

**Report to:**

## **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**Relevant Officer:**

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communication

**Meeting**

2 March 2023

### **INTERNAL AUDIT FOLLOW-UP - COMMUNICATIONS**

#### **1.0 Purpose of the report:**

1.1 To consider a progress report on the recommendations made in the internal audit report of Communications issued on the 24 February 2022.

#### **2.0 Recommendation(s):**

2.1 To consider the actions being implemented to address the audit recommendations relating to the Communications audit.

#### **3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):**

3.1 To enable Audit Committee to consider an update and progress report on the audit recommendations.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

#### **4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:**

4.1 None.

#### **5.0 Council priority:**

5.1 Communication impacts on both of the Council's priorities.

#### **6.0 Background information**

6.1 The Corporate Communications team aim to deliver an effective and efficient communications service for the Council. The team has responsibility for internal and external communications, marketing, brand/graphic design, media relations and the Council's main digital media platforms.

In addition to the Corporate Communications team, there are other pockets of engagement resource across the Council. The Community Engagement function, works to support and advise services that intend to carry out their own community engagement activities, such as consultations. Infusion, which

falls under the Chief Executives directorate, engage with stakeholders and carry out research on behalf of the Council.

Several Council services and the wholly-owned companies further supplement communications and engagement resource through appointing their own dedicated communications officers, commissioning external marketing agencies and/or through maintaining their own digital platforms.

6.2 The scope and assurance statement of the audit was as follows:

**Scope**

The scope of the audit included:

- Progress to implement improvements suggested through two peer reviews carried out by the Local Government Association (LGA);
- How the appointment of Communications Officers and procurement of external support for marketing by individual services impacts the Corporate Communications Team;
- How the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted service delivery of Corporate Communications.

**Assurance Statement**

We consider that the controls in place are adequate with some risks identified and assessed and several changes necessary. Many improvements have been made to communications since the LGA peer reviews and we have made recommendations to further enhance corporate buy-in to the Corporate Communications team.

6.3 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

**7.0 List of Appendices:**

7.1 Appendix 3(a): Internal Audit Recommendations and Agreed Actions.

**8.0 Financial considerations:**

8.1 The controls being implemented will be done so within current budget constraints.

**9.0 Legal considerations:**

9.1 Risks need to be effectively managed in order to comply with relevant legislation.

**10.0 Risk management considerations:**

10.1 To enable the Audit Committee to gain assurance that risks are being effectively managed.

**11.0 Equalities considerations:**

11.1 Where equality analysis is appropriate these will have been undertaken whilst making decisions relating to the subject.

**12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

12.1 Any matters relating to sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations will be considered when making decisions relating to the subject.

**13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:**

13.1 The progress report has been prepared in conjunction with the relevant Head of Service and Chief Officer.

**14.0 Background papers:**

14.1 None.

**Appendix 3(a) - Agreed Action Plan**

<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>		<b><i>Priority</i></b>	<b><i>Agreed Action</i></b>	<b><i>Responsible officer</i></b>	<b><i>Target Date</i></b>	<b><i>Revised Target Date for outstanding actions</i></b>	<b><i>Progress</i></b>
<i>R1</i>	To ensure that corporate communications focus on the right areas, we advise that annual corporate communications work plans, which align to the Council's priorities, are produced. These plans should be endorsed by CLT and the Executive.	2	Agreed. Annual corporate communications work plans will be reintroduced.	Corporate Marketing and PR Manager	30th June 2022	March 31, 2023	Work plans aligned to the Council's priorities are discussed and agreed with CLT members. An annual work plan for 2023/24 is awaiting final completion and approval.

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R2	To provide CLT with regular updates on strategic priority-led communications activity, we recommend that quarterly communications and campaign evaluation reports are reinstated.	2	Agreed. Quarterly communications and campaign evaluation reports will be reintroduced.	Corporate Marketing and PR Manager	30th June 2022	March 31, 2023	The reintroduction of formal campaign reports was delayed by the impact of some campaigns being suspended during the pandemic. Now that campaign activity has been fully restored the next report covering activity over the third quarter of last year will be presented in this final quarter.

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R3	<p>We recommend that it is agreed at CLT level that all communications, engagement and marketing decisions are passed through the Corporate Communications team.</p> <p>In the meantime, the Corporate Communications team should carry out their own assurance work, through consulting with the Corporate Procurement team, to review where other Council services are spending on external resource.</p>	2	<p>Agreed. The recommendation for all communication-related decisions to be passed through the Corporate Communications team will be placed on the agenda for a CLT meeting to allow a decision to be made.</p> <p>The Corporate Procurement Team will be contacted to help identify where other Council services are spending on external resource.</p>	<p>Director of Communications and Regeneration</p> <p>Head of Tourism and Communications</p>	<p>31st May 2022</p> <p>30th September 2022</p>		<p>There are clear examples where communications-related decisions have been dealt with by CLT. There is now a fixed communications item on every CLT agenda.</p> <p>The Corporate Communications team continues to work with services to promote the benefits of having a “One Council” approach to communications and marketing. There are still pockets of marketing and PR activity which are procured by individual services who prefer to use external agency resource and/or their own dedicated resource.</p>

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R4	To help encourage more services to approach the Corporate Communications team for proactive campaigns and communications-related advice, we recommend that activities to market the team are reintroduced.	3	Agreed. Quarterly communications and campaign evaluation reports will be reintroduced.	Corporate Marketing and PR Manager	30th June 2022		The Corporate Communications team continues to work closely with services to show the benefits of using a centralised resource for proactive campaigns and comms-related advice. The inclusion of a fixed Communications item on the CLT and Leadership Board agendas helps with heightening that awareness.

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R5	To help make the core service offer of the Corporate Communications team clear to other Council services, we recommend that a service level agreement (SLA) is drawn up.	3	Agreed. A SLA will be drawn up to outline the core service offer for Council departments.	Head of Tourism and Communications	30th September 2022		Informal agreements are in place with those services that co-fund communications activity (such as Highways, Public Health). An annual work plan is agreed for the year ahead. SLAs are in place for those arms-length companies that require use of our resource including the housing company and BTS.



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R6	We recommend that consideration is given as to how it can be ensured that a consistent, co-ordinated approach to sharing information is established between the Corporate Communications team and communications officers that are appointed by separate services.	2	Agreed. Mechanisms already in place will be reviewed and reinforced to encourage a consistent, co-ordinated approach to sharing information.	Head of Tourism and Communications	30th June 2022		The primary objective is to create a centralised service, not one that promotes the recruitment of dedicated officers for some services and particularly where there is no rationale for this. However, where this has happened, those dedicated comms officers are invited on to weekly team meetings to ensure consistent messaging.
R7	For business continuity purposes, we advise that contingency plans are developed for all communications officers that are external to the Corporate Communications team.	2	Agreed. This will be discussed with CLT as part of the agreed action for recommendation 3. The outcome of this meeting will help inform the approach going forward.	Head of Tourism and Communications	31st July 2022		Services that utilise resources that sit outside the Corporate Communications team are encouraged to develop their own contingency plans

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R8	Consideration should be given to contacting the communications teams of other local authorities to identify whether there are any other successful digital communication methods that the Corporate Communications team could pursue.	3	The Head of Tourism and Communications explained that networks are already in place with other local authorities where ideas for digital communications are shared. The Corporate Communications Team will consider any further suggestions made by stakeholders.	Head of Tourism and Communications	Ongoing		The monitoring of other local authority comms activity is carried out on a regular basis. Quarterly meetings are held at regional level and we subscribe to national best practice reports.

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<i>R9</i>	To ensure that the Corporate Communications team can maintain appropriate oversight over Council websites (and thus ensure that websites are appropriately maintained), we recommend that consideration is given as to how the use of subdomains could be of benefit.	3	<p>Agreed. The Corporate Communications team are able to advocate the use of sub-domains when decisions for new websites are passed through the team.</p> <p>An audit of existing websites can be carried out and a governance structure to maintain and update these websites can be introduced.</p>	Corporate Marketing and PR Manager	30th September 2022		Any service that wants to establish a website or social media presence is required to present a business case to the Corporate Communications team for assessment. These are handled on a case by case basis.
<i>R10</i>	To ensure that expectations for the maintenance of websites and social media channels are being met, we advise that an exercise is undertaken to identify all Council digital platforms.	2	Agreed. It was noted that the required action for this recommendation is similar to that of Recommendation 9. An audit of existing Council websites and social media channels will be carried out.	Corporate Marketing & PR Manager	30th September 2022		We regularly audit Council digital platforms and have a full understanding of what is being used by different services. Where possible, we offer advice on maintenance and housekeeping.