RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No 8

meeting date: 18 JUNE 2019
title: RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2019-21
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
principal author: PRINCIPAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

1. PURPOSE

1.1 To update members on communication activities and achievements.

1.2 To approve the Council's Communications Strategy 2019-21.

1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – Communications supports the eight core areas outlined in the Ribble Valley Sustainable Community Strategy 2014-19
- Corporate Priorities – To ensure a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on customer needs, To sustain a strong and prosperous borough, To help make people's lives safer and healthier, To protect and enhance the environment, To match the supply of homes with housing needs
- Other Considerations – Council Values: To lead the community, To ensure Council services are accessible to all

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Council's communications function sits in the Resources Department and comprises a principal communications officer, customer services team and support from the ICT team, which manages the authority's web site and social media accounts.

2.2 Despite a relatively modest investment in communications, the Council has one of the highest resident satisfaction rates in the North West and enjoys an unrivalled relationship with its stakeholders.

2.3 With the support of effective communication, the Council is delivering services that are important to and appreciated by residents, and establishing good working relationships with its partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors.

2.4 The Council is required to produce a communications strategy as part of its governance statement and by doing so is also demonstrating its commitment to clear and consistent communication that meets the needs of residents and stakeholders.

3. ISSUES

3.1 This strategy (at Annex 1) outlines how Ribble Valley Borough Council will manage communications and inform stakeholders about its policies, activities and events. Its purpose is to establish and maintain effective channels of communication and promote a positive image of the borough. It will enable the Council to:

- Create and maintain effective communication with stakeholders
- Keep Ribble Valley residents well-informed

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- Reach all sections of the community
- Raise awareness of the Council's vision and objectives
- Address negative information about the Council and its services
- Raise the profile of Ribble Valley as a place and brand

3.2 It is based on the latest communications best practice and place-branding guidance set out by the Local Government Association, Solace and the PRCA: Public Relations and Communications Association in #FutureComms[i], as well as the CIPR: Chartered Institute of Public Relations[ii], of which the principal communications officer is a member, and UK centre of communications excellence PR Place[iii].

3.3 It outlines who we communicate with, what we communicate and how we communicate, as well as how we measure our success.

4. PERFORMANCE AND SUCCESS

4.1 The Council's last communications strategy undertook to distribute information about Council services and achievements, refresh the Council logo and brand, and promote Ribble Valley as a food destination.

4.2 Progress on all areas of the strategy has been good, particularly in relation to food, with the borough now recognised as a premier food destination and the Clitheroe Food Festival one of the UK's leading food events.

4.3 The Council issues around 100 press releases a year that enjoy a significant take-up in the local press resulting in largely positive coverage. It also produces a twice-yearly newspaper in print and audio format delivered to the borough's 24,000 homes and its visually-impaired residents that is valued and appreciated.[iv]

4.4 The communications function has also supported numerous successful Council initiatives, such as:

- Affordable housing
- Elections and referendums
- WWI 100 commemorations
- Boxing Day flood recovery
- Three Royal visits
- The Clitheroe Food Festival
- Chipping Community Broadband
- Voluntary Organisation Grants

5 MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

5.1 The measurement and evaluation of communications activity has undergone seismic change across the communications sector in recent years.

5.2 Formerly, the Council evaluated this activity as an 'output' by monitoring AREVS, or advertisement rate equivalent values, which plateaued at around £200,000 a year, but communications as a strategic and ethical practice is now evaluated by 'outcomes,' rather than 'outputs', and the difference is illustrated on page 13 of the strategy.

5.3 Recent national guidance on the measurement and evaluation of communications is set out in the Government Communication Service's Evaluation Framework 2.0[v] and

the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication's Barcelona Principles 2.0[vi], and the Council's principal communications officer will be familiarising heads of service with this new approach over the coming months.

6.   RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1   The approval of this report will have the following implications

- Resources – There are no budgetary implications arising from this report
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None identified
- Political – None identified
- Reputation – This strategy plays a key role in maintaining and enhancing the Council's reputation
- Equality and Diversity – This strategy sets out how the Council communicates with all its residents, including the elderly, vulnerable and rurally-isolated

7.   RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

7.1   Approve Ribble Valley Borough Council's Communications Strategy 2019-21.

DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES   PRINCIPAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

PF32-19/TS
10 June 2019

Further information is available from Theresa Sanderson (01200 414483)

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[i] www.local.gov.uk/future-comms
[ii] *PR and Communication in Local Government and Public Services*, Brown, Gaudin and Moran (Kogan Page 2013)
[iii] *Developing and Writing a Communication Strategy*, Pilkington (PR Place 2017)
[iv] Around half of respondents in the council's 2015 Perception Survey said they preferred to receive information about council services via the local press and council newspaper, higher for those aged 65 or over (58 per cent)
[v] gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/6.4565_CO_Evaluation-Framework-2.0-v11-WEB.pdf
[vi] amecorg.com/how-the-barcelona-principles-have-been-updated/

Ribble Valley Borough Council
Communications Strategy 2019-21

Contents

Clear and consitent communication

Ribble Valley Borough Council has one of the highest resident satisfaction rates in Lancashire and enjoys an unrivalled relationship with its stakeholders.

With the support of effective communication, we are delivering the services that are important to our residents and maintaining good working relationships with our partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors.

This strategy outlines how Ribble Valley Borough Council will manage communications and keep its stakeholders informed about the authority's policies, activities and events.

We know how you like to be communicated with, as well as how you like to share your ideas and opinions with us, and we are working hard to enhance and improve our use of new media, without compromising traditional communication methods.

We have had many years of successful two-way communication – our resident satisfaction rates are a testament to that – and we are generally good at reaching the people we want and need to.

But we know we must continue to develop and improve communication activity and, with this strategy, we are demonstrating our commitment to clear and consistent communication that meets the needs of residents and stakeholders.

Effective communication strengthens communities and this strategy places you, our residents, visitors and partners, at the heart of what we do.

Ribble Valley Borough Council

www.ribblevalley.gov.uk

Stephen Atkinson
Leader
Ribble Valley Borough Council

Marshal Scott
Chief Executive
Ribble Valley Borough Council

Vision, values and priorities

Vision

"An area with an exceptional environment and quality of life, sustained by vital and vibrant market towns and villages acting as thriving service centres meeting the needs of residents, businesses and visitors."

Values

In order to deliver the services people want in a fair and consistent manner, Ribble Valley Borough Council will:

• Lead the community
• Strive to achieve excellence
• Ensure that access to services is available to all
• Treat everyone equally
• Respect all individuals and their views
• Appreciate and invest in its staff

Corporate Priorities

Ribble Valley Borough Council has five corporate priorities addressing issues that matter most to the borough's residents and stakeholders:

• To ensure a well-managed authority providing efficient services based on identified customer needs
• To sustain a strong and prosperous borough
• To help make people's lives safer and healthier
• To protect and enhance the environmental quality of the borough
• To match the supply of homes with local housing need

Communication Priorities

Communications activity will support the council's corporate priorities by:

• Raising awareness of council policies, services and events
• Publicising meetings and decisions of the council
• Enhancing and maintaining the borough's positive image
• Publicising the council's role in partnership initiatives
• Enabling residents and stakeholders to have an effective and informed dialogue with the council about services and policies
• Highlighting public safety messages and keeping residents informed during an emergency

The strategy in context

Service standards

Local authorities are accountable to their communities

Accountability depends on understanding, which is achieved by effective communication. This creates informed audiences and empowers them to take part in debates on issues affecting them.

Research shows that the better informed people are about council services, the more satisfied they feel. Clear, honest and transparent communication helps to build trust among residents, improve service take-up and foster stronger partnerships.

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity says council publicity should be:

- lawful
- cost-effective
- objective
- fair
- appropriate
- issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity
- have regard to equality and diversity

"

I rely on newspapers like Ribble Valley News, which is a joy to read, containing vital information and such good news."

In the 2018 Perception Survey, 79 per cent of respondents said they were satisfied with life in Ribble Valley, one of the highest satisfaction rates in the Lancashire, while 59 per cent of respondents said they were happy with the way the borough council ran services.

Ribble Valley Borough Council's communications function contributed to this success, by:

- promoting council services
- improving the profile of the borough
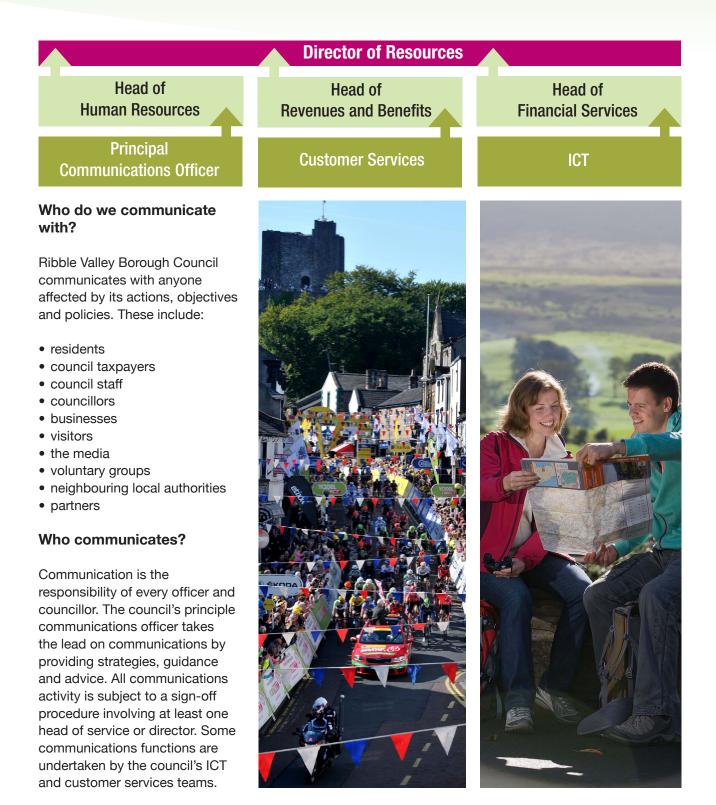- providing a effective media relations service

"

Thanks for the press releases on the affordable housing event. There was a queue of people waiting when we arrived to set up and the providers were delighted with the level of interest."

Communication in context

Director of Resources		
Head of Human Resources	Head of Revenues and Benefits	Head of Financial Services
Principal Communications Officer	Customer Services	ICT

Who do we communicate with?

Ribble Valley Borough Council communicates with anyone affected by its actions, objectives and policies. These include:

- residents
- council taxpayers
- council staff
- councillors
- businesses
- visitors
- the media
- voluntary groups
- neighbouring local authorities
- partners

Who communicates?

Communication is the responsibility of every officer and councillor. The council's principle communications officer takes the lead on communications by providing strategies, guidance and advice. All communications activity is subject to a sign-off procedure involving at least one head of service or director. Some communications functions are undertaken by the council's ICT and customer services teams.

> **"** Thank you so much for putting the Open for Business film together. It is fantastic!"

What do we communicate?

Service delivery is Ribble Valley Borough Council's core function and the bedrock of its communications activity.
We provide information on:

- council services
- how to access those services
- changes to services
- how the council works
- who councillors are
- the council's policies
- council events and activities
- how stakeholders can influence the council's policies and decisions
- who the council's partners are and how we work with them
- the council's role as a community leader
- the council's successes

"We have had 500 visits to our web site within 24 hours of the Guardian article being published. We have taken six full weekend reservations for our accommodation for the summer from people who read the article and want to visit the food trail. Fantastic!"

How do we communicate?

The council has a range of methods through which it facilitates one and two-way communication with staff and stakeholders, including:

- the media
- the council newspaper Ribble Valley News
- the council's websites ribblevalley.gov.uk and visitribblevalley.co.uk
- e-mail
- Facebook
- Twitter
- the contact centre
- events
- committee meetings
- committee agendas
- staff meetings
- the staff newsletter
- the intranet

Media relations

Local newspapers are undergoing seismic changes. As well as centralising their operations, they are moving from news-generated to user-generated content.

After many decades, the Clitheroe Advertiser and Times, the borough's principal newspaper, no longer has a town centre presence and similar moves are on the cards for other local titles.

Newspapers are a fundamental part of the democratic process and the changes present challenges and opportunities for news coverage of Ribble Valley, particularly in relation to photography.

Despite this, local newspapers remain a core communications outlet and journalists can expect us to:

- build mutually beneficial relationships
- treat them with courtesy and respect
- make every effort to assist them with their enquiries

We expect journalists to:

- treat us with courtesy and respect
- report fairly and accurately on stories about the council and the borough
- give the council a reasonable opportunity to provide facts and respond to criticism

Digital communications

Digital communications, such as e-mail, internet and social media, allows greater flexibility and speed of response with residents, council taxpayers and stakeholders.

The council seeks to embrace new technology, assessing opportunities for interactivity and instant delivery of and access to information.

The council's ICT team maintains and develops ribblevalley.gov.uk and ensures the authority's use of digital communications meets the changing needs of residents and service-users, while underpinning traditional channels, such as face-to-face and telephone.

The council's principal communications officer, contact centre and ICT team work proactively together to ensure the experience of residents and stakeholders is a positive one, with ease of access to information in a timely manner.

We will continue this effective working relationship to develop our use of e-communications and build on opportunities for channel shift, as well as working to ensure our web sites, **ribblevalley.gov.uk** and **visitribblevalley. gov.uk**, meet accessibility standards.

"

The television feature was excellent and will help us find new recruits. You have done us really proud with this important exercise."

"

The annual report is a splendid publication by any standards and richly deserves the gold award. Each page and section is carefully thought out and titled. It paints a wonderful picture of the area and is a useful, informative and enjoyable read."

Performance and successes

The council's last communications strategy undertook to distribute information about council services and achievements, refresh the council logo and brand, and promote Ribble Valley as a food destination.

It outlined activity over four key areas: media relations, public relations, communications for councillors and branding.

Progress on all areas of the action plan has been good and the communications function continues to underpin successful council initiatives, as well as provide a busy media relations service.

Communication campaigns

2016
• Job Centre relocation
• Boxing Day flood recovery
• Ribble Valley 'happiest place in the UK'
   (Halifax Rural Quality of Life Survey)
• Somme Centenary commemoration
• Launch of Up and Active scheme

2017
• Visit of HRH The Prince of Wales
• Local Government Boundary Review
• Dog-fouling action zones
• Community Alcohol Partnership
• Affordable bungalows Monk's Cross

2018
• Chipping Community Broadband
• Shared ownership houses Littlemoor Park
• Clitheroe Food Festival
• Voluntary Organisation Grants
• First World War Centenary commemoration

Measurement and evaluation

Communications activity is regularly monitored to gauge success, but we no longer measure success using AREVs, or advertisement rate equivalent values. Communications as a strategic discipline is moving towards a system of evaluation based on outcomes, rather than outputs. The example below from Stage 2 of the Tour of Britain illustrates the difference.

Output	Outcome
13 press releases issued by Ribble Valley Borough Council	180,000 spectators, including 45,000 from outside the North West £1,157,396 spent in Ribble Valley
Combined media activity by Ribble Valley Borough Council and Tour organisers: 924,000 national television viewers, 116million international television viewers 27 live and pre-recorded radio interviews Coverage in 33 international newspapers, 13 national newspapers and 33 regional newspapers 10 dedicated newspaper supplements	180,000 spectators, including 45,000 from outside the North West £1,157,396 spent in Ribble Valley Ribble Valley showcased to a national and international audience 67 per cent of residents inspired to cycle more often
1,311 activity packs delivered to 21 primary schools	200 entries from 10 schools to competition to design start flag 17 schools lined the route Eight school field art installations
Leaflets outlining road closures and parking restrictions delivered to 4,650 households and 150 no-parking signs displayed at key route points along the route	One complaint about road closures Three cars towed from the route
Pre-event promotional film attracted 4,393 hits, including from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the United States	Ribble Valley showcased to a national and international audience 50 per cent increase in holiday enquiries for Lancashire, particularly in Ribble Valley and Pendle, at Stage 2 sponsor Welcome Cottages Anecdotal increase in repeat visits to Ribble Valley (Clitheroe Visitor Information Centre)
Digital campaign attracted 230,000 hits with 2,046 follow-up clicks to Stage 2 website (a 0.89 per cent click-through rate compared to a national average of 0.08 per cent)	180,000 spectators, including 45,000 from outside the North West Ribble Valley showcased to a national and in international audience
Tour of Britain website attracted 665,000 hits, including from the USA and across Europe	180,000 spectators, including 45,000 from outside the North West Ribble Valley showcased to a national and in international audience
Stage 2 website attracted 29,584 hits	Extensive community buy-in, particularly from the Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and Longridge Business Group
Six public and stakeholder meetings held	Extensive community buy-in, particularly from the Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and Longridge Business Group

Communications Strategy 2019-21

This strategy outlines how Ribble Valley Borough Council plans to communicate with stakeholders over the next three years.

Its purpose is to establish and maintain effective one and two-way communication channels of communication between Ribble Valley Borough Council and its stakeholders and promote a positive image of the borough.

A successful strategy will enable us to:

- create and maintain effective communication with our stakeholders
- keep Ribble Valley residents well-informed
- reach all sections of the community
- promote respect and trust between the council and its stakeholders
- raise awareness of the council's vision and objectives
- address negative or damaging information about council services
- raise the profile of Ribble Valley

With all our communications activity, we aim to:

- maintain a strong and consistent identity for the council
- raise awareness of and maximise access to council services
- improve quality of life of residents and visitors
- help to maintain the council's customer satisfaction levels

We are committed to making our communications activity:

- two-way
- relevant and appropriate
- easy to understand
- of a consistent quality and style
- clearly branded
- timely
- honest

"

The excellent newspaper that we publish and deliver to households in Ribble Valley is well-read by residents and visitors.
Well done."

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ACTIVITY	ACTION	AIM
Media relations	• Maintain and build relationships with the local media • Train key personnel in photography	• Maintain a culture of two-way communication with stakeholders • Keep stakeholders well informed • Address negative or potentially damaging information about council services • Raise Ribble Valley's local, national and where possible international profile
Council publications	• Continue to produce the popular twice-yearly council newspaper	• Keep stakeholders well informed • Raise awareness and take-up of council services • Reach all sections of the community
Leaflets and posters	• Train key personnel in leaflet design and accessibility standards	• Keep stakeholders well informed • Raise awareness and take-up of council services • Reach all sections of the community
Publicity and awareness campaigns	• Devise and implement biannual outcome-based publicity and awareness campaigns • Revise and enhance the authority's photo-library and investigate the use of stock shots	• Keep stakeholders well informed • Raise awareness and take-up of council services • Reach all sections of the community • Raise Ribble Valley's local, national and where possible international profile
Corporate identity and branding	• Train key personnel in corporate identity and branding • Train key personnel in the use of plain English	• Promote Ribble Valley Borough Council as a single entity with a clear identity • Promote respect and trust between the council and its stakeholders
Website	• Ensure the website remains relevant, informative and engaging • Improve website functionality and encourage further channel shift for improved service delivery • Ensure the website keeps pace with emerging technologies and customer devices • Create stronger links between the website and other communications channels • Ensure our websites continue to meet accessibility standards.	• Keep stakeholders well informed • Raise awareness and take-up of council services • Reach all sections of the community • Keep abreast of technological developments and embrace them where feasible • Promote respect between the council and its stakeholders • Promote Ribble Valley Borough Council as a single entity with a clear identity
Social media	• Train principal communications officer in podcasting and videography • Set up dedicated Twitter account for principal communications officer for use in emergency and rapid response communications • Ensure policies and procedures are in place to reduce risks associated with the use of social media • Recognise social media as the communication medium of choice for a growing proportion of service users • Exploit the benefits of social media in emergency and rapid response communications • Continually review social media best practice	• Keep stakeholders well informed • Raise awareness and take-up of council services • Reach all sections of the community • Keep abreast of technological developments and embrace them where feasible • Promote respect between the council and its stakeholders

Ribble Valley Borough Council's communications strategy is not a stand-alone document. It has relevance to the following plans and policies:

Communications Protocol
Principal Communications Officer
Theresa Sanderson
theresa.sanderson@ribblevalley.gov.uk

Website
ICT Manager Stuart Haworth
stuart.haworth@ribblevalley.gov.uk

Corporate Strategy
Principal Policy and Performance Officer
Michelle Haworth
michelle.haworth@ribblevalley.gov.uk

Consultation Strategy
Principal Policy and Performance Officer
Michelle Haworth
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Customer Care Policy
Principal Policy and Performance Officer
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