residents, employees, members and other key stakeholders.

Guidelines to support training and to facilitate effective use of social media by officers and members will be reviewed and actively promoted.

4. Enhance internal communications

Effective and engaging internal communications with employees is vital to support the fundamental cultural change across the organisation.

Internal communications supports the internal awareness and understanding of the corporate strategy as well as playing an active role in supporting the work of HR and OD in shaping the organisational culture through the People Strategy and other key initiatives.

The review will look at the skills, resource and mechanisms – including the intranet – required to engage and inform employees in most effective way.

5. Improve self-service across the Council

The review has highlighted a need to improve the communications self-service guidance to ensure consistency of quality across the council's communications.

The communication service will focus on the council's priorities, so a clear brand guidelines, templates and copywriting will be put in place to support services that need to produce simple, often operational, communications on a self-service basis. It will be clear that all communications materials must be produced within guidelines.

6. Income generation

There are opportunities to increase income by offering communications services to other organisations. Following on from the One Team delivery model and the skills audit it is recommended that there is a review of the communications 'offer' to establish the scope for income generation.

Additionally it is worth considering if there is a role for communications in gaining sponsorship and advertising from other organisations on behalf of the council.

7. Develop communications skills that will support the future organisation

The review has highlighted that marketing, digital and brand development skills will be needed to communicate with audiences in different and new ways in the future. The skills review may also highlight other areas where we need to develop skills.

A skills review will establish areas of strength and gaps. To make sure that Surrey County Council has the required skills, it is recommended that training and development is made available to all relevant staff which reflects any identified needs.

The review will establish a one team approach, this means that people with identified skills can be brought together more effectively to deliver required activity. The findings of the skills review will help inform the one team delivery model.

8. One Team delivery model for communications

There are different roles, responsibilities and skills that support strategic priorities and operational priorities. To make sure that communications is consistent across the organisation and that resources are allocated against the priorities of the council, a one team collaborative approach to delivery is being adopted.

This does not mean that resources are centralised but that there is flexibility to align resources to organisational requirements, much like a communications agency through a matrix management approach.

An implementation plan for the one team delivery model is being put in place and as part of this communications roles will be reviewed in line with a skills audit to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation, both now and in the future.

The one team approach will improve value for money and cost effectiveness by removing duplication in workload and resource and by improving procurement practices. There appears to be scope to make savings through a more co-ordinated approach to procurement of communications activity and materials, for example advertising and printing. This work is currently being scoped to see whether there would be benefits from an audit in this area.

The review recommends that there will be improved productivity through the one team approach which maximises skills and expertise wherever it is in the organisation and through a better sharing of knowledge and resource. The review will work to identify the recommended shape of the future communications resource to ensure the most efficient and effective use of skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion the review has identified a number of strategic principles and recommendations that are highlighted in this paper. They are the outcome of discussions with a number of stakeholders and formulated through the Steering Board and the Member Reference Group.

Next steps

Scoping the possible benefits of an audit of the procurement spend for communications activity across the council.

The current high level implementation plan and the timeline (which includes the new communication and engagement strategy) will be considered alongside the Corporate Strategy by Cabinet in June.

The high level timeline for the immediate next steps is as follows:

Feb	March	April	May	June	July
Create detailed implementation plan					
Develop new communications and engagement strategy				Strategy to Cabinet alongside Corporate Strategy	
Develop digital strategy and guidelines					
	Board and management team in place			Skills gap analysis begins	
			Develop one team delivery model		
		Internal Audit to undertake audit of procurement spend			
			Developing improvements to member communications		