

## INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

**FROM:** Audit and Risk Manager

**SUBJECT:** Communications Strategy  
Audit

**TO:** HR/OD Manager

**DATE:** 27 January 2015

**CC:** CMT  
Head of Finance  
Customer Contact Manager  
Media and Communications Manager

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### 1 **Introduction**

- 1.1 In accordance with the Audit Plan for 2014/15, an examination of the above subject area has been completed recently and this report is intended to present the findings and conclusions for information and action where appropriate.
- 1.2 Wherever possible, results obtained have been discussed with the staff involved in the various procedures examined and their views are incorporated, where appropriate, in any recommendations made. My thanks are extended to all concerned for the help and co-operation received during the audit.

### 2 **Scope and Objectives of Audit**

- 2.1 The purpose of the audit examination was to report a level of assurance on the adequacy of the corporate framework for managing internal and external communications to ensure conformity with relevant standards and effectiveness in support of the Council's priority objectives.
- 2.2 The examination was initially scoped as an evidential overview of the management framework in the context of the following themes:
- § strategies and policies
  - § roles and responsibilities
  - § awareness and training
  - § monitoring and review.
- 2.3 It was agreed with the Customer Contact Manager and Media and Communications Manager that the audit would focus on the Council's Communications Strategy and the governance arrangements for delivering it. The relatively small number of days allocated to this assignment required an "overview" approach to be applied, as distinct from a detailed one.
- 2.4 The findings are based on examination of relevant documentation and some discussion with the aforementioned officers.

2.5 The examination also considered the current status of the recommendations from the previous audit of Communications reported in October 2011.

2.6 It should be emphasised that the examination did not constitute a communications audit in its widely used industry definition. This describes a systematic research exercise on all communication tools used by an organisation to evaluate their effectiveness as a basis for instituting an improvement programme.

### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 Recommendations from previous audit

3.1.1 There were five recommendations from the last audit report on this subject issued in October 2011 (all medium risk) as follows:

Recommendation	Management Response	Current Status
1 A formal strategy for communications should be finalised, presented to Council for adoption and subsequently monitored and reported.	This will be reviewed as part of the Channel Strategy and review of C&CS.	The Channel Strategy was formally adopted by Council in April 2012. A new Communications Strategy, accompanying an Action Plan, was endorsed by Executive in June 2013.
2 At the same time that a strategy for communications is presented for adoption, a policy should also be prepared.	This will be reviewed as part of the Channel Strategy and review of C&CS.	As above. No distinct policy was produced to accompany the Strategy. Policy development has tended to be selective focusing on key areas (e.g. social media).
3 A set of procedures or code of practice for communications should be compiled, published and made available to all staff.	This will be reviewed as part of the Channel Strategy and review of C&CS.	It was advised that Media Services maintains procedures for communications channeled through them. Protocols are being developed under the Communications Action Plan (a recent example relating to e-mail).
4 A staff survey should be prepared and distributed in order to obtain the views of staff on internal communications.	SMT is reviewing existing information from staff on internal communication. A plan will be developed from this.	This has been subsumed into a Staff Engagement Action Plan in place to deal with aspects of internal communication linked to the Strategy. A staff survey is being planned for March 2015 as part of the Council's commitment to Investors In People.

Recommendation	Management Response	Current Status
5 The risks associated with communications should be identified and recorded in the Corporate and Community Services Risk Register.	Will be completed in December 2011.	Two entries appear in the Service Risk Register specific to Media Services. Elsewhere in this and other Risk Registers, communication crops up repeatedly in relation to mitigation measures.

### 3.2 Communications Strategy

3.2.1 The current Strategy was formally adopted by Council in June 2013 and covers a three-year period, thus the audit examination has been undertaken just past midway through its projected lifespan.

3.2.2 The Communications Strategy is a relatively concise document with an appended Action Plan.

3.2.3 Although the Strategy is strong on principles and aspirations, it can be improved by:

Ensuring its links with the People Strategy and Channel Strategy are clear.

Ensuring the evolving Staff Engagement work is clearly incorporated.

Ensuring the Communication Strategy Action Plan is monitored and reported.

These aspects need addressing to make the Communications Strategy a more meaningful, relevant and purposeful document and one that is more likely to result in recognisable change.

### **Recommendations**

1. The links that the Communications strategy has with the People Strategy and Channel Strategy should be clearly established.
2. The ongoing Staff Engagement work should be incorporated within the Communications Strategy.
3. The Communication Strategy Action Plan should be monitored and reported to the Senior Management Team at appropriate intervals.

### 3.3 Governance Arrangements

3.3.1 Any strategy is only as good as the monitoring and review programme implemented to oversee its delivery. Two basic elements established are:

- § ownership of the current Strategy from Senior Management Team;
- § an Action Plan for implementing the Strategy.

- 3.3.2 It is worth acknowledging that the absence of formal monitoring and reporting of the action plan has not mitigated the progress of certain actions.
- 3.3.3 Certain elements of internal communications in the Action Plan have splintered off into a separate Staff Engagement Plan which has been reported to both Senior and Corporate Management Teams and Members at regular intervals since November 2013.
- 3.4 Other Observations
- 3.4.1 Media Services has a central role with regard to communications. This is managed through a team planning process and documented procedures and guidelines for team use and general Council consumption. Significant publicity initiatives have a measure of project management applied to them centred on a work plan agreed with the lead service officer in each case. The work plan is itself based on a standard template with generic objectives.
- 3.4.2 The Media Network Group is cited as a vehicle for providing training and promoting awareness among officers in the services that deal routinely with the media. The Group's activities have lapsed in recent years, although it was advised that plans are in place to revitalise the Group.
- 3.4.3 A 'staff engagement' agenda is being actively followed through with its own action plan reported regularly to Senior Management Team. The 'Staff Voice' is a relatively recent product of that agenda.
- 3.4.4 Before concluding, it is recognised that that other relevant forces may be at work in the form of developments under the People Strategy and Channel Strategy.

## 4 **Conclusions**

- 4.1 The examination has concluded that the overall management framework for internal and external communications consists of sound operational level controls.
- 4.2 However, failure to monitor and review the action plan has eroded the value of the current Strategy. On the other hand, it is recognised that several of the key actions emanating from the Strategy are being implemented.
- 4.3 Although the lack of formal monitoring and reporting of the action plan is a cause for concern, the plethora and effectiveness of initiatives that are underway to improve communications, such as the Staff Engagement programme, supports a SUBSTANTIAL level of assurance.

## 5 **Management Action**

- 5.1 Recommendations to address the issues raised are reproduced in the Action Plan together with the management response.

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